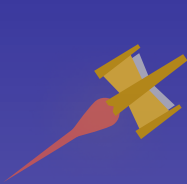
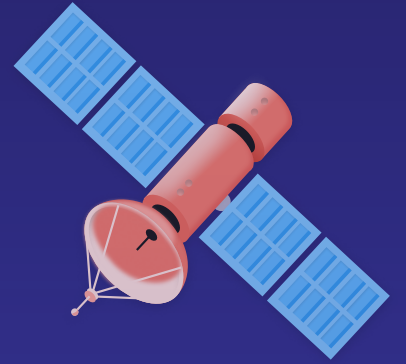


# The Ultimate Content Strategy Guide for Content Marketers



# The Ultimate Content Strategy Guide for Content Marketers

Content Planning vs Content Marketing vs Content Strategy.....	4
Why Is a Content Strategy Important? .....	5
Content Strategy for Marketers .....	7
Content Strategy for Sales Enablement .....	10
Post-Sale Content Strategy .....	11
Rethinking Your Keyword Strategy .....	12
What Is the Difference Between a Topic and a Keyword? .....	15
Keyword Research vs Topic Research .....	17
Why You Need to Start Thinking About Topics Instead of Keywords .....	19
Where Keyword Difficulty Gets it Wrong (Examples) .....	20
A Better Approach to Keyword Difficulty .....	21
Cheat Sheet for Creating Content That Performs Well in Search .....	23
Employ a Content Optimization System .....	28

As a content marketer, one day you'll probably be tasked with creating a content strategy, if you haven't already. And you may be asking yourself:

- What is content strategy?
- What does a content strategist do?
- Is it any different than what I'm already doing?

Every content team needs a content strategy, but only the biggest ones have a dedicated content strategist. In other cases that role is assumed by a content marketer or an SEO specialist. The line between content marketing and content strategy can get a little blurry due to the degree of overlap. However, we'll do our best to keep them separate.

But first, let's look at what they both have in common – that's content.

**“Content” is a single word loaded with different connotations and meanings that depend on its context. Yet, a single concise definition is elusive – most of us would simply say we know it when we see it. It applies to technical whitepapers and in-depth blog posts as much it does to TikTok videos and memes.**

That's why it might be best to think of content along several different lines. In the realm of digital marketing, content encompasses four core elements:

**Information** – What are the actual contents of your message? It can be factual, practical, entertaining, informative, or some combination of the three.

**Context** – What is the content supposed to help you and the reader accomplish? Who is the target audience for this content? Why is it being published?

**Medium** – What channel are you publishing the content on, and how does that influence the overall message?

**Form** – Is the content text, graphic, audio, video, interactive, virtual/augmented reality, etc.?

Many definitions of content focus too much on the information and not on the rest of the elements. Information without context is just noise.

Information that isn't presented with the form and medium in mind risks being lost on the recipient. For example, you could write out the steps of changing a tire, but including images would make it a lot clearer.

Likewise, the material you include in a piece of content has to reflect the medium and form – you wouldn't publish an in-depth guide to a complex topic in a Twitter thread. It also has to make sense in the context of the target audience you want to reach. We don't publish content about social media marketing because it doesn't align with the use of our product. Anything we post on that topic would quickly lose relevance for our audience, even if it is sound. Any definition of “quality content” has to take this into account.

Content is a means of showing your expertise and awareness around things your target audience cares about and building trust with them so that if they decide to make a purchase, you are front and center. It's not about being purely promotional or transactional. You have to truly add value in some way if you want your content to move any business goal forward.

## **Content Planning vs Content Marketing vs Content Strategy**

It's easy to lose sight of the forest for the trees, especially since content planning, marketing, and strategy are often used interchangeably. So let's start out at a high level, examining the difference between each term. Keep in mind that there is some overlap between the terms, especially when it comes to content marketing and content strategy.

At the lowest level, a content plan is highly tactical. Content is usually associated with different campaigns like a new product rollout or another business initiative. With a certain amount of content to produce within a specific time frame, content plans often take the form of calendars in order to accurately project completion dates based on allocated resources. The basics include what content to create along with how it gets shared, plus any appropriate calls to action.

Above this sits the content marketing strategy. It's similar to a marketing strategy, but in this case the focus is on content. It covers using content to build an audience, increase revenue, decrease costs, reduce customer churn.



Parts that make up a content marketing strategy include:

1. Channel Plan – for determining what channels to use and how to use them.
2. Brand Story – for communicating consistent messaging across all channels.
3. Audience Personas and Content Mapping – for ensuring that every piece of content is the right fit for the right person at the right in their customer journey.

Content strategy guides the creation, delivery, and governance of useful, usable content.



**Kristina Halvorson**

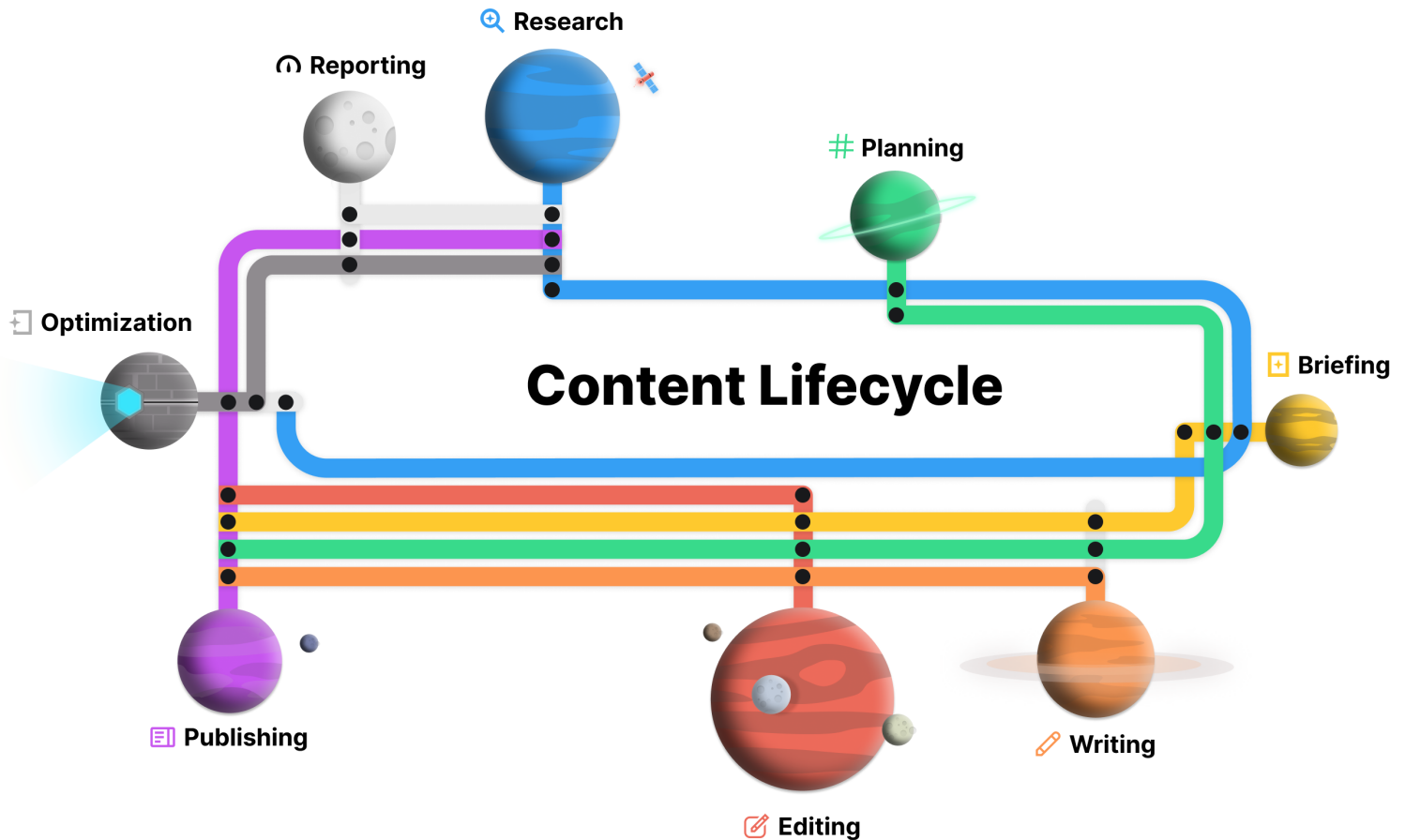
Founder and CEO, Brain Traffic

At the top is content strategy. This deals with, in the words of Kristina Halvorson, the “creation, publication, and governance of useful, usable content.” While some would argue that there’s a lot of overlap between content marketing and content strategy, the big difference is content strategy addresses all the content within an organization, and how it is maintained.

Whether we’re talking about content strategy or content marketing, the key here is that it must align with business objectives.

## Why Is a Content Strategy Important?

The short answer to this question is that you’ll be directionless without a content strategy, chasing whatever new shiny object enters your line of sight. The fact is that the content lifecycle needs to start somewhere. Here’s what that looks like.



This illustration represents the cycle of content strategy and execution. Strategy leads to execution. Execution leads to results, which you use to influence your strategy on an ongoing basis. You can't start this process without knowing what you want to accomplish. As you make your way through the content lifecycle, you'll learn what content types resonate with your audience best.

You'll find ways to optimize your workflows. You'll get feedback from customers, prospects, partners, and the public about your content that can help you refine your overall strategy. That's what's challenging and fun about content strategy. It's not something you deliberate on once a year or once a quarter. You're constantly adapting and finding new ways to move through this cycle a little smarter than the last time.

Along the way, your content team should be collecting its learnings and creating a documented content strategy. But again, it all starts with knowing what your strategy is. There's no other way to measure your content marketing ROI.

# Content Strategy for Content Marketers

**As a content marketer, you need to translate business objectives and goals into a plan that uses content as the primary means of achieving those goals.**

There's no need to talk about a content audit, content governance, a content plan, content production, an editorial calendar, until you have a clear idea of what business objectives to which you can map content. It's your responsibility to know the larger goals you're contributing to and why. The right content for the wrong purpose won't drive consistent results.

Remember, content strategy is not just building an editorial calendar, writing content, and publishing it. It's not having a blog, even if it's full of great content. And it's not pushing out a one-off content piece here and there based on sales or product teams' requests.

If your content strategy doesn't start with a business objective, it's not a content strategy. It's just content. Once you've established your core objectives, the "how" of your content strategy is honed by asking simple, yet vital questions.

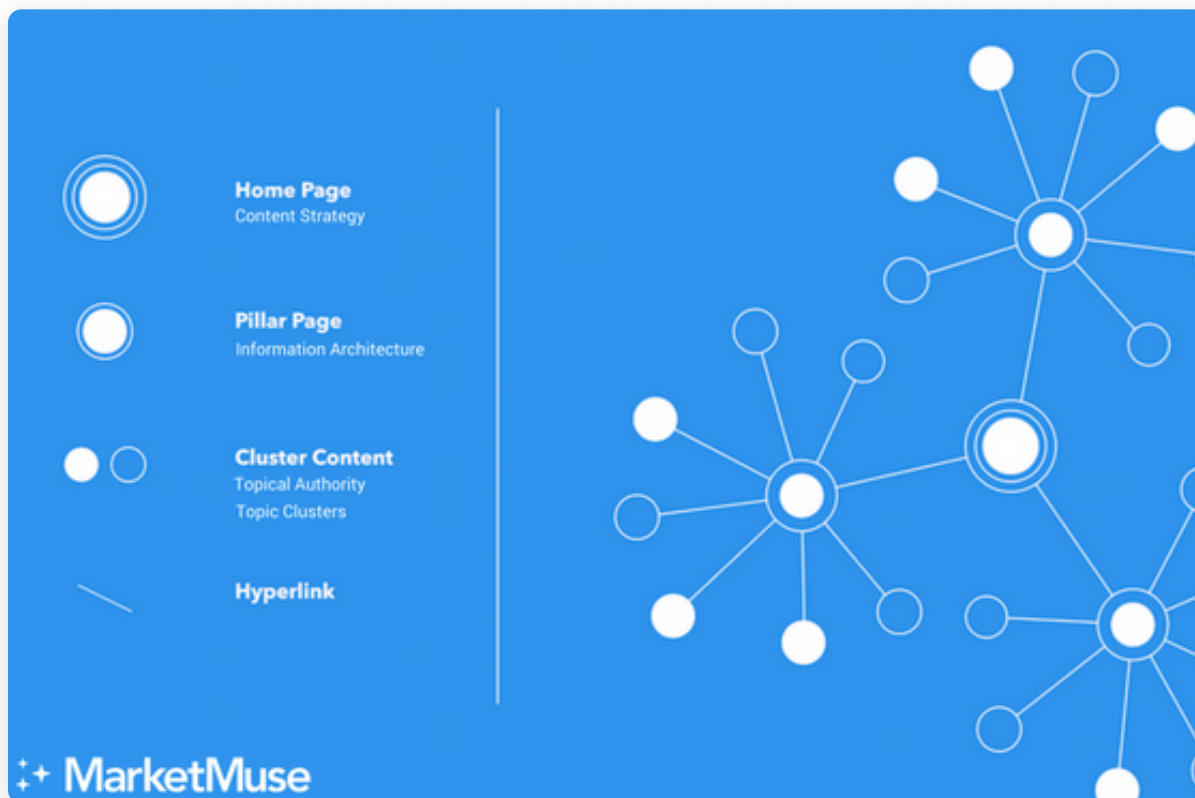
- What do we want our content to accomplish in pursuit of our business goals?
- What are the KPIs for each type of content we publish?
- What is our target audience for the different types of content we will produce?
- What does a content audit of our site tell us about our existing content and our gaps?
- How will we source content ideas? How will we ensure they align with our brand voice, goals, and audiences?
- What content formats are we best suited to produce? Maybe your content team can put together a mean blog post but lacks the skills to create high-quality videos. If so, you know where you'll be more likely to stand out.
- How will we ensure we have a documented strategy and governance, rather than relying on ad hoc requests for content?
- How will we distribute content? How can we ensure our email, influencer outreach, and social media content strategy supports our overall content marketing effort?

A content marketing strategy must align with the broader brand strategy, marketing goals, and business objectives, which requires a roadmap. Let's look at a few examples of how this might look in action across different functional areas: Search, sales enablement, and post-sale.

Many businesses aim to increase organic traffic and leads generated via content while lowering their Customer Acquisition Costs. As search engines evolve, more emphasis is put on serving users quality content that satisfies their search intent. That's why small domains can punch above their weight with authoritative content clusters that rank highly for competitive terms.

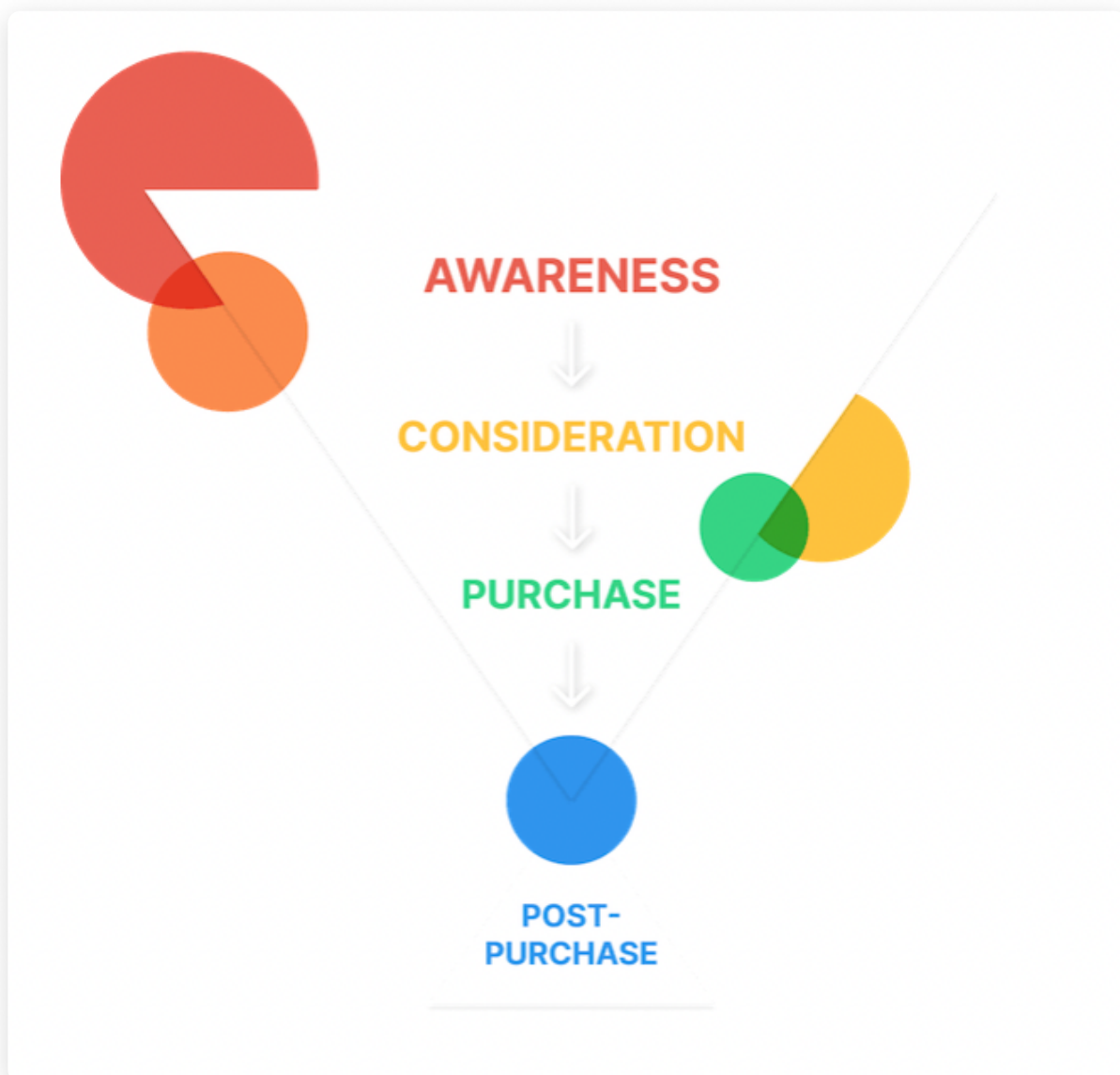
**A content cluster, or topic cluster, is a way of aggregating content on a website into topically related collections.**

It's done by producing a 'pillar' page on a core topic along with multiple additional content pages related to that topic. The pillar page should link to the cluster pages and vice versa. This encourages visitors to further explore your content's coverage of the topic. Additionally, a content cluster should cover a topic across all phases of the buyer's/user's journey. As the diagram below shows, it starts at the top, driving awareness of your business through content that targets searchers who want to answer questions or solve a problem.



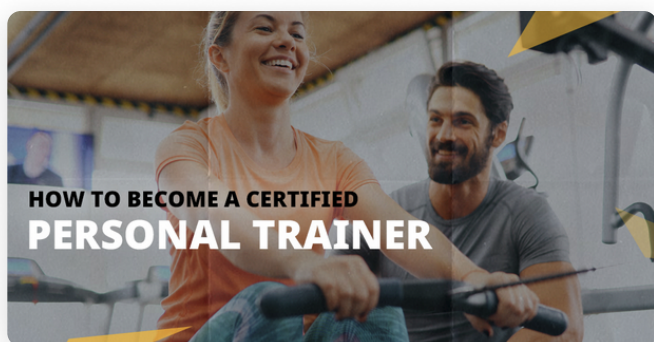
As they begin to identify your product/service as a possible solution, they want content that helps them answer questions and make the best decision to ultimately make a purchase. But the sales funnel isn't linear. Not everyone starts at the top and works their way down. Some people will enter your funnel already solution-aware and just want to know more about your solution.

Others may not have the slightest clue they need a solution at all and are searching for answers to a problem or question they have. That's why you need to cover the entire journey – anyone who enters your site should have a clear next step they can take no matter where they are in the funnel.



One example of a successful content clustering strategy is from ISSA, a provider of personal trainer, nutritionist, and fitness instructor certifications. For their personal training certification track, ISSA has produced content that anticipates every possible question and search intent someone could have about personal trainer certification. Here are a few pieces of content in their cluster that show how well they've covered the topic.

## Awareness



[How to Become a Certified Personal Trainer](#)



[How to Start a Personal Training Business – The Quick Guide](#)

## Consideration



[How Much Do Personal Trainers Make?](#)



[Can You Do Personal Training Without Certification?](#)



## Purchase



Certified Personal Trainer – Self-Guided Study Program

Certified Personal Trainer – Fast Track Program

This is just the tip of the iceberg for how much content ISSA has produced on this topic. With a robust internal linking strategy to go along with all of this content, ISSA makes it easy for users to get the information they need and take a clear next step. Their SEO gains and organic traffic growth has been steady and continues to climb even in a highly competitive space.

## Content Strategy for Sales Enablement

Sales enablement content is content that a sales team can use to educate prospects and help them build a case for purchasing your product or service. Your content strategy here should take into account common questions and objections your salespeople hear.

For example, one of the most common questions our sales team at MarketMuse gets from prospects is how they can use MarketMuse with their existing marketing technology stack. That's why we produced content like:

[How to Get the Most out of Ahrefs With MarketMuse](#)

[How to Get the Most out of SEMRush With MarketMuse](#)

Our sales team can send these over to prospects who want to understand how to make sure MarketMuse fits into their processes they've already built with other tools. This content can be shared beyond the buying team, so other budget makers can understand precisely what they're paying.

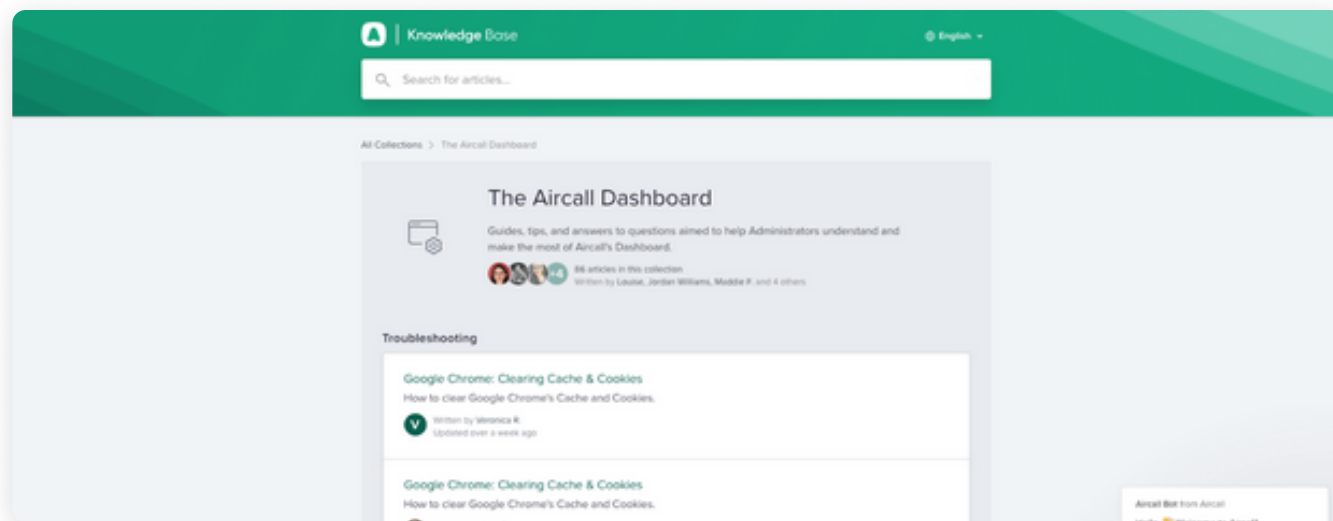
# Post-Sale Content Strategy

Content for top-of-funnel purposes gets the lion's share of attention, but don't ignore the "Post-Purchase" phase. Content isn't just for prospects; it's just as necessary to provide useful content for customers. Post-purchase content may not be flashy in the sense that it attracts traffic and social shares. But it's one of the best ways to solve the business issue of too many inbound customer support requests.

A customer support strategy's success is measured through reduced support tickets and retention. A robust library of self-serve support content, once built out, can reduce the need to hire additional headcount for those purposes. It also allows your support teams to focus their attention on high-value clients and more significant issues that content alone can't solve.

**Content can be an effective tool to educate, train, and teach customers.**

Aircall walks the walk when it comes to using content effectively to support and retain customers. In addition to a blog with useful VoIP, sales, and customer success tactics and tips, they have a robust Knowledge Base that customers can use to search for answers to specific questions about the software and phone systems. If your support teams are inundated with the same issues and questions regularly, make some room in your content calendar to produce content that helps your customers learn how to use your product themselves.





# Rethinking Your Keyword Strategy

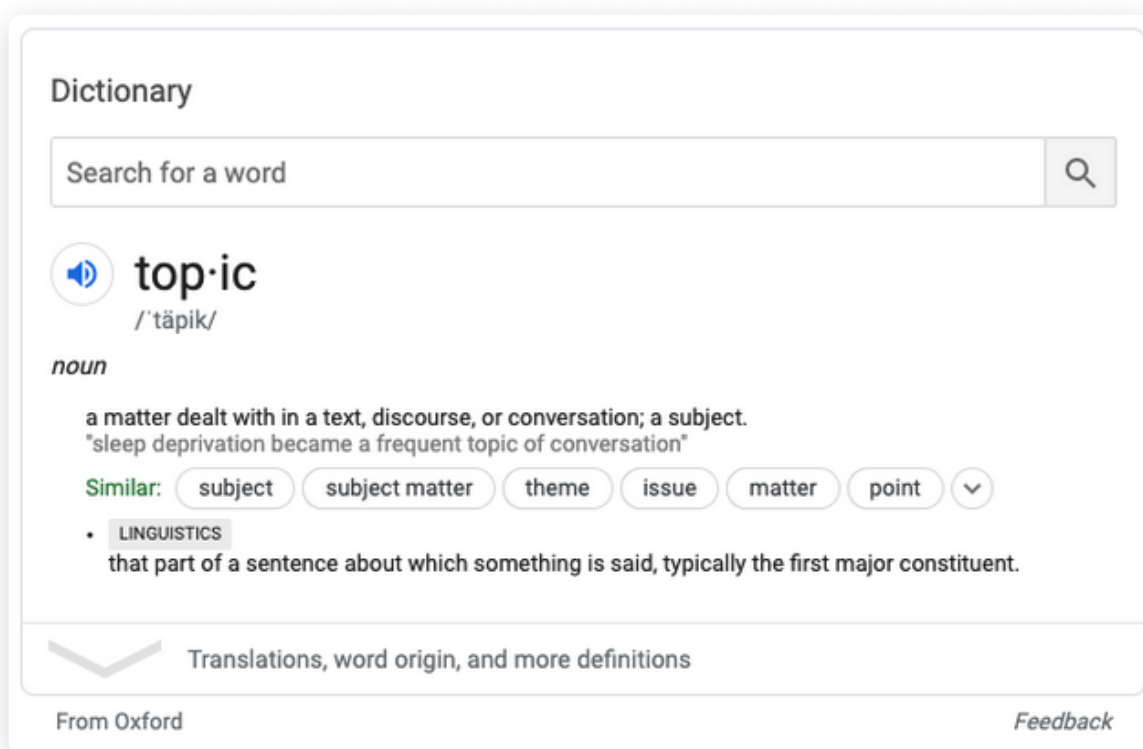
If you're like most content marketers, you've learned to view Search through the eyes of keyword research. That's understandable given the history of Google. In the past, the search engine focused on matching keywords on a page to a search query. However, Google continues to evolve, and what was valid five or ten years ago is no longer true. Take the case of keywords, a topic held in high regard by SEOs.

They are no longer the driving force behind Search. As Google's John Mueller explained, "search engines will get better over time to understand more than just the words on a page."

So, it's time we have a serious conversation about the difference between keywords and topics. As you'll soon discover, there's a substantial variation in how they are used for content marketing.

## What Is A Topic?

According to Oxford, a topic is "a matter dealt with in a text, discourse, or conversation; a subject."

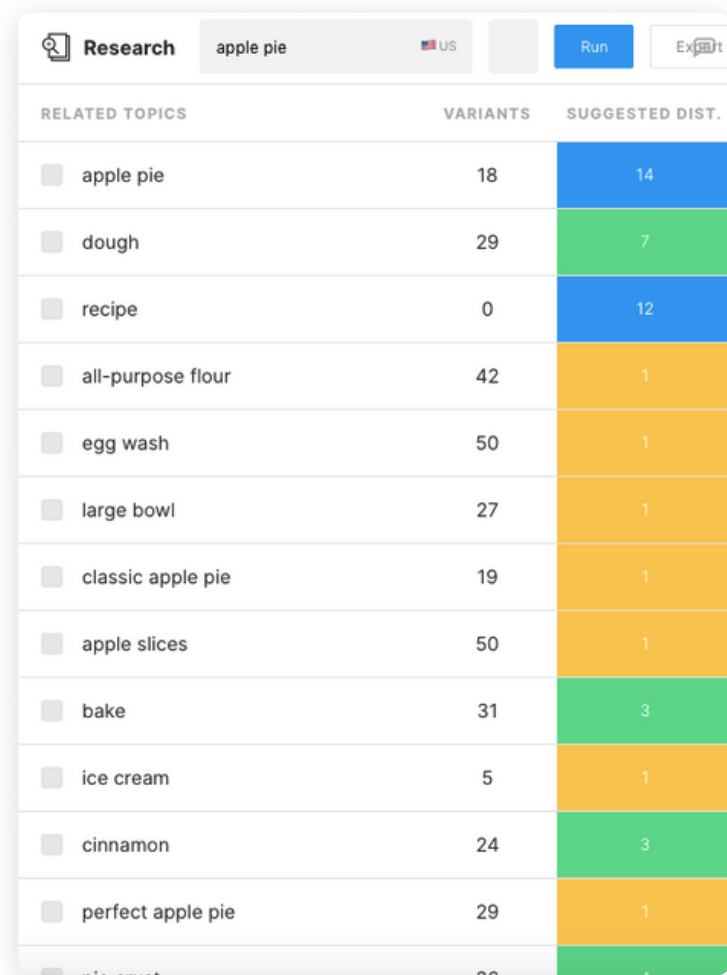


Let's talk about my favorite subject, "apple pie." There's a lot to discuss, such as:

- Ingredients
- Nutritional facts
- Recipes
- How to bake an apple pie
- Pie dough
- Baking a pie crust
- Parchment paper
- Pie plate
- All-purpose flour
- Ice cream

There's so much more we could include in a discussion. When we put the subject into MarketMuse, this topic tool found 50 highly-related topics that are semantically related to apple pies.

Semantic relevance is key to understanding the narrative that this group of words tells. It's also what sets apart topics from keywords, which we'll get to in a moment.



The screenshot shows the MarketMuse Research tool interface. At the top, there's a search bar with 'apple pie' entered, a US flag, and buttons for 'Run' and 'Export'. Below the search bar is a table with three columns: 'RELATED TOPICS', 'VARIANTS', and 'SUGGESTED DIST.'. The table lists 15 related topics, each with a checkbox, a variant count, and a suggested distance. The topics are: apple pie (18 variants, 14 distance), dough (29 variants, 7 distance), recipe (0 variants, 12 distance), all-purpose flour (42 variants, 1 distance), egg wash (50 variants, 1 distance), large bowl (27 variants, 1 distance), classic apple pie (19 variants, 1 distance), apple slices (50 variants, 1 distance), bake (31 variants, 3 distance), ice cream (5 variants, 1 distance), cinnamon (24 variants, 3 distance), perfect apple pie (29 variants, 1 distance), and pie crust (29 variants, 1 distance).

RELATED TOPICS	VARIANTS	SUGGESTED DIST.
<input type="checkbox"/> apple pie	18	14
<input type="checkbox"/> dough	29	7
<input type="checkbox"/> recipe	0	12
<input type="checkbox"/> all-purpose flour	42	1
<input type="checkbox"/> egg wash	50	1
<input type="checkbox"/> large bowl	27	1
<input type="checkbox"/> classic apple pie	19	1
<input type="checkbox"/> apple slices	50	1
<input type="checkbox"/> bake	31	3
<input type="checkbox"/> ice cream	5	1
<input type="checkbox"/> cinnamon	24	3
<input type="checkbox"/> perfect apple pie	29	1
<input type="checkbox"/> pie crust	29	1

## What Is A Keyword?

Keyword is a term we often substitute for search terms. Oxford states that a keyword is “a word or concept of great significance.”

Once more, let's take my favorite subject and plug that into a popular keyword tool to see what we get. This software offers four choices for the types of keywords returned:

- Broad match (variations of the original phrase in any order)
- Phrase match (the exact phrase in various orders)
- Exact match (use the keyword string in the exact order)
- Related (similar to the see keyword)

The first three choices are quite restrictive in that they require our initial phrase (apple pie) to be in the result. There's no notion of semantic relevance there! The last choice offers a bit more flexibility. In theory, related keyword results don't need to contain the initial phrase. Let's see how this looks.

The screenshot here shows the top ten keywords related to apple pie, ordered by relevance, as found in a popular keyword research tool. While there are over 1,500 keywords that could be considered "related," let's focus on those that are the closest.

You'll notice that nine out of the top 10 contain the seed term "apple pie." For those who are curious, I looked at the other 1,500 keywords in that list. What I found was that the majority contain either the term "apple" or "pie."

<input type="checkbox"/>	Keyword		Related	Volume
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie pie recipe	≡+	90	40
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie com	≡+	85	40
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie directions	≡+	85	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie recipe	≡+	85	165,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	how to make great apple pie	≡+	85	30
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pay recipe	≡+	80	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie from	≡+	80	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	best juicy apple pie recipe	≡+	80	20

# What's The Difference Between A Topic And A Keyword?

Let's revisit the formal definitions of topic and keyword to see if there's a discernible difference. Here are the two definitions side-by-side. What do you think?



top·ic

/ˈtəpɪk/

*noun*

a matter dealt with in a text, discourse, or conversation; a subject.  
"sleep deprivation became a frequent topic of conversation"

**Similar:**

subject

subject matter

theme

issue

matter

point



• **LINGUISTICS**

that part of a sentence about which something is said, typically the first major constituent.



key·word

/ˈkēˌwɜrd/

*noun*

a word or concept of great significance.  
"homes and jobs are the keywords in the campaign"

- a word that acts as the key to a cipher or code.
- an informative word used in an information retrieval system to indicate the content of a document.

Whether you call it a matter dealt with in a discourse or a concept of great significance, to many there may be no difference; it's a matter of tomato vs. tom-ah-to. Fair enough. But look at this side-by-side comparison in the output between the two approaches.

Research			apple pie	US	Run	Export
RELATED TOPICS			VARIANTS		SUGGESTED DIST.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie	18	14			
<input type="checkbox"/>	dough	29	7			
<input type="checkbox"/>	recipe	0	12			
<input type="checkbox"/>	all-purpose flour	42	1			
<input type="checkbox"/>	egg wash	50	1			
<input type="checkbox"/>	large bowl	27	1			
<input type="checkbox"/>	classic apple pie	19	1			
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple slices	50	1			
<input type="checkbox"/>	bake	31	3			
<input type="checkbox"/>	ice cream	5	1			
<input type="checkbox"/>	cinnamon	24	3			
<input type="checkbox"/>	perfect apple pie	29	1			
<input type="checkbox"/>	pie crust	26	4			

<input type="checkbox"/>	Keyword	Related	Volume
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie pie recipe	90	40
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie com	85	40
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie directions	85	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie recipe	85	165,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	how to make great apple pie	85	30
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pay recipe	80	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	apple pie from	80	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	best juicy apple pie recipe	80	20

Imagine writing an article about apple pie. Most likely, you'd offer a recipe including instructions on how to make the dough, how to slice the apples along with instructions on using an egg wash to make the crust shiny. And let's not forget the cinnamon or that it's best served with a scoop of ice cream on the side!

Contrast this with the keyword approach where you've got a list of phrases like:

- Apple pie pie recipe (no this is not a grammatical error)
- Apple pie com
- Apple pie recipe
- Apple pay recipe

How are you going to create content from that?

# Keyword Research Vs Topic Research

Just as keywords and topics are different, so is the approach to research. Using a keyword tool for the topic “guitar types” will return a list of related keywords that are simply different ways of expressing the same search term. Here’s an example from a popular keyword research tool showing keywords related to guitar types.



















Parent topic: guitar types × 6 keywords Total volume: 7.9K										
<input type="checkbox"/> Keyword	KD	Volume	Global	Clicks		CPC	CPS	RR	SF	Parent topic
<input type="checkbox"/> + types of guitars	10	6.8K	9.1K	4.0K	<div><div></div></div>	\$0.60	0.59	1.12	6	guitar types
<input type="checkbox"/> + different types of guitars	10	900	1.3K	555	<div><div></div></div>	\$2.50	0.65	1.12	5	guitar types
<input type="checkbox"/> + different kinds of guitars	9	100	150	61	<div><div></div></div>	\$0.00	0.52	1.16	7	guitar types
<input type="checkbox"/> + types of guitars for beginners	26	20	80	N/A	<div><div></div></div>	N/A	N/A	N/A	5	guitar types
<input type="checkbox"/> + types of guitars names	11	20	30	N/A	<div><div></div></div>	\$0.00	N/A	N/A	6	guitar types
<input type="checkbox"/> + types of guitars with names	12	20	60	N/A	<div><div></div></div>	\$0.00	N/A	N/A	5	guitar types

Here you’ll discover that most people use the search term “guitar types,” quite a number use “type of guitars,” while few use the term “different types of guitars” and even less so for “different kinds of guitars.” While all these may seem to be linguistically similar, you would need to verify by comparing the SERP results.

All this isn’t very helpful if you’re looking to create content around the topic of “guitar types.” And if you’re not careful, this can get you into a lot of trouble. In the past, marketers would create separate pages targeting each of these phrases with no regard for whether they served the same intent. This is where the whole keyword cannibalization problem started, with different pages competing against each other.

Occasionally, this type of research will surface something usable, such as “types of guitars for beginners.” But that’s more the exception.

Type “guitar types” into MarketMuse or another topic modeler and you’ll get related topics like “acoustic guitar,” “electric guitar,” “bass guitar,” “classical guitar,” “steel guitar,” “Les Paul,” “flamenco guitar,” etc. Now you have a map of topics around which to create content. Some of these topics will require multiple pages, in which case you can apply this process recursively. Since MarketMuse presents a list of related topics sorted by semantic relevance, it can help prioritize your content creation.

<div> <div> <div>🔍 Research</div> <div>guitar types  US (EN)</div> <div>Enter url or sear</div> <div>Run</div> <div>     </div> </div> </div>					
RELATED TOPICS	VOLUME	TREND	CPC	VARIANTS	SUGGESTED
 guitar types	12,100		29.93	5	3-10
 acoustic guitar	110,000		1.16	50	10+
 electric guitar	165,000		1.00	50	10+
 les paul	40,500		1.22	47	3-10
 classical guitar	27,100		1.31	42	3-10
 bass guitar	110,000		1.14	46	3-10
 electric guitars	165,000		1.00	21	10+
 guitar	450,000		2.29	47	10+
 acoustic guitars	110,000		1.16	31	10+
 string guitar	90,500		2.21	44	3-10
 steel guitar	22,200		1.08	8	3-10
grand concert	70		1.19	2	1-2
acoustic guitar strings	12,100		1.35	4	1-2
resonator guitar	12,100		1.04	3	1-2
steel string	880		0.63	1	3-10
gibson les paul	40,500		1.40	32	1-2



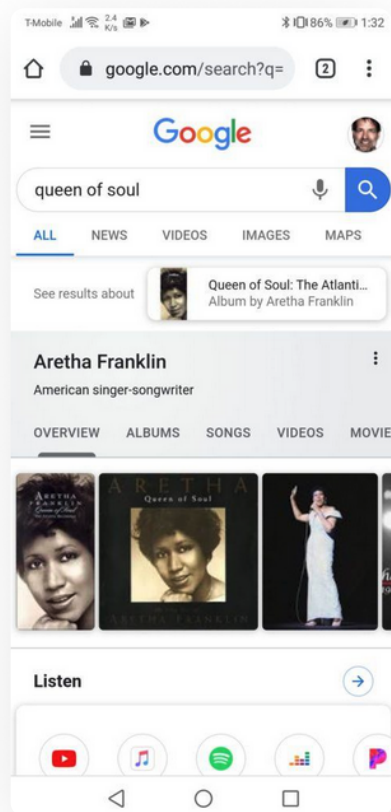
# Why You Need To Start Thinking About Topics Instead Of Keywords

Keyword research doesn't help create better content, and a bigger list won't solve the problem. Fifteen hundred keywords (most of which contain either "apple" or "pie") don't help. Instead, they hinder the creation of expert-level content.

Topics help you focus on the critical matters that are dealt with in a conversation on the subject. Keywords? Not so. That's why writers struggle to fit keywords into their narrative. The goal isn't to optimize keyword usage, it's to ensure thorough coverage of a topic.

If that's not enough to convince you, then take a moment to think about [Google's mission statement](#), which is to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." In 2018, [Google announced](#) a new "topic layer in the knowledge graph." Notice that they don't refer to it as a "keyword layer." Is anyone willing to venture a guess why?

Here's what a topic layer looks like. Available primarily on mobile searches, it's starting to roll out to more desktop queries.



Google has organized the SERPs into several topics, all related to the queen of soul herself, Aretha Franklin. If you're writing content on this subject or any subject for that matter, you will do well to take a topical approach.



# Where Keyword Difficulty Gets It Wrong (Examples)

Let's see how this plays out using a couple of examples. Google Adwords keyword planner shows pay-per-click competition. It has nothing to do with organic search. That's the easiest one, right?

Semrush has slightly improved their keyword difficulty metric. But their old one, all it did was stack rank all the traffic. They did a traffic ranking of the top 10 million sites and it would give you the average of where the sites in the search results were stack ranked.

What does that mean?

Basically, higher traffic sites were designated as being harder to rank against effectively. They did this independently of anything related to the keywords or topics being targeted, the search results themselves, and the search results features, like the right rail, and ads.

They took all those other factors and just threw them out the window. Instead they decided to only look at the traffic that goes to the sites that are in the search results. That is tremendously error prone, definitely not correlative and prone to huge errors. Ahrefs publicly confirms that their difficulty metric is only a link metric.

So what does it say and what problems does this create for teams? What this does, is it ignores the content on your site. We're all content people, yet this approach to keyword difficulty ignores:

- Who you are
- Who your business is
- What you write about
- Where your strengths are
- Where your authority is
- Where your historical momentum is on successful topics
- Where you've had failures with content

Instead, it looks at a search result for a term, looks at the cohort's link volume and makes an assumption on that. For example, it's saying my score is 50 and the search result has an average score of 50. So I should be able to rank.

That's basically what the process is being taught to the market based on links. The effectiveness rate of doing this in this way is tremendously error prone. I've seen teams waste massive amounts of money, believing that this is how it works or believing that they can't rank for something.

So they don't try to cover a topic. Most commonly, this is how it manifests itself. What does this mean?

In the case of a brand new site, they're not even going to try to go write the best article that's ever been written about this topic. Or they've written a cluster of content that ranks for some easy search phrases. According to the data, they've maxxed out their potential on the topic, so they're not going to keep on trying. That's such a waste of potential.

## A Better Approach To Keyword Difficulty

A better approach is to take link data as one aspect of a difficulty calculation and build composites against:

- How much content you've built on a topic
- Your breadth of coverage
- Your depth of coverage
- The quality of your coverage
- Your historical success rate

**When you meld content and performance data with link data, it can become very predictable.**

However, the market has trained us to only look at link data. So many mistakes can be made here. For example, if we were to write the best article ever written on the brand new iPhone and post it on the MarketMuse blog, it would not perform well for the phrase "iPhone review." Sorry.

However, take that exact same article, throw it up on Cnet and it's going to do really well. Why? It isn't just about links. It will rank well because they:

- Have history of writing great reviews
- Offer an enormous breadth of coverage
- Possess a great depth of coverage
- Write about technology
- Write about phones
- Write about the iPhone specifically
- Have historical authority on those topics site, section combinations

The topic-site section combination authority is as important for assessing difficulty as is the quality of the page itself and link data. So if you have a practice, that's just looking at a pay-per-click competitive data or just link data for your competition, you need to get personalized.

This means you've got to figure out more about you and who you are:

- What topics do you cover?
- Which ones do you have the most success with?
- What does your link profile actually say?

That last one is an important point because not all links are created equal. So let's just say you're in the middle of the pack when it comes to links and all your links are about horse racing. Looking at the top search results you see you're a 50 too but all the content that you write is about audio equipment.

That does not mean that you can go write an article about horse racing and rank. It's absolutely untrue, but that's what the process has been taught to the market – that you're allowed to just jump into the pool. Very few sites can actually do that without building infrastructure.

# Cheat Sheet For Creating Content That Performs Well In Search

The key to creating content that your audience loves and search engines adore is to focus on the content itself. Here's why.

When a searcher clicks on your link in Google and visits your site, that's a measurable event. The search engine can estimate how long it should take to consume your content. If the person has a terrible experience and quickly clicks back to the search results, that's an indication to Google. If it happens enough times, that could be an indicator that your content doesn't match the intent of the search, and it's conceivable that your ranking could change.

The goal of content optimization is to demonstrate your expertise and establish your authority on the subject. It encourages you to think about topic clusters, satisfying search intent, and everything else that comes with great content.

Here are a few things to help create better content.

## Use Personalized Metrics

**"Personalized" means that the metrics you use need to be tied to the content on your site, specifically.**

Unfortunately, virtually all third-party metrics like domain authority, page authority, etc. are topic agnostic. Using one of them to rationalize creating an article on big screen TVs and posting that on the MarketMuse blog offers no chance of success because the site:

- Has no authority on reviews
- Has no authority on TVs
- Has no infrastructure

To grow there, you must build infrastructure. That means hundreds of articles about TVs that write dozens of reviews in order to bridge into having that authority. Keep that in mind.

It is even tougher if you're in a regulated market. Don't even try to just jump in and go write MarketMuse thoughts on vaccine distribution. Good luck! It's not going to work! Our blog is not even close to being in a Your Money or Your Life (YMYL) sector classification.

There's so much more to it than just link data. Yet some large teams set their watch to using linked data for difficulty. And it is so inefficient. It creates tremendous mistakes at the content strategy level. Specifically:

- Investing in content that has virtually no chance of becoming successful
- A missed opportunity cost by not investing in content that has a solid chance of becoming successful

## Focus On Being An Authority In Your Niche

To make the most out of Google Search Results, you need to create content that establishes your site as a leader in your field. Use a [good topic model](#) to make sure your blog posts cover everything they should. Take advantage of AI-powered content software like MarketMuse to help you identify relevant topics.

Make sure that your content has [sufficient topic depth](#). Look at your competitors' content and identify content gaps that your post can fill. You may also spot topics on which you can elaborate.

Follow these steps to get started:

1. Look at your competitors' content, and create a thorough overview of the competitive landscape for your chosen topic.
2. Look for gaps that are missing from the content.
3. Think about what can drive more organic traffic for your chosen topic's related keywords.

To produce high-quality content that ranks well on Google, you need to present yourself as a [topical authority](#). In other words, you need to produce content that's as in-depth as possible. For instance, creating a blog post about lead generation using content requires the inclusion of subtopics like qualified lead, gated content, buyer persona and others that are relevant to the main subject.

It's rare that you'll gain Topic Authority through publishing just one post alone, no matter how comprehensive it may be. Most often you'll need topic clusters. Structure your content in a way that's logical for search engines and human users. Identify subtopics and subcategories of your main topic, and make pillar pages for every type of service and product you have. Each pillar page should be a hub for that topic with internal links to supporting content.

## Structure Your Content For Readability

Don't skimp on headings — use as many H2s and H3s as needed. Not only do they make content easier to read, but they're also a great way of incorporating important search terms. Remember that they are meant to summarize and provide structure to a post, so be concise with them. Save inferences and indirect references for body paragraphs.

Consider using machine-readable semantic HTML5 markup to describe page outlines. This will make it easier for search engines to identify how your page is structured.

## Write Clearly

To attract organic traffic to your site, you need to write clearly. Avoid passive voice, use common words when you can, and avoid purple prose. Even if you are writing for a very specific niche, there's no need to use overly-complicated sentences. Otherwise, given the limits of Google's Natural Language Processing capabilities, you may not get the results you expect.

## Answer Relevant Questions Concisely And Directly

Make sure your post answers questions concisely and directly. Search engines always interpret queries as questions, so they promote pages with content that matches the intent behind that query.

## Create Content That Matches Search Intent

Search intent, also known as user intent, refers to the intention or goal a user has when typing a query or relevant keyword into a search engine. Content that fails to match user intent provides a poor experience and causes visitors to leave abruptly – a signal that's easy for Google to spot. To prevent users from leaving too quickly, your content needs to answer those questions your audience may have in the format preferred for that search term, in the appropriate format.

## Be Very Careful When Pruning Content

As you work to build authority around a particular topic, you may find some of your older material to be less than stellar quality. Do whatever you can to make those page better and use content pruning as a last resort.

Of course, there will be situations where deleting content is necessary. For example, posts about applications that no longer exist probably have little, if any value. However, don't prune too much – altering it substantially may cause Google to re-evaluate your site, with unpredictable results.

Whatever you do, avoid using traffic as a proxy for content quality. You'll need to create important foundational content for your audience that may not immediately rank. Even so, you still need the content to build out that cluster. If the content is really as bad as the traffic, then work to make it better.

## Set Up Image Discovery In Search

If images are an important part of your content marketing strategy, make sure Google can discover them by setting up an image sitemap. This is an XML document for listing all of the image URLs of your site. It helps Google understand, find, and crawl the relevant URLs on your site and show them in search results. Check out this [Google guide](#) on how to create one.

## Video Optimization

Videos can be an integral part of both your content marketing strategy (using YouTube as a channel) and content strategy (embedding them into written content for a better experience). To optimize your videos for search, start by creating an account on YouTube. This will allow you to:

- Boost on-page engagement by embedding YouTube videos onto your site
- Make your content appear higher in organic SERPs
- Build brand recognition
- Improve conversions and click-through rates via search engines

After you've created your YouTube channel and uploaded a few videos there, use these tips to get the audience you deserve:

- Use target keywords in the name of your video file.
- Give your YouTube video an enticing and concise title.
- Create a unique thumbnail.
- Craft an accurate and concise video description with links to your website and social media at the top of the description (to boost your website's conversion and engagement rates).
- Feature the video prominently on the page that it is embedded.
- Implement responsive sizing so they work well regardless of what device visitors use.

## Google E-A-T

Whether or not your content falls under YMYL (Your Money or Your Life) it's worth paying attention to Google's Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines, specially the parts concerning E-A-T (Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness).

Google Search Quality Evaluators function as a human feedback mechanism to help their machine learning algorithms rate websites. When it comes to E-A-T, Evaluators are looking at:

- The expertise of the creator of the content.
- The authoritativeness of the creator of the content, the content itself, and the website.
- The trustworthiness of the creator of the content, the content itself, and the website.



Here are some of the things you can do to improve your E-A-T:

- **Establish author credibility.** Add author biographies and bylines to tell users who is writing your content and what their expertise and credentials are. Formal education is not always required, so if the authors have experience, that should be mentioned.
- **Use an SSL certificate.** Having a site that has an SSL certificate will make it more trustworthy. Sites with SSL certificates are less likely to steal users' information or mess around with data. If it has an SSL certificate, the URL will begin with HTTPS:// rather than HTTP://.
- **Create an "About Us" page.** A thorough "About Us" page to improve the E-A-T of your whole site. Include recommendations, awards, news coverage, and more.
- **Pay attention to spelling and grammar.** As part of the trust factor, it matter to both search engines and people.

## Employ A Content Optimization System

As you can see, optimizing content can be a lot of work, particularly if you have a large site with many pages. Using an AI-powered way of optimizing content allows you to get the most out of your words without manual work. It automates the following steps of the content creation process:

- **Research.** AI can help you identify content gaps. It can also help you create and plan new content that can generate a lot of views.
- **Writing and editing.** AI can help you identify the number of keywords used, keyword density, and more. It can also help ensure consistent style, brand, and message across different types of content.
- **Promotion.** Finally, AI can help you schedule social media posts at the right time.

# Publish better every time.

Let us show you how MarketMuse helps  
thousands of marketing teams turn  
content into a growth channel.

Let's talk