# SEO A-Z

EMBRYO

We see what
others don't

# Hello!

To introduce the SEO A-Z, there's a backstory that you must know...

There was once an extraordinarily useful forum post in the early 2000s about the 'A-Z of website success'. This post was influential to many of the more experienced SEOs still practising today. I was one of them.

It was simple, yet informative, which made it beautiful, and this solitary post was undoubtedly a key element for my near 20-year career in the field. I practise much of it to this day, with obvious additions (and omissions) as times have changed.

So, I thought I'd create my own: an updated SEO A-Z of how to make a successful website for organic Google success.

I've tried to make the list as jargon-free as possible so that it's accessible to those with – and without – a background in marketing. I know much deeper detail in all of the points, but expressing this would stop the guide doing what it is intended to do – helping as many people as possible – rather than flexing any SEO muscle.

# Build Content Daily

You can see from the Embryo blog that we make it a 'metronomic process' to write and share new blog posts regularly.

This adds a large number of new pages to our website each year, helping us to be found and improving the overall contextuality of our profile as a digital agency.

Every member of Embryo understands that they have their part to play in ensuring that the blog is continually updated. By each team member adding content, the lexicon of words used has a brilliant range to it, making our content extremely diverse.

Not only do we add regular content via our blog, but we also produce and add to existing content pages, such as our long-form SEO page. Although I have chosen the blog post method for Embryo (for various reasons other than SEO), in most cases, content added to a site should be in the form of extra pages of content about key products/services and their myriad use cases – as well as adding, fine-tuning, and re-optimising content on key pages over time.
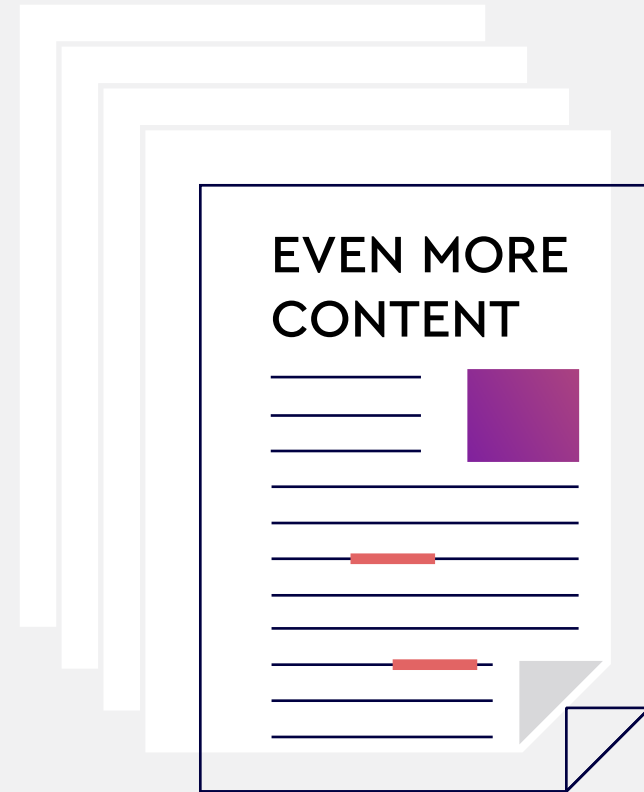
# Monday

CONTENT

# Tuesday

MORE CONTENT

# Wednesday

EVEN MORE CONTENT
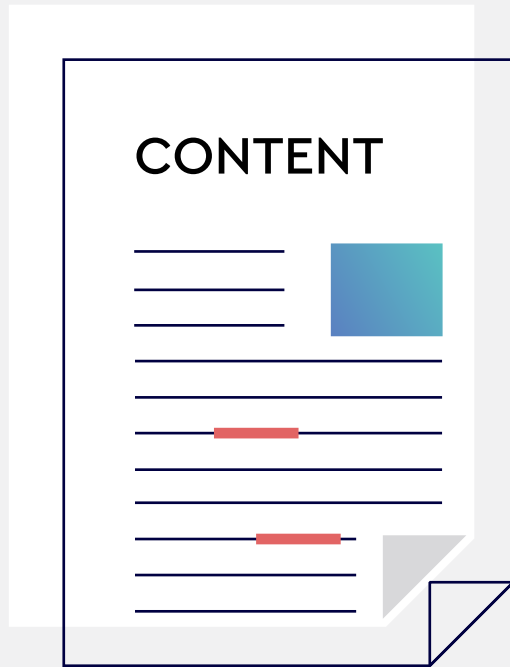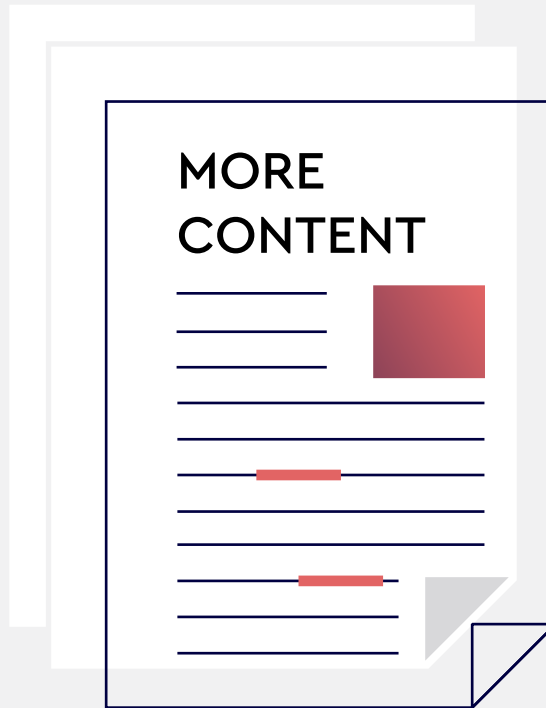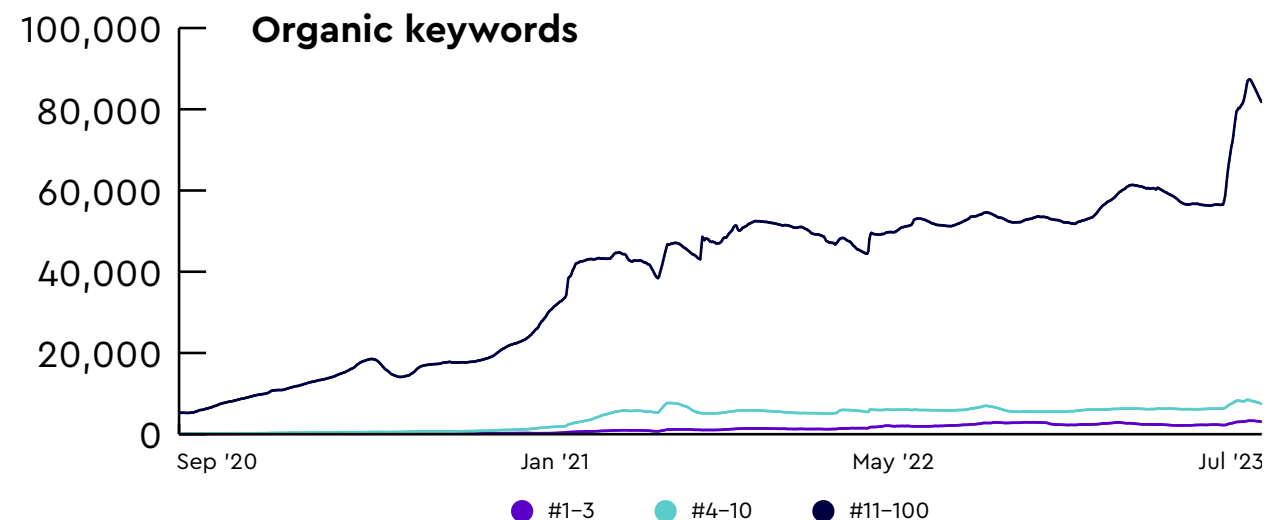
# Think Keyword Reach

B

For the first three months (minimum) of doing the tasks set out in this A-Z, look at one statistic only: keyword reach.

Keyword reach is the total number of keywords that can find your website. By adding content at the rate that I suggest, your reach will expand. The greater the increase, the more contextual your website will become about the topic(s) that you want to rank for – as long as your content remains on-topic, of course.

Don't even look at keyword rankings in this time – it will probably only make you sad. If you have an already strong website, then you may see good-to-great ranking leaps at this point; however, for most sites, keyword reach will be the only metric that you need to have a laser focus on.

Ahrefs will support you here.

Below, Ahrefs shows the keyword reach of a real client that followed many (but not all) of the suggestions on this list. This data shows their journey from when they started using my advice in Jan 2021 to July 2023. In this time, they have moved from being #2/#3 in their industry to an increasingly solid #1 – and this market position will only solidify by continuing these suggestions.
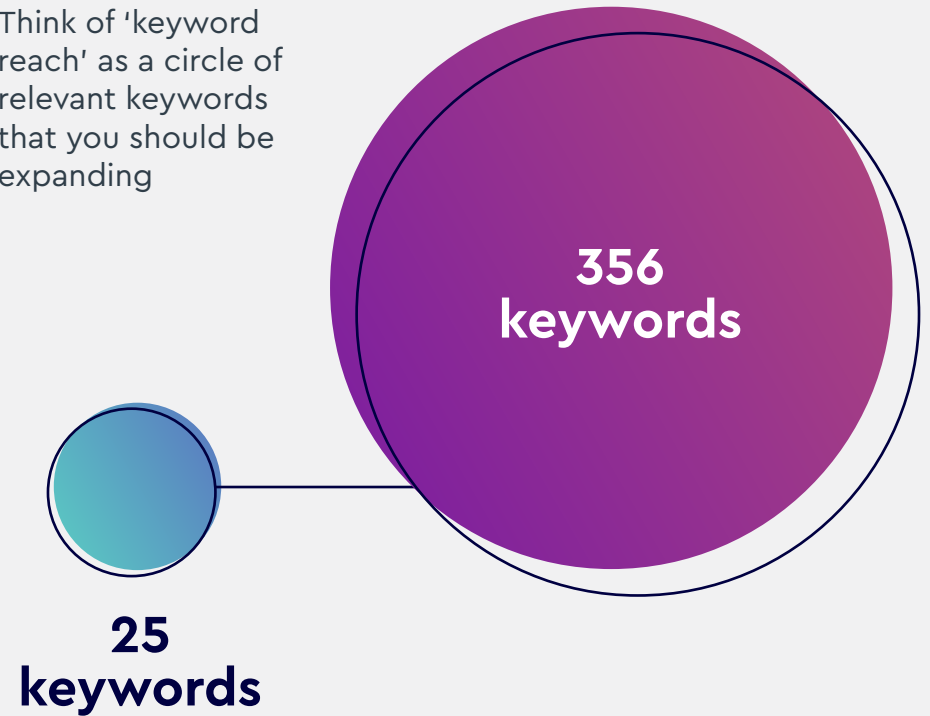
Here is the same graph showing only their top 10 rankings in Google's search results – and you can clearly see the impact.



**Organic keywords**

| | |
|---|---|
| ● #1–3 | ● #4–10 |
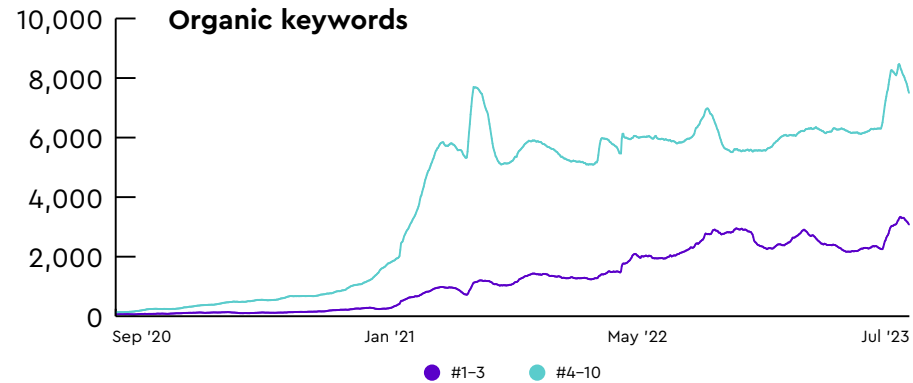
# How you could visualise keyword reach:

Think of 'keyword reach' as a circle of relevant keywords that you should be expanding



**356 keywords**

**25 keywords**

# Integrate Context Signals

As Google gets smarter and its algorithms improve, the contextuality of your webpages must increase. Standing still is not an option. Neither is going slow.

We all like to think that we are clever, but we are mere peons to the geniuses at Google. How they understand the web (and the things that people want) increases at a much faster rate than most SEOs and site owners can comprehend.

That's why website contextuality is key.

Now, when it comes to improving your website contextuality, the best routes include:

- **On-page optimisation, including internal linking strategy**

  Whilst producing useful, long-form content on a consistent basis – to match (at a minimum) the levels (quality and volume) of the leading sites in your industry – you should be ensuring that it's correctly linked.

  Interlinking your webpages, as and when they get added to the site, gives Google a better idea of how each page relates to the next.

- **Inbound link strategy**

  Attaining related and/or 'juice-giving' links should be part of your inbound link strategy. These links help Google to understand that you are an authoritative site for them to rank. In simple terms, the more that other related websites – for example, industry news platforms within your sector – link to yours, the more Google deems your site important.

  Juice-giving links are links from websites that themselves have many thousands of links pointing to them – making them full of 'juice'. Good examples of juice-giving sites are leading newspaper websites, university websites, and government websites. By earning a link, your website also benefits from this juice.

For more on this, read the items on internal linking, link shingling, and mega menus.

# An example of adding contextuality to a key product or service page on a website:

**Blog links**

**News links**

**Industry links**

A B C D

A

B

C

D
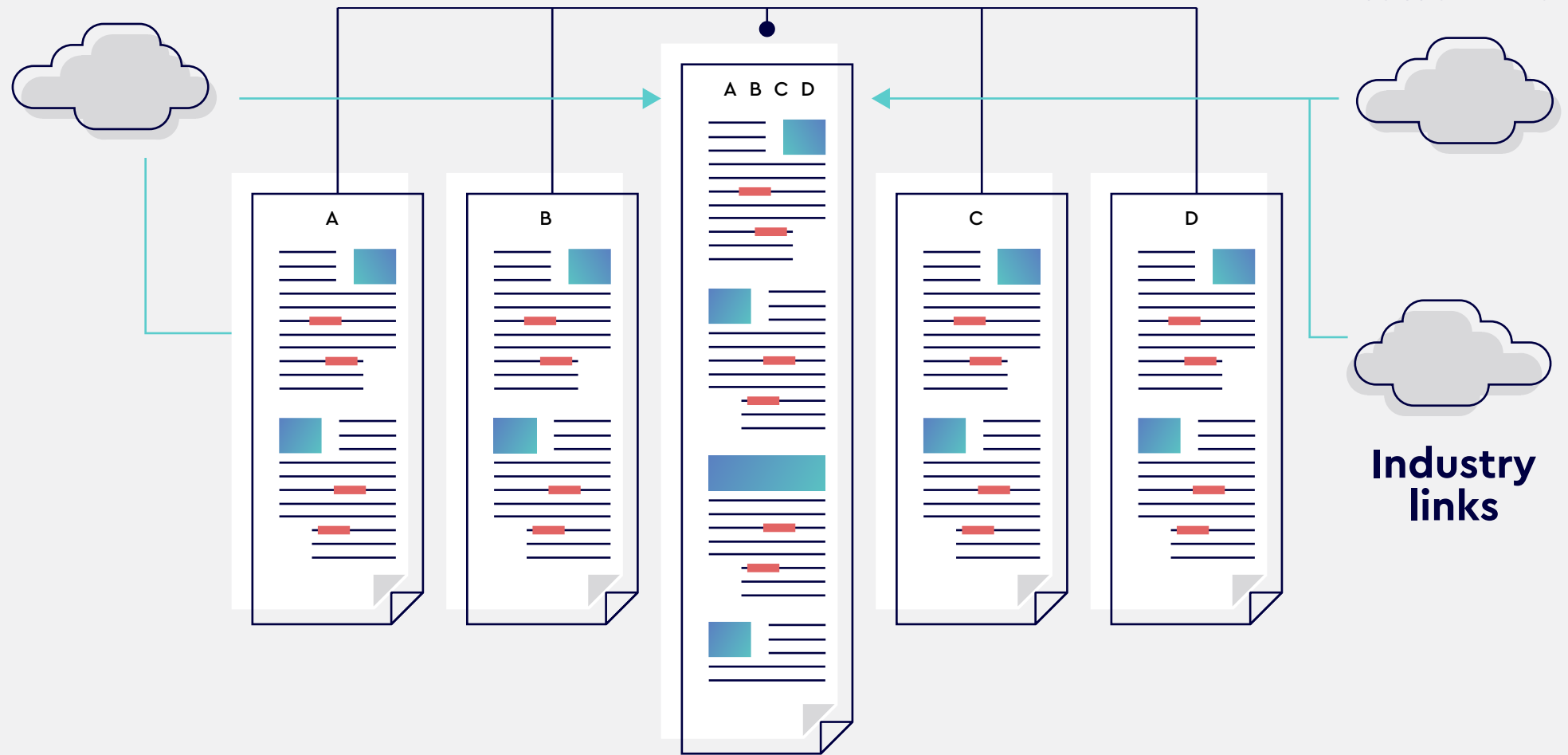
Links (internal and external)

# Keep It Simple Stupid

**Simple is best.**
It always was,
and it always will be.

**Lighter is best.**
It always was,
and it always will be.

**Useful is best.**
It sometimes was,
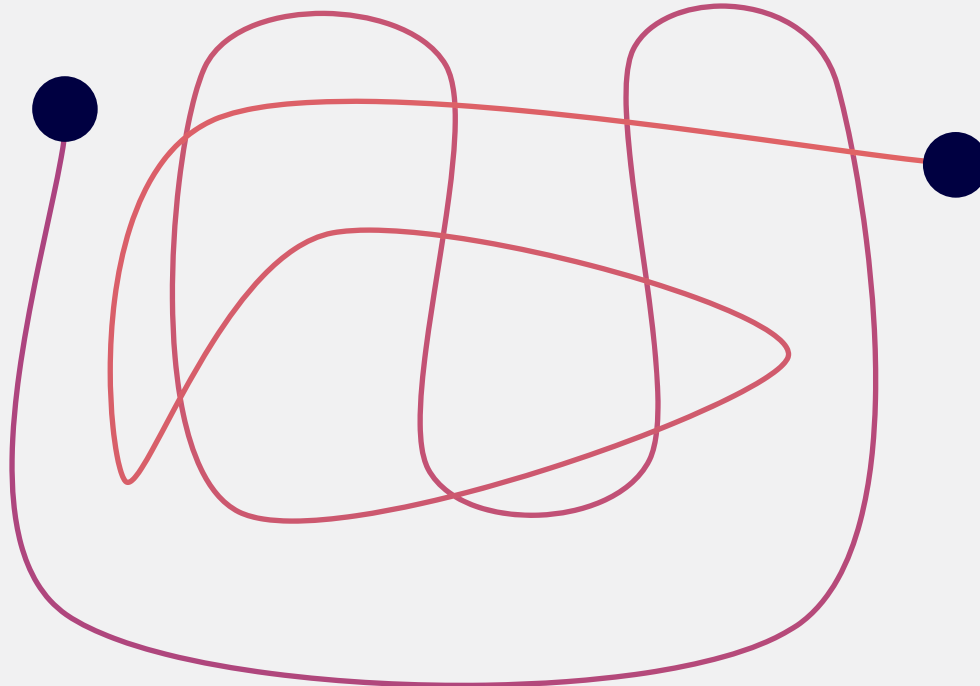and it (almost certainly) always will be, moving forward.

Whatever you do, do not ignore these rules (otherwise known as the KISS principle). Every single reason for a website not performing as well as it could do will have its roots in one of these points.

I've kept this list item uncomplicated just like you should do when building a website.

**Simple**

**Complex**

# Create Long-Form Content

Back in 2012, SerpIQ (now defunct) reported that the average number of words on a page in the top 10 across 20,000 keywords was over 2,000. Wondering if this data was still accurate we (Embryo) carried out our own word count study and here's what we found.

We examined the search engine results pages for 24,774 keywords, crawling every website that had secured a top 10 position.

Here's what we found:

- Webpages that ranked highly had at least **2,000 words**
- The page in position one for a given keyword typically featured **2,855 words** or more
- The amount of content needed to rank on page one has increased by around 10% in the last decade

**Average Content Length of Top 10 Google Results**
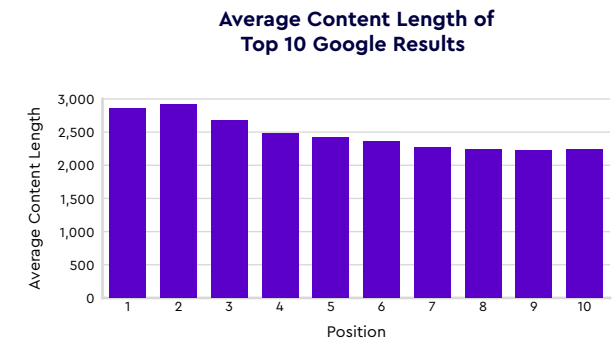
Lots of words alone are not a measure of success, of course.

There are plenty of SEOs that have created (isolated) long-form content that has had little impact on results – however, combined with a thorough link-building strategy, long-form content that is well-written and on-topic is extremely hard for Google not to promote to its visitors.

People tend to trust content that is longer than a typical 500-word blog post. The rate of shares and links to longer content also back this up. In fact, I have yet to see a website filled to the brim with excellent long-form content not ranking well in its niche.

**Which of these pages are you more likely to trust?**

SHORT PAGE

LONG-FORM PAGE
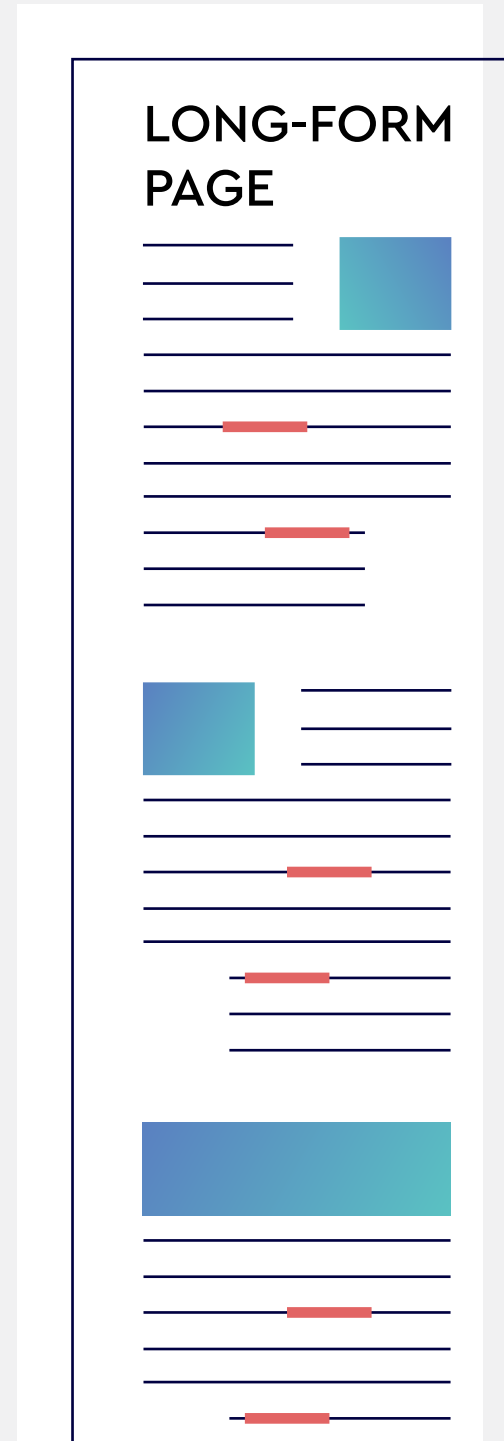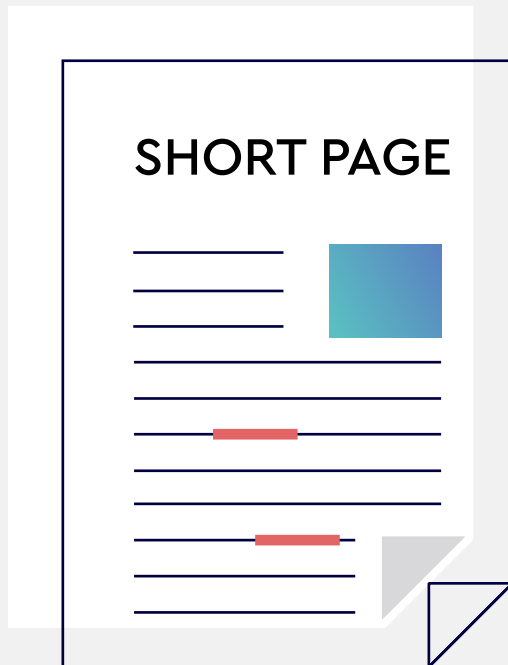
# Build a Pyramid, Not a Skyscraper
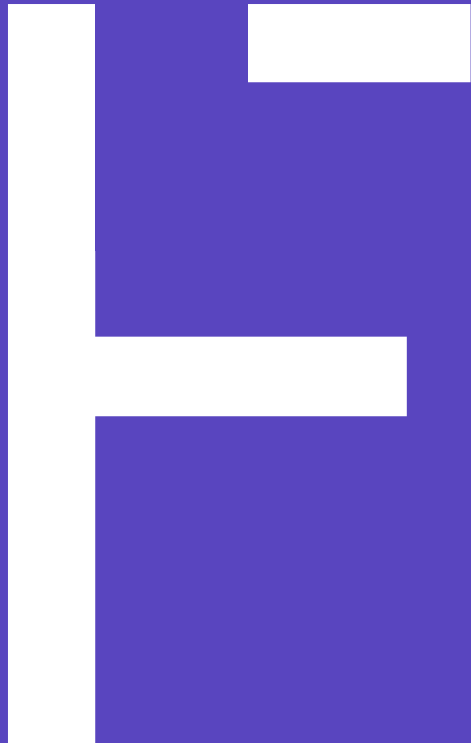
Picture a Google algorithm update as a strong wind blowing in. If the wind is strong enough, it could topple a skyscraper, but it could not do the same to a pyramid.

In the West, when we think of growth, we typically think of things rising up – such as a skyscraper. Shortsighted website owners and SEOs will adopt this mentality, striving to take shortcuts to scale their sites 'upwards'. For example, someone that thinks of links in a purely numeric manner is likely to keep piling up links to emulate this infrastructure.

In my early days as an SEO, whether through ignorance/and or testing, I too made this mistake. I woke up in the morning after a Google algorithm update and felt my stomach sink to the floor. All it takes is one unpredictable update for websites of this precarious foundation to fall.

Not for well over a decade have I made the same mistake. Neither have my clients. Not one.

And this is why you should grow a site as though it were a pyramid. If you do this, then, when an update happens, you can sleep soundly while many website owners scurry to scaffold their foundations.
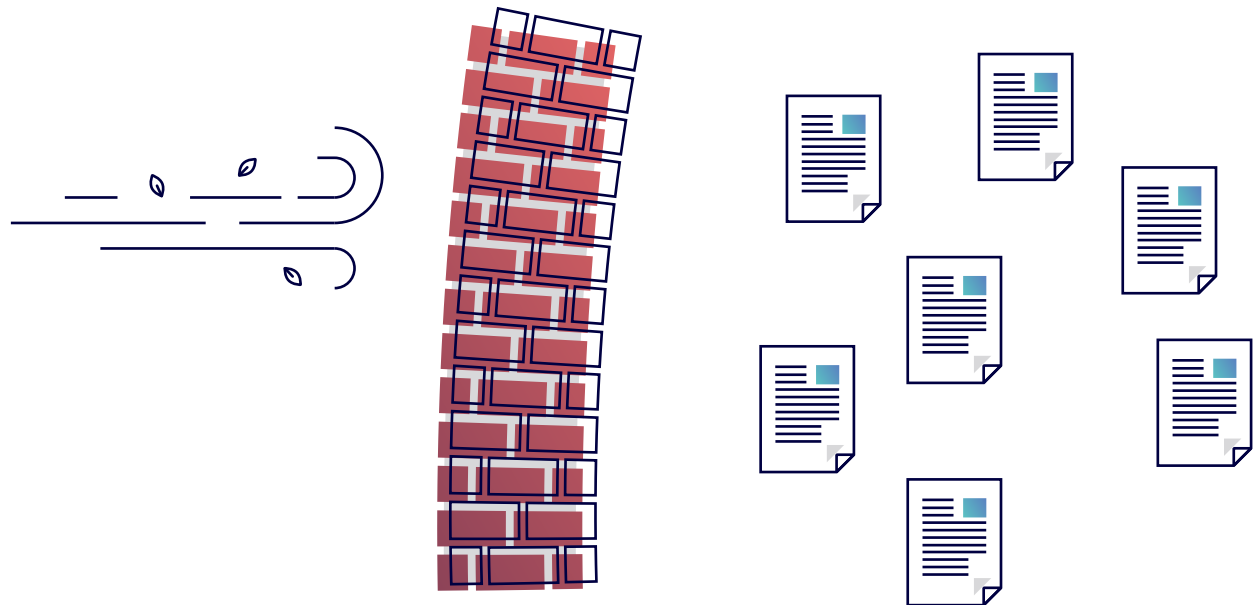
# But how do you make a website like a pyramid?

Not unlike the inspiration for this A-Z, a noteworthy forum post on 'theming pyramids' was highly influential in shaping this strategy in my formative years.

By covering several of your main topics on the homepage of your website (think of this as the 'top triangle' of a pyramid), you then create sections/pages for each of your key topics (this being the second layer of your pyramid, looking from the top down). Under each of these topics, you create further, smaller pyramids that break down each subject matter into ever-smaller areas/pages.

The base of your pyramid will be made up of pages that would naturally attract long-tail keywords, as these will cover specific features of topics higher up in the pyramid.

NEWS

INDUSTRY

# Move That Mega Menu!

I hate mega menus! They have very few positives but *many* negatives. But, what are they? Basically, a mega menu is a type of navigation structure that displays all (or most) of your site's pages in one single menu. When you hover over one menu item, it expands to showcase all of its subcategory pages.

A tactic I've used for mega menus is to change the location of the menu HTML to the bottom of the HTML document. By cleverly using CSS, you then keep the menu where it normally is in the browser – at the top of the page – so that the user sees nothing different.

This change makes EVERY page on your site INSTANTLY more contextual. The H1 and first paragraph of every page will now be closer to the top of the HTML document ready to be crawled – rather than playing second fiddle to the mega menu code. If you fail to switch the order, check the image on the following page. There, you can see the cluttered code that Google must first crawl before getting to what your specific page is about. This confuses its understanding of your page's true context.

Best internal link practices will also come into play here (see 'link shingling').

# Curating mega menus

You can further improve contextuality and theming of areas of your site by curating which menu items appear on each page.

For example, if you sell shoes and belts, restrict your links on the mega menu to the category they best relate. The result? Improved contextuality and search rankings.

Curation should consist of the removal of unnecessary mega menu links on certain pages, and not, instead, using 'no follow' tags on those links.

## Google has to read this non-useful content on each and every page

ACME

Heading 1

Mega menu source code can be huge and greatly reduces page contextuality if not correctly implemented.

## The H1 tag of a webpage with a mega menu could be thousands of lines down in the code!

# Network Science!

If you take the time to understand even the basics of network science, then you become more knowledgeable about how to make a website successful than all website owners and SEOs that do not know about it. If you apply it, that is.

Now, I have given several 3–4 hour talks (even a 12-hour talk!) about this subject matter, and it is tricky to explain in just a few words.

But… essentially, by understanding the underlying nature of how networks operate, you are able to much more clearly see why certain websites rank as they do.

Being able to reverse-engineer why the top 10 for a given search phrase is as it is – within just a few seconds – gives you the understanding of how to remedy the situation, taking out much – or all – of any guesswork.

Your quest to rank a site well becomes a set of actions that you are easily able to create. And, believe me, the reason that we use Google and not Yahoo or Bing is because those clever guys at Google used network science to a much higher level than the others.

The seminal work on this subject matter, in my opinion, is *Linked: The New Science of Networks* by Albert-László Barabási, and, while I am an ebook fan, I strongly suggest you buy the physical book over Kindle version, as there are graphs in the book that need to be seen clearly on paper.

In writing so few words about such a complex subject, I can do more damage than good, so please take my advice and buy the book.

# The more links that a node has, the more important it is

# Use Breadcrumbs

When I encounter the team behind a website – especially an e-commerce website – who wish to start playing with the 'big boys', one of the first things that I check is if they're using breadcrumbs (a little navigational aid that helps Google to understand how your site is structured).

In many cases, breadcrumbs are an oversight. This happened with a very well-known kitchenware company that I spoke to recently. Various competition, despite not being anywhere near as big as them offline, were outranking them in Google search results. Each of the competitor sites were using breadcrumbs. Meanwhile, this long-established brand was not.

When it comes to breadcrumbs, put yourself in the position of a Google robot. Upon following a link to a webpage about red cupboards, it would probably say:

**On a site WITH breadcrumbs:**

'Ah, I see that I am a page about red cupboards, and I belong in the cupboards section of the site, which belongs to the furniture section. I know where I am.'

**On a site WITHOUT breadcrumbs:**

'Ah, I see that I am a page about red cupboards. But where am I? AARRGGGHHHHH. Where am I? Where do I belong? Help me! AARRGGGHHHH?!'

And in both of those cases, the same scenario happens across every page of the site.

I make several references to contextuality throughout this list, and the correct use of breadcrumbs is another way to assert to Google what your website is about here.

Google loves to know where a page is supposed to be on a website. Breadcrumbs are an easy way to show this.

**Make it easy for Google to understand your website.
Use breadcrumbs!**

A PRODUCT
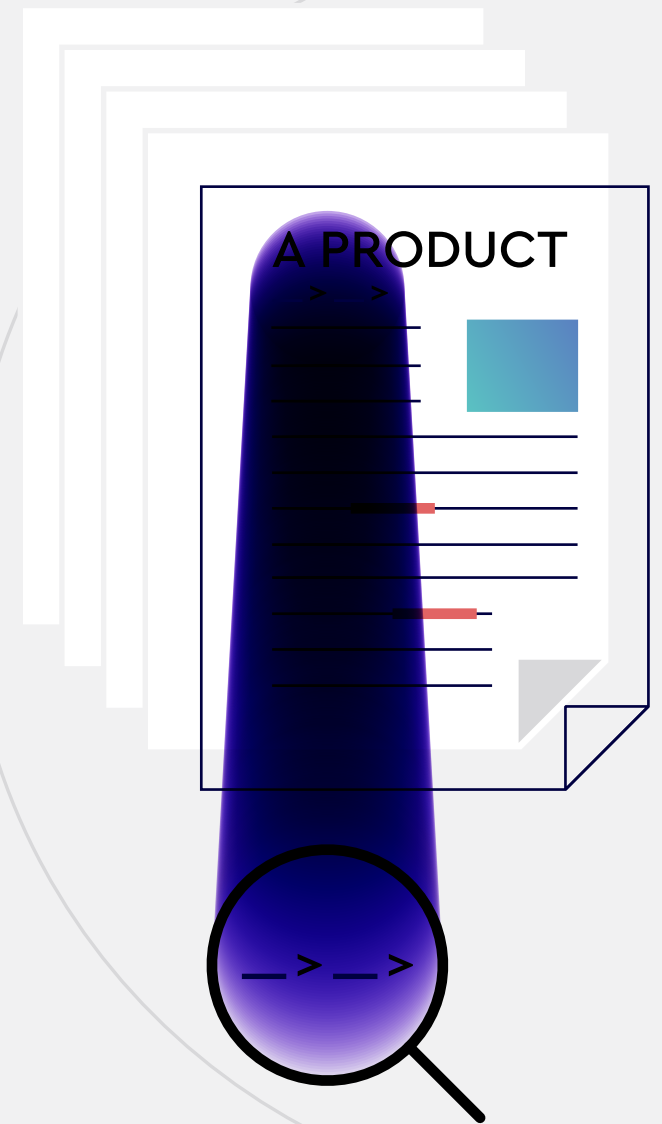
# Make Speed a Priority

If you don't know by now that page load speed is (ever-increasingly-so) important to Google, you have been living under a rock. There are a raft of tools, with Google originally creating the AMP framework to enable extremely lightweight versions of slower, database-driven content.

I could write a LOT of words about the complexities of making a website faster, but, simply put, if your website needs to be successful for your business as a whole to prosper, then you need to make page load speed a priority. Every microsecond you shave off could mean higher rankings in the short, middle, and long term.

I can't overemphasise how critical this is to how your website will perform. And, for more established websites that can often suffer from slow-to-load scores due to the sheer size of their domains, this should be a number-one priority to sort.

# Chances that a website belongs to a reputable brand

**All other signals**

10 Seconds                                    1 second

**Page load speed**
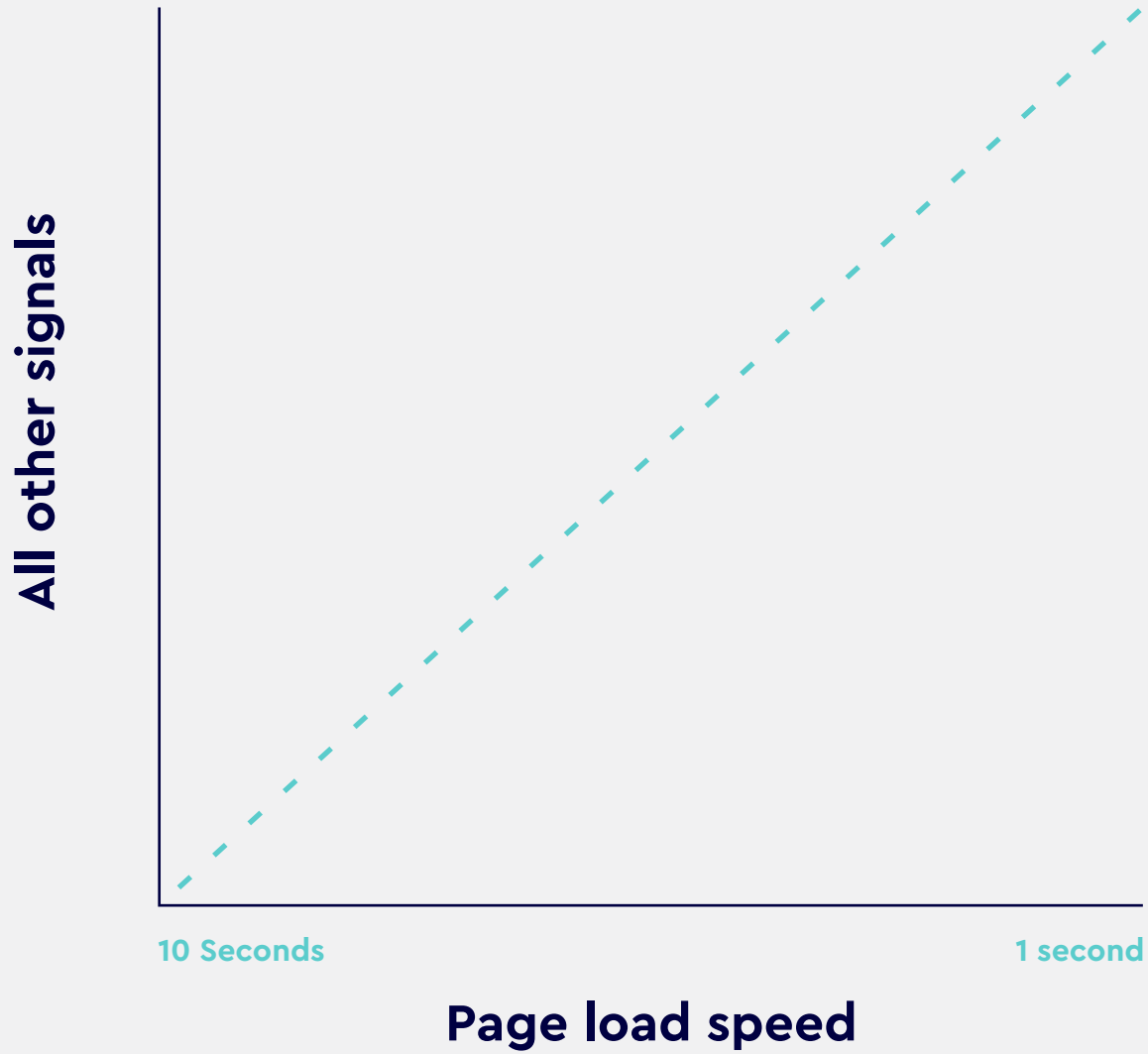
# Do Your Keyword Research

If SEO skills were comparable to those of a football player, I'd be a Michael Owen. I rate myself highly because I've had a great career.

Like Owen, I have many skills that make me good at what I do. In a similar vein, like Owen, who was terrible at one important thing – heading the ball – I'm terrible at one important thing, and that's keyword research. Because I'm bad at it, I tend not to practise it, either. I suspect Owen didn't bother practising headers, too.

So, should you be taking advice from me when it comes to keyword research? The answer is no.
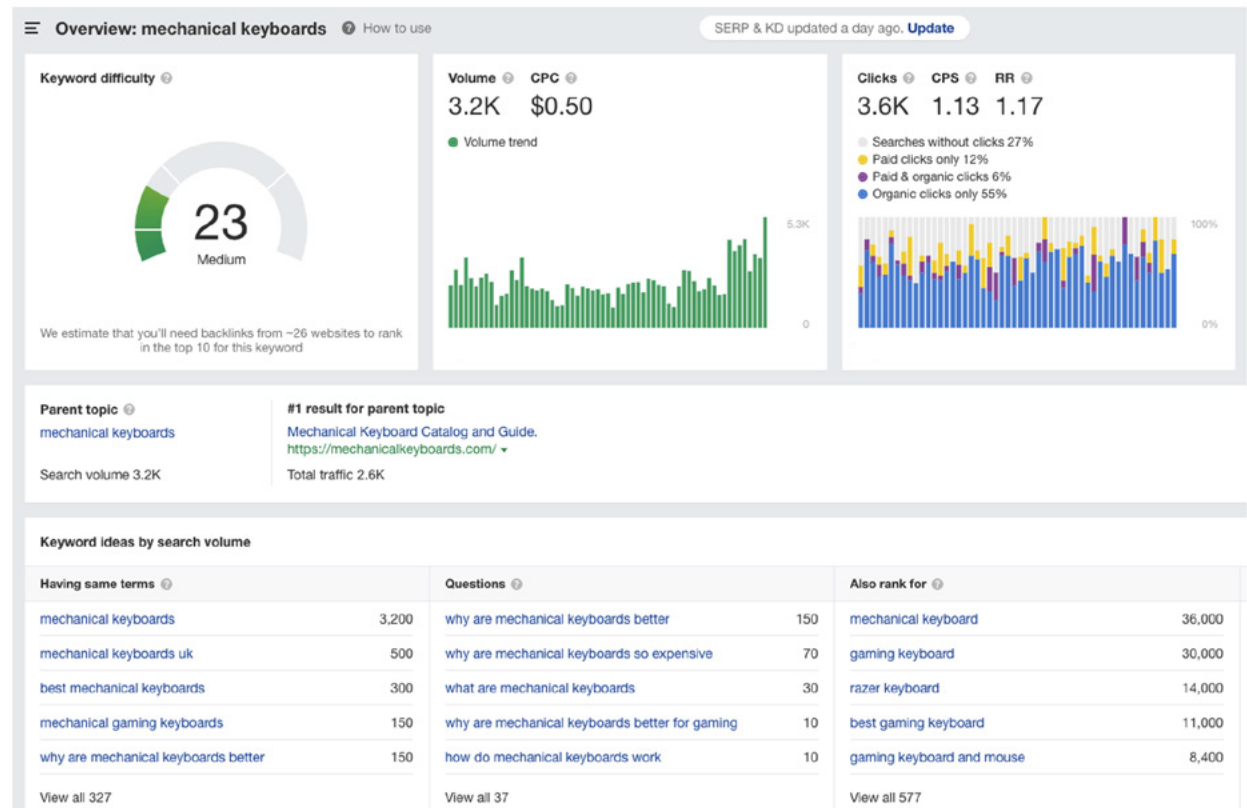
## However...

As technologies have improved – and as luck would have it – you don't actually have to be that good at keyword research nowadays, especially if you know where to look.

Using tools like Ahrefs, Google Keyword Planner, and Frase will indicate the direction that your content should take with just a few clicks of a mouse.

As you can see from the (Ahrefs) screenshot on the previous page, having typed in 'mechanical keyboards', I'm able to see so much information. And the data on this screen is just the tip of the iceberg.

As mentioned, I'm not the world's best when it comes to keyword research. However, with the Ahrefs dashboard (or basic knowledge of any number of SEO tools), I'm able to find out exactly what I need to write about and how to organise any website.

I've had a pretty successful career leveraging tools such as these to score big SEO wins. You could go one better than me. Keyword research is now easier to grasp than ever. Once the fundamentals are understood, a conversation with our expert SEO team can unlock the rest.

# Get Links IN

By following the advice in 'H: Understand Network Science!', you'll understand that every network in the universe follows exactly the same rules.

And networks, by nature, are extremely efficient. Larry Page and Sergey Brin knew this, using it as the basis for the rules for their first search engine – and Google's somewhat comical original name – BackRub.

Google's understanding of network science and how 'nodes' with better content typically gain more links than 'nodes' with lesser content (think of the air traffic to Las Vegas versus that of Blackpool) are at the heart of why their search engine provided excellent results from the off. And why it literally killed the competition.

So, if your website has more links than others in your sector, you'll get to the top of the SERP, *right*?

## If only it was that easy...

If the number of links was the entire metric for success in Google's search engine, then the world would be a weird place. Firstly, not all links have equal value. A link from a university website would almost certainly be seen as more valuable than a link from a music teacher's website. Not because (as many SEOs would have you believe) of the domain suffix – likely .edu/.ac.uk – but because there will be many times more links pointing toward the university site than the music teacher's.

So, at the core of Google's algorithm, links matter. Content is assumed to be better or worse depending on the number of links that a webpage has pointing towards it.

This would explain why links from newspaper websites (see 'N: Do Digital PR' ) would be useful to have pointing toward you.

# But this is, of course, only part of the picture

Because we humans love to cut corners, people try to manipulate links. By creating devilish schemes such as paying for links from important websites or creating/using 'farms' of websites to attract more links, Google has to use other metrics (such as many of the items on this list) to mitigate any monkey business.

In the past, Google has been woefully incorrect in ranking whole industries, but, as each day goes by, they are getting better at it.

How do they do it?

Google makes use of data from the below, amongst other metrics, to rank billions of webpages and ensure that their search engine remains aligned with what users actually want:

- Social media activity
- Website engagement and traffic
- Website taxonomy
- Authorial expertise
- Page load speed

Google is a huge success – and it all works because of the bedrock of how sites link to each other. So, start today. Get more links, ideally from websites that have lots of links themselves to push your rankings up.

## The strength of links from a website is largely dictated by the number of links that point to it



YOUR PAGE

University Website

News Site

Blog
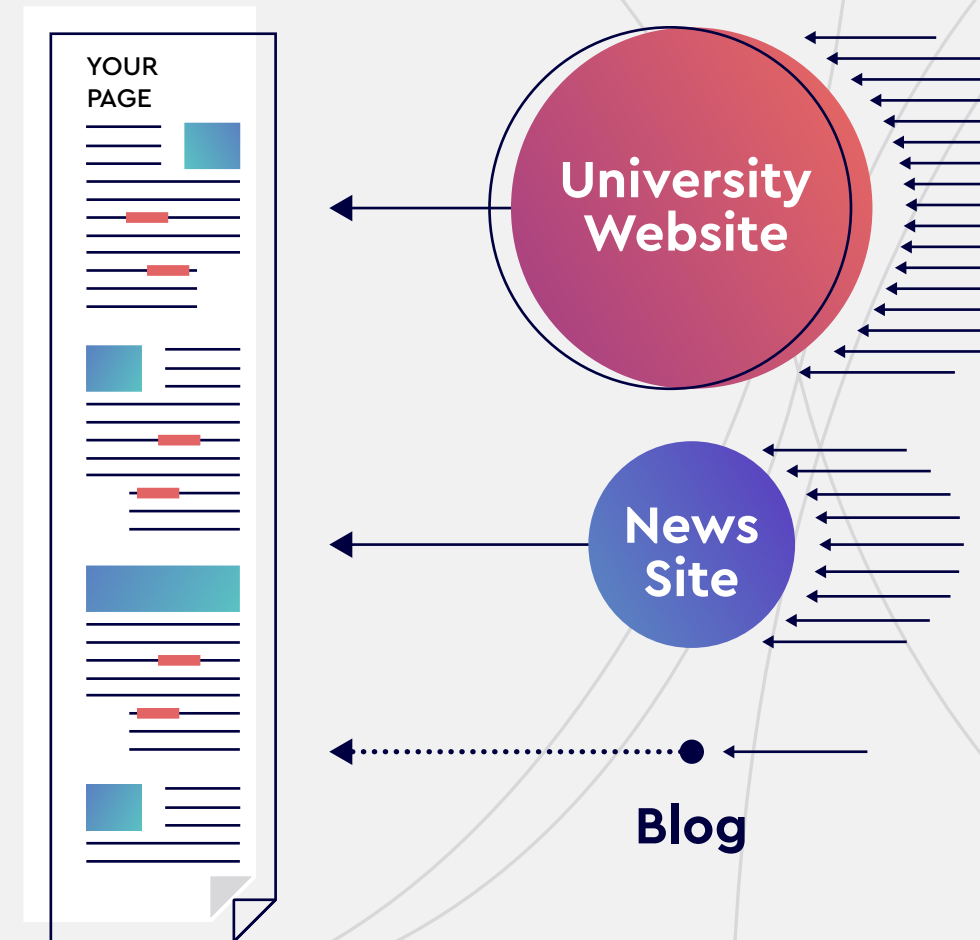
# Get Links OUT

There are far too many SEOs/website owners that think they will lose visitors or rankings if they link out to other sources. Pfffttt.

Think about this for a moment... which website do you visit several times per day/week that's chock-full of links to other sources, yet you keep going back again and again?

That's right, Google.

The point being is that when you link to good sources of information, you start to be thought of as a subject matter expert. How else would you know which resources to link to? People go back to Google again and again because the information that it sends you is so good.

Linking out to useful sources will never ever see you punished. Remember, this giant network that we all use every day is coined 'the web'. Without links in abundance, the web would be, *well*, like using Google Drive. It simply wouldn't work at scale.

## Be selective and prioritise usefulness

Google is likely to reward websites that link out to useful resources. In fact, it would be pretty stupid to NOT reward this activity, in my humble opinion.

This does not mean that you should – purely for SEO reasons – go away and add a few links out from every page of your site just for the sake of it (although it would help a little). However, it *does* mean that you should change your mentality to make linking out to useful sources a part of how you create content on your site.

**Links IN**
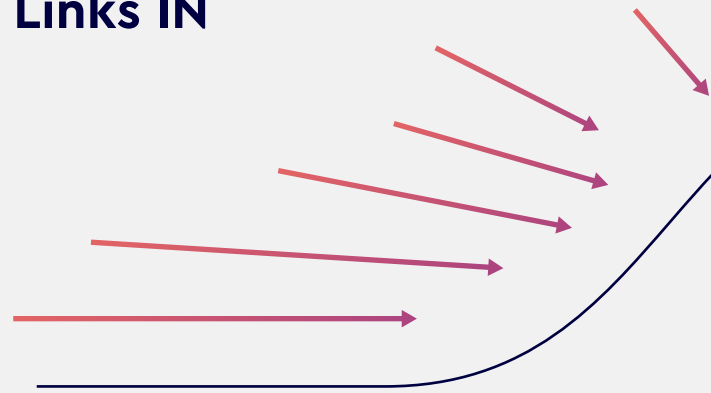
**Links OUT**
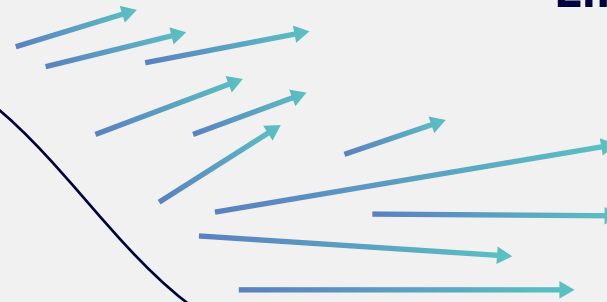
**Industry 'landscapes' are formed by links to and from websites.**

**This creates sites that become landmarks.**

**Google trusts this site more than the others**

# Do Digital PR

Digital PR is a relatively new phrase in the world of SEO and online marketing.

What it effectively boils down to, in 'brass tack' terms, is to get links from strong news websites. That is an awfully crude way of explaining digital PR, I have to admit, but a digital PR campaign that generates few or no links at all is considered an unsuccessful campaign. Links are ultimately how digital PR campaigns will be judged. Coverage is a distant second, whatever your views.

If you are Google, and you want to know which of two relatively similar sites to rank the highest, it makes good sense (in most situations) that the site that has the most links from well-regarded news sites would be the best to deliver to your visitors.

## Why?

Because a site with several mentions across press outlets is more likely to be a real, 'bricks and mortar' company, with a customer service department and experience, lots of customers, and so on. There is much less chance of it being an affiliate site, run by an 'SEO geek' out of his/her bedroom, drop-shipping products. I should know – I was once this geek!

Alongside other suggestions in this list, a healthy profile of links (and coverage) from national news websites, specialist news sites/blogs, news sections of industry body sites, and local news outlets not only helps Google to apportion authority to a website but also improves the likelihood of a website belonging to a firm of some repute.

## Learn what is newsworthy content (more difficult than you may think)

I think I'm moderately clever. I think I know what kind of content works on the web. However, I know little about how news outlets prioritise publication. What, to me, is excellent content is not always aligned with journalistic opinion.

## Getting your story out there...

At Embryo, our Digital PR team has taught me that understanding the journalistic mindset is a skill of its own. I'm lucky that I have someone to call upon to (literally) rip apart my ideas when they don't fit the criteria.

Should you have a newsworthy story that you want to be picked up, it's essential that you do your research into pitching – each journalist and publication will have their own priorities when it comes to what they'll cover.



Digital PR

SEO/ Content Strategy
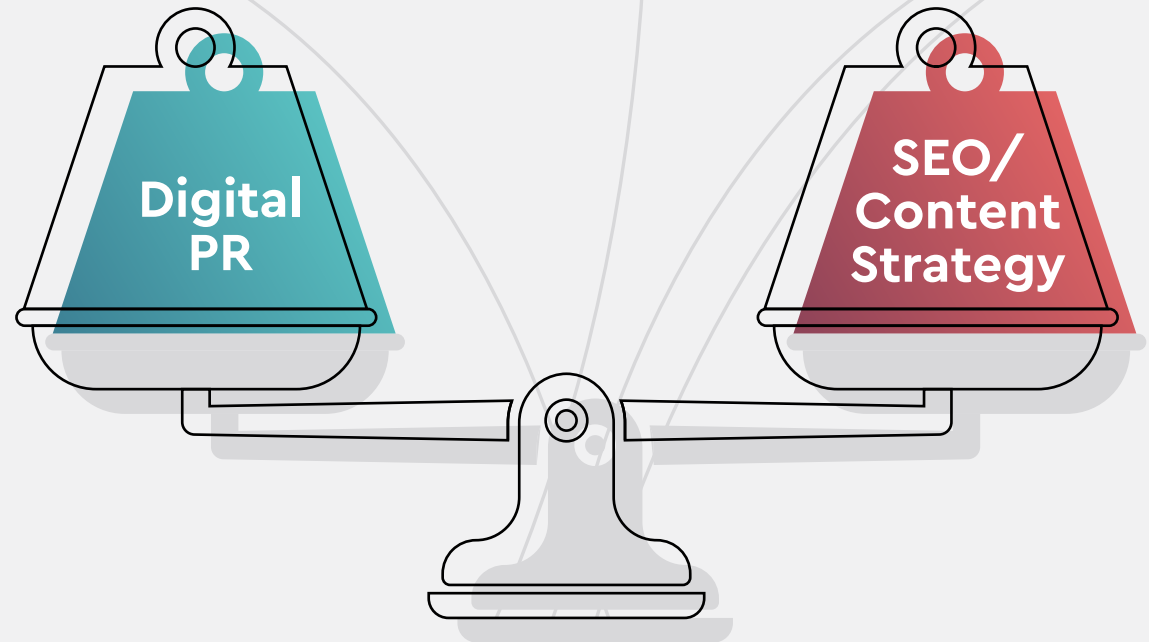
# Know About Ontology

Ontology can be defined as 'a set of concepts and categories in a subject area or domain that shows their properties and the relations between them'.

In essence – and this is a very simplified explanation – when writing a webpage, the more interrelated ontological items you include, the more that Google will perceive you to be a subject matter expert.

For example, if you were tasked with the unfortunate job of writing the obituary of Robin Williams, you would likely cover many of the films and TV shows that he acted in. You'd also write about his stand-up routines, no doubt. But there would be other salient points that are not so common knowledge, such as his long-time love of video games.

A film buff would know that he was the voice of the animated professor in the film, *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, or that certain scenes in *Aladdin* were drawn around his ad-libbing, rather than him simply recording structured dialogue. A real film/Williams buff would also know about his impromptu visit to Christopher Reeve (who he went to college with), pretending to be a proctologist, which was the first time that Reeve had laughed since finding out that he would be paralysed for life.

## Ontology insists you delve deeper...

Now, when it comes to Robin Williams (or any keyword phrase that you wish to use, from 'Bramley apples' to 'curtain rails'), Google will have an ontology of the words that relate. I like to think of this as a series of concentric circles, with most important relationships to the core keyword closer to the centre. So, when you write for the web and don't include core elements of the ontology for that phrase, it signals to Google that you don't yet know enough about the topic at large.

Essentially, if the terminology you use is limited, it's assumed that your expertise within the field is too. Not a great ranking factor.

# Another example of how to explain ontology

Here's a real-life example that I use to explain why the content we write at Embryo is not 'just words on a page'.

As a generalist content writer, if you were asked to write an article about DNA, you'd likely do some research on the web, and then populate your article with some of these borrowed terms and references that you understand at surface level.

However, task a Biology graduate with the same article, and they'd probably write twice the length, filling it with a broader scope of references that frame the topic of DNA within the wider field of biology.

Now, a geneticist with 30 years of experience gets commissioned, and you already see where this is going... You'd get an incredibly comprehensive article – one that's undoubtedly filled with case studies and broad research that handles the topic of DNA as a legitimate subject matter expert would.

With the tools that we have at our disposal, Embryo's Content team is able to produce material that is a lot more 'geneticist' than 'generalist'. Because we understand the power of ontology in reference to SEO and have tools that allow us to visualise such things, we are able to produce rankable content that builds authority and trust.
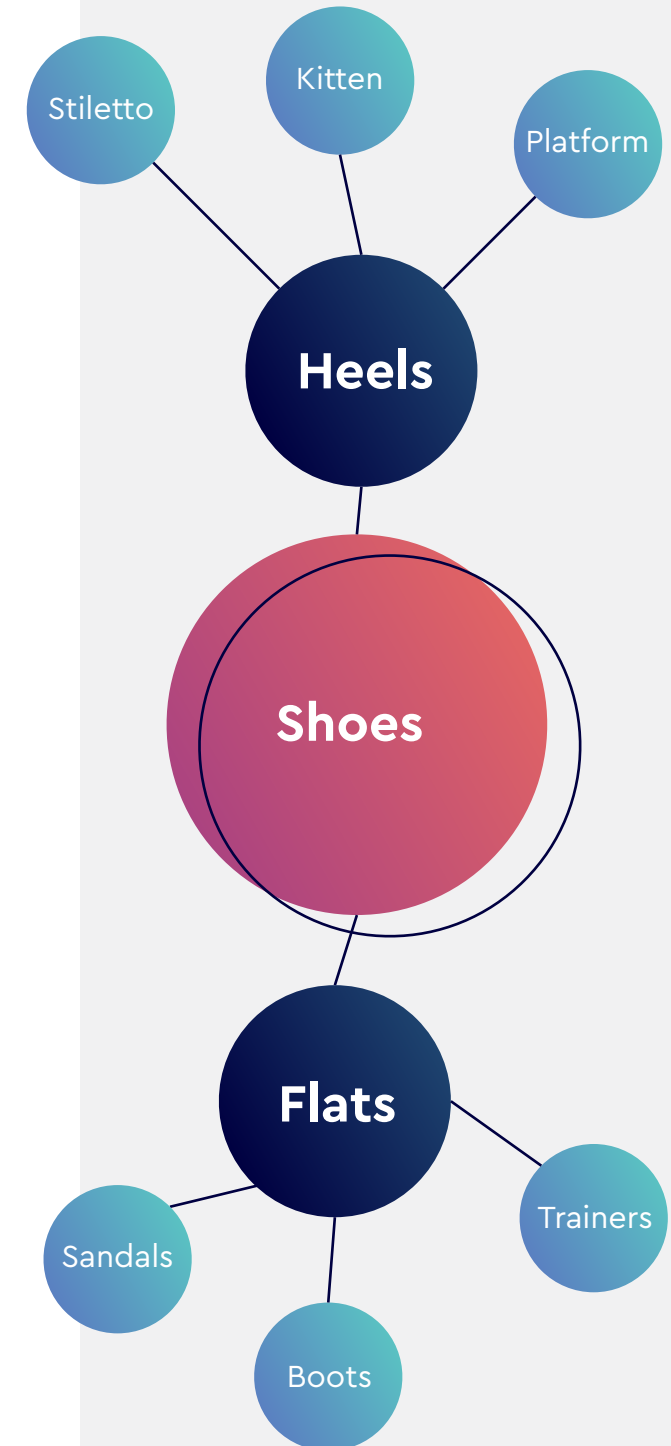
# Create Pages with Small File Sizes

Over time, the average file size of a webpage has increased to around 2MB, according to the HTTP Archive.

When I originally wrote this (in 2021), I was asking my own Development team to create pages around the 300KB mark – and I'm still not happy with that number. They mostly fail at this, of course, but by setting such a stringent target, we generally produce much lighter pages than the vast majority of webpages out there.

It's very easy to add functionality (with bloated code) to your website. You can add a function to one page that is then resident across all other pages, even though it is not needed. Do this a few times, and your website is way thicker around its middle than it should be.
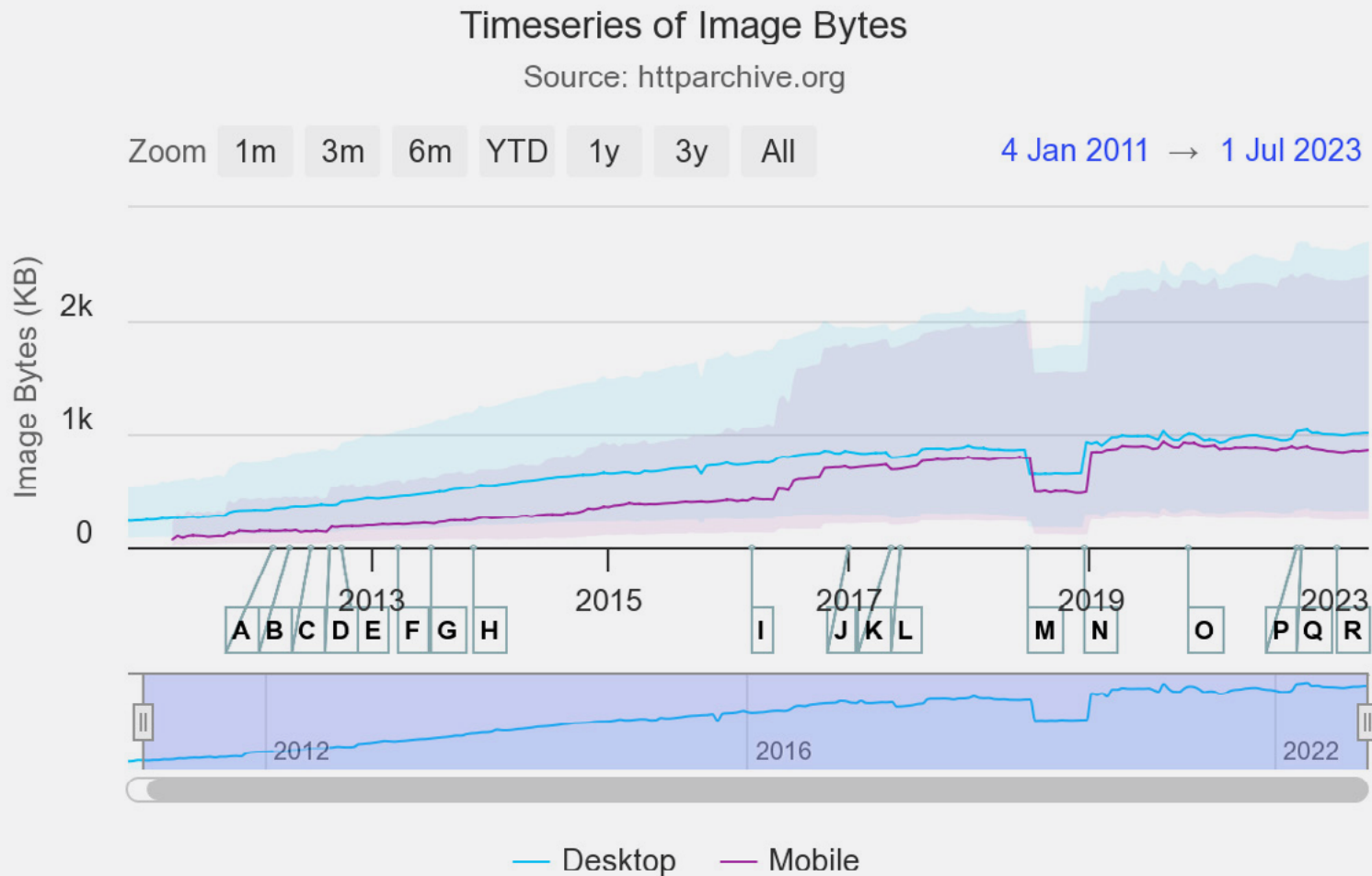
## Why is this a bad idea?

Each and every time that Google visits the pages of your site, it has to traverse this extra fat, which could so easily be avoided. This 'computing time' of the search bots could be much better spent by speeding through a greater number of (less heavy) pages of your site in one go.

Would Google prefer a competitor's webpage of 450KB over that of your bloated 1.8MB webpage? Almost certainly. Multiply this by every page on both sites, and you can see how things could start to have an impact.

Lighter is better. Do it if you can.

# How file sizes have grown over the years



### Timeseries of Image Bytes
Source: httparchive.org

Zoom  1m  3m  6m  YTD  1y  3y  All          4 Jan 2011  →  1 Jul 2023

Image Bytes (KB)

2k

1k

0

A B C D E F G H          I    J K L          M N          O    P Q R

2013        2015        2017        2019        2023

2012                    2016                    2022

— Desktop   — Mobile

highcharts.com

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# Ensure Your Site Is 'Living and Breathing'

Google takes into account signals that show if a website is 'living and breathing' (a real company) over a site that is just there to gain rankings (an affiliate site, perhaps). This, I cannot prove but am certain. Let me explain.

Google has never wanted affiliate websites at the top of its rankings. It wants real, 'brick and mortar' companies, as there's a much higher chance that these sites will offer their visitors a better experience, meaning they'll return.

This is why Google has become the overwhelming market leader in search. It uses common sense – not just website features and link numbers alone – to rank websites. I have used the term 'canteen theory' for many years to explain how Google is able to rank the web with much more proficiency than competitors. I'll elaborate...
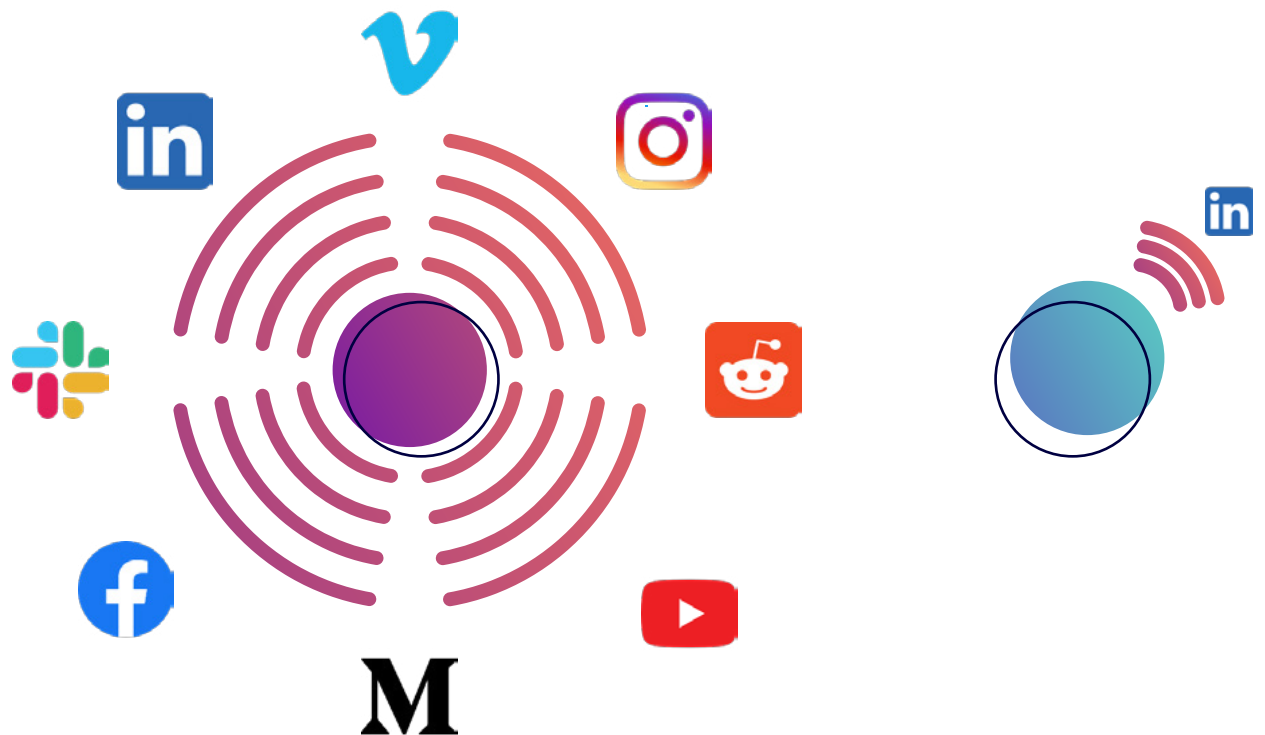
## What is 'canteen theory'?

'Canteen theory' refers to Google's (smart) incentive to work out just how large the canteen is at the company behind a website. The larger the canteen, the more staff a company is likely to have – and the more trust Google will likely put behind a brand. But what signals are on their radar?

Well, the first rule is to think 'what signals can a "real" company send/receive that an affiliate cannot?'. What can the archetypal 'SEO geek' in his/her bedroom – having built an affiliate site – not replicate?

The list I'd encourage is long. Of course, you do not have to choose all items, but a few will certainly help your case and stack your 'canteen'. Think social media activity (back and forth), press coverage, top-tier memberships of industry bodies, mass charity activity, several members of a company on LinkedIn, links/mentions in social media bios.

## Canteen theory in action

A good example of canteen theory is the now defunct Phones 4U company who also owned Dial-a-Phone – a once very prominent pay-monthly phone company whose (almost) sole marketing tactic was to display ads in multiple national newspapers on a daily basis. While the very same search/online tactics were used to promote both brands (by the same marketing team), Phones 4U was several times more successful than Dial-a-Phone. The marketing team (and managing director at the time) couldn't understand what they were doing wrong.

The key difference was that Phones 4U advertised on TV, had highly active social media channels, had radio ads, was talked about in media outlets because of its quirky ad campaigns, and had a few hundred stores that would garner local press attention and social media mentions. Messages like 'I think the blonde bird in the Hanley Phones 4U store is fit' (a real example, by the way) could simply never happen for Dial-a-Phone. You couldn't walk past one of its stores, as it didn't have any.

Even though Dial-a-Phone staff (all four of them) and Phones 4U staff shared the same building, there was no canteen for Dial-a-Phone. Yet the canteen for Phones 4U was pretty big indeed...

So, ask yourself: Is it likely that my website is seen as 'living and breathing' to Google? How big does your canteen seem to Google? What could you do to emphasise just how large your company is? How can you make your company seem larger than it is?

# Create a Beautiful Irregularity of Page Shapes

If you printed out each of the pages on your site, pinned them to a wall, and looked at them all from around two metres away, would they look largely similar? Would they all have the same header, and then a series of sections like this?:

- Heading banner
- Title
- Two paragraphs
- Stock image
- A list of features
- Another image
- A footer

If yes, then your site is like 98% of the websites that exist today.

Now, imagine the Google spider chomping through your site. If you are in the 98%, the 'meals' you provide it – by way of each of your pages – could be seen as the equivalent to eating only boiled rice every day for the rest of your life. It feeds you, but it quickly becomes boring.

Think of each page of your site as a meal for Google to eat. Sometimes you should give it steak, sometimes chicken, and other times fava beans and a nice chianti.

Make it interesting.

Mix it up a little.

Use two columns on some pages, three on another. Place images in different places. Use elements that break up content. When all this is done – with the addition of great content and strategically crafted internal and external linking – you make things VERY interesting for Google as it travels around the site. What's in it for you? A better ranking, of course.

Page 1

Page 2

Page 3

Page 4

Page 5
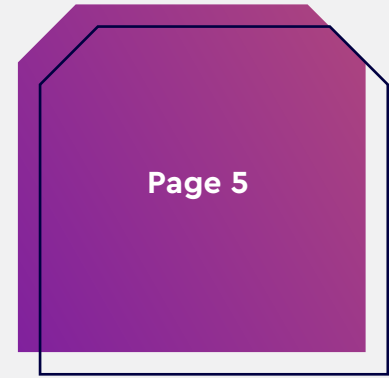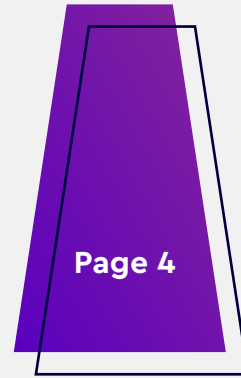
# Apply 'Link Shingling' across Your Site

When linking to pages within your site, I strongly advocate using something that I call 'link shingling'.

By this, I mean that, when linking to a page from multiple others, you should ensure the anchor text is different (whilst still relevant) each time. This will help Google to understand the target page more, as well as the site as a whole.

Let's say you run a company that provides installation services for people that want a home cinema. I use this example as I am converting my own garage to a home cinema as I write this list.

All home cinema conversion websites have a 'portfolio' page/section on their site, showing off past examples of their work. Instead of simply linking to this page with the text 'portfolio' each time, the following examples would help to add more contextuality, as you can see:

- See how we converted a barn into a cinema in our portfolio.
- Perhaps you would like an attic converted into a home cinema, like our clients in Essex.
- A basement cinema conversion would be the envy of your friends and family.
- Many people have now turned their garage into a home cinema, and you can see several examples in our portfolio.

Now, instead of just the word 'portfolio', there are nine or so keywords among just those four links that help Google to better understand what the portfolio page is about.

There is now much more of a chance that, when someone searches for 'basement home cinema', they will find your site.

An example of shingling can be seen across the page, notice how the red circle (e.g. the word 'sprocket') is in each link text (represented by shapes), but each instant is surrounded by a series of shapes (representing different words). Essentially, this variety provides Google with more contextual reference points about what the linked-to page is about:
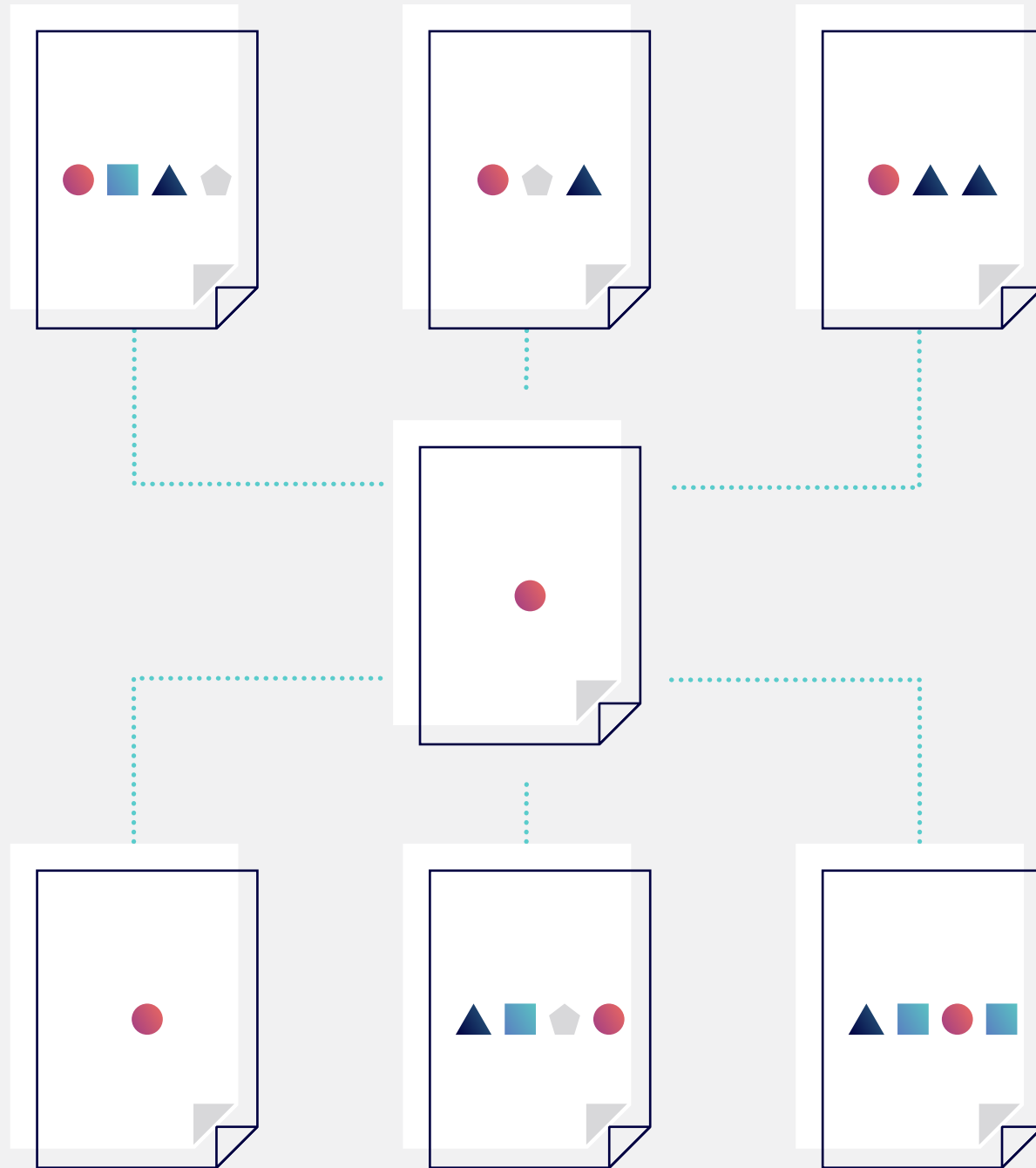
# Google Rewards the Hard Tasks

I have always said 'The harder a task is to do, the more Google rewards it'. I have used this phrase possibly for 20 years, and it is as true today as it was when I first said it.

Google's organic aim – I believe – is to replicate common sense, or the 'wisdom of the crowd'. The better it does this, the better search results that are delivered to visitors.

And, in its quest to replicate common sense, it is almost certain to reward work that is harder to do over work that (almost) anyone could do. Things like:

- Writing 3,000+ words about a product or service
- Getting a score of 95+ on Google Lighthouse
- Having 300+ people enter a competition posted on social media – multiple times
- Getting 25+ staff members to list you as their current place of work on LinkedIn
- Earning links and media coverage from major newspapers
- Earning links from prominent industry-body websites
- Gaining genuine testimonials
- Displaying membership emblems from various industry bodies, accreditations, business groups, etc.
- Taking part in charitable endeavours that get reported on by local press and charity websites

Most of the items here are very natural for companies of a certain size to achieve as part of their journey. Meanwhile, some of these items in particular are difficult for a person running an affiliate site to replicate consistently. This is why these types of things are likely to help a site rank better than a site that does not/ cannot do the same.

If you have two website tasks that you find as equally important as each other, do the one that is harder to do first. Google will most likely appreciate it more.

# Create a Guest Blog Post Strategy*

When you write guest blog posts, try to ensure that the post that you write/pay-for has several links within it to similar and/or useful webpages. Let me explain.

How many guest/paid-for blog posts are written each day with just one link to a site? 'Too many' is the answer. In all probability, over 99% from my experience. This is so easy for Google to spot from a mile away – while wearing an eye mask made of lead.

Now, if you paid for a guest post with a link to your own site and, say, eight other relevant links – perhaps even to competitors in another country, industry blogs, news sites, etc., your post would look a LOT more like a useful post to Google. It would look like it's been crafted – and would look exactly the opposite to a guest or sponsored blog post. It would be so incredibly hard for Google to tag it as a non-useful document.

## Easy rule of thumb for paid/guest blog posts

If you look at the homepage of a blog that you are thinking of paying for/guest blogging on, and the subject matters of the latest blogs differ wildly in their subject matter (e.g. 'the benefits of memory foam mattresses' and '10 ways to choose the right car'), then there is a 90% chance that you should end your interest there. There are always exceptions, of course. But this simple rule will stand you in good stead, and keep you away from 'bad juju'.

*Guest blog posts are not the be-all and end-all of link building. Despite what some say, they still work perfectly well as part of your overall link building strategy – especially if you follow what I say here.

BLOG
POST A
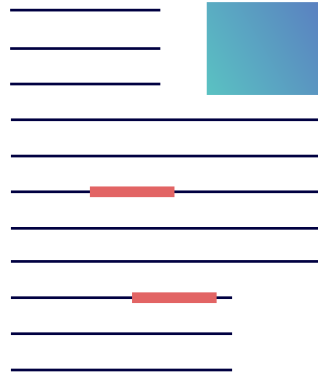
BLOG
POST B
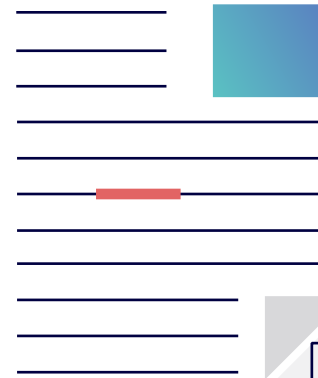
**Which of these blog posts looks like a guest/paid for post?**

# Read 1,000 Blog Posts

Yes, you read that correctly. Read 1,000 blog posts about SEO, growth hacking, and website development.

Why? So that you learn that 900 of those posts are pretty useless – and why.

Of the 100 left, 50 will be good and insightful. The remaining 50 could make you a fortune – and change your life. It happened to me.

There's beauty in the act of your mind 'self-sifting'. Organising information each time you read something new – as you'd expect – increases your subject matter knowledge. Perhaps just as important is learning what to discard.

There is a bittersweet feeling of reading 1,000 blog posts. It is necessary to do, so that you know what is good – but sad that you will have had to have read so much 'hot air'.

# 1,000 blog posts
# (value to scale)



**Read and discard
all memory**

**Bookmark**

(Read sometimes)

**Cherish**

(Print. Save.
Read often.)

# Get Links from Friends' Websites

Getting a link from your friend's website is NOT 'cheating the system' as some misinformed SEOs still say to this day. I see this incredibly bad advice often.

In fact, Google has never once suggested they'd penalise this. Why on earth would they punish you for such a thing? Are you not allowed to have friends? How many times do you find good deals, good sources of info, jobs, etc., from a friend (or friend of a friend)? A lot, is the answer.

## So, capitalise on your connections...

Every business owner that I have met in my career has had friends that would most certainly link to their site – they just need to be asked. The link may come in the form of a testimonial, for example, or simply as part of a list of sites that they find useful.

In most cases, the friend's business will also be located in the same, or neighbouring, town. By linking, you gain additional contextuality that 'cements' the location of your own business in Google's eyes. The more that Google is able to ascertain these things, the more trust that it can put in you to rank for things relevant to local people.

However, if you have 630 close friends with websites, you probably need to think about my advice differently. But I doubt this scenario very much.
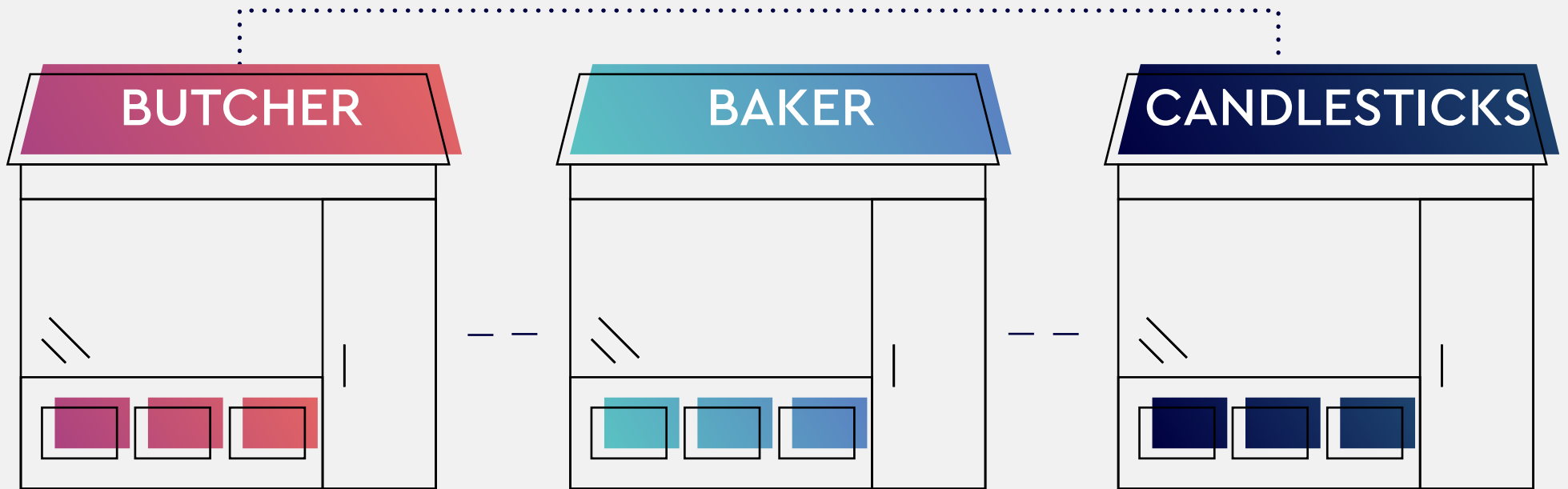
# Create the Most Interesting 'X' on the Internet

X

It is always an aim of mine – for any website that I am serious about – to create a content asset that is the best of its kind on the entire web.

This asset being an ultimate guide related to what the business sells and, by 'ultimate', *really* mean it. Say you run a flower shop, for example, having the longest guide to flowers on the web would be an example.

There are many reasons for why this is worthwhile – one being that these long-form guides are great for gaining links naturally, or via outreach.

They are the perfect promotional tool to shout about, too, as they give readers instant value (often at no cost to them, just simply an email subscription). Being able to say, 'Did you see our Ultimate Guide to Exotic Flowers?' can send a conversation in all manner of positive directions. Such assets are almost certainly going to add an extra element of contextuality to a site, too.

In every industry/sector on the web, the leading sites will undoubtedly have such an asset, probably several. Try and find an industry where this is not the case – you may be some time.

Another really useful byproduct of these assets is to see how it ranks for its main keyword – without any external links – which can often give an indication of the authority of the website it is hosted on.
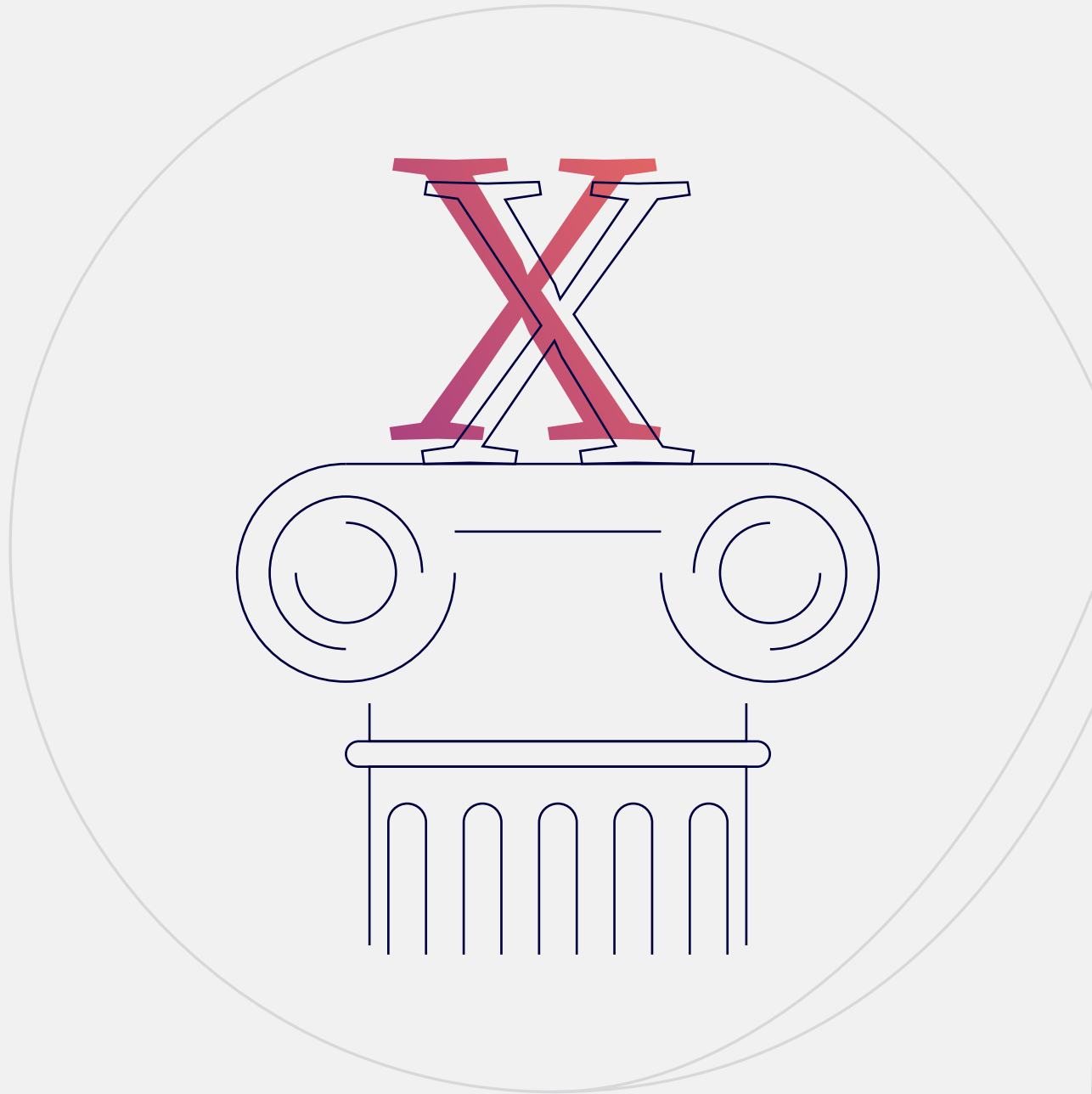
# Create an Asset Matrix

To give you a good amount of direction in terms of building features on your website, it's a good idea to create what I call an 'asset matrix'.

Create a simple table and find the top 10 sites for your most important keyword(s). List each site on its own row.

Then add the following columns:

Asset 1 | Asset 2 | Asset 3 | Asset 4

Assets could be items such as an active news section, a well-done interactive portfolio, a series of guides, an interactive tool to help you decide the product/service that you may need, a long-form 'how to' guide, videos, interviews, FAQs, and even useful case studies.

By the time you have completed the asset matrix, you should have a solid idea of the site features that you would like to add to your site to make it much more useful than it is today.

If you find that there are only a few good assets within the top 10 sites, then perhaps you should see this as an opportunity. It is an extremely rare occurrence, however.

|        | Asset 1 | Asset 2 | Asset 3 | Asset 4 |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| x.com  |         |         |         |         |
| y.com  |         |         |         |         |
| z.com  |         |         |         |         |

# Add More Content

Adding more content to your website means a multitude of things.

Firstly, content equals context, so adding more of it allows Google to better understand your business' level of knowledge and authority about your industry. The more authoritative Google deems you, the greater your rankings will be.

Secondly, more content means you're targeting more key terms that your audience is searching for – this will be true across various stages of their purchase journey. More content increases the chances of them knowing you, liking you because of your content, and subsequently trusting you enough to purchase from you.

Finally, more content means more chances to internally link to other pages on your site. This additional layer of links will allow you to create a clear web that seamlessly connects each relevant page of your site. The easier it is for your site to be crawled across a body of work, the better the crawl bots can understand your site.

Content creates opportunities for your business. The more content you deliver – refined and tailored to your audience – the better value your website will be deemed. Ultimately, Google prioritises the user experience; if your content mirrors this, you boost your chances of winning the SERP.

In short, you will likely be unsuccessful by creating little content – instead, favour frequent content delivery and optimisation.

If your content is of good quality, then you are likely to be very successful.

So, add more content to your site. Every day, if you can.

CONTENT

MORE
CONTENT

EVEN MORE
CONTENT

Do these things well and your site will be a great success.

It is much harder for a site NOT to be a success
having done some or all of these items.

In what form success manifests will be dictated by many
things that occur between now and then...
but it WILL be very successful.

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