How to Create Compelling Content

that Ranks Well in Search Engines

copyblogger

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Once upon a time, there was something called SEO copywriting.

These SEO copywriters seemed to have magical word skills that allowed them to place just the right *keywords* in just the right places, in just the right amounts, and even in the *densities* that were *just right* for miraculous top rankings. And that's all you needed . . . or at least that's what was advertised.

There's no doubt that the location and frequency of keywords is still important. Search engines work by keying in on the word patterns people are looking for and returning relevant content. But that's not all there is to it.

Here's the deal . . . much of what determines the ranking position of any particular page is due to factors that are independent from the words on the page, in the form of links from other sites, social sharing, and other signals. Getting those links and other signals naturally has become the hardest part of SEO, which is why we've seen the mainstream emergence of *content marketing* as a way to attract links with compelling content.

Put simply: If your content isn't good enough to attract good, natural links and

social sharing, it doesn't matter how "optimized" the words on the page are.

That's why a good SEO copywriter is now primarily a smart online content creator who has a knack for tuning in to the needs and desires of the prospective audience. And because links and social sharing are so important, those needs and desires have to be nailed well before that content will show up prominently in the search engines.

The same emotional forces that prompt people to *buy* can also cause other people to link from blogs, and bookmark, like, plus one, and retweet from social media platforms. The context is different, as are the nuances, but it's still a matter of providing compelling *benefits* in the form of content.

> "Ask yourself what creates value for your users," sayeth Google.

Their brainy engineers continue to diligently create smarter search algorithms, while people-powered social media sharing delivers links and traffic as a reward for compelling content.

To sum it up: a good copywriter needs to have a flair for writing content that's inviting to share and to link to. She needs to have top-notch skills to optimize

the page, so search engines know what it's about and who might want to read it. And she needs to know how to write copy that converts readers to buyers.

That copywriter will become a vital (and well compensated) member of any serious marketing effort.

So, if it's all about what happens *off* the page, does the "SEO" in SEO copywriting still matter?

Absolutely, and here's why.

Wait … Isn't SEO Dead?

That depends on what you call "SEO."

- Is it buying links to thin keyword-stuffed pages?

- Is it low-quality content enhanced by inorganic link building?

- Is it building a content "farm" based on brute site authority and weak value?

If so, then yes, SEO is pretty dead, or at least on life support. And the Panda and Penguin updates to the Google algorithm are not the end of the story

… the engineers at Google will continue to do everything they can to stick a stake in the heart of this type of search engine "optimization."

But that's not what I call "optimizing" for search engines, because eventually the search engines will sniff you out and wipe out your rankings. On the other hand, some of the brightest minds in SEO have been taking a content and socially-driven approach since before Twitter and Facebook were around, and Panda and Penguin have not caused those folks (including Copyblogger) one bit of distress.

The kind of SEO that *actually works* from a long-term perspective is alive and well:

- Creating high-value content that achieves business objectives as if search engines didn't exist.

- Using the power of social media to gain exposure for that content, which results in natural links and other signals of quality and relevance.

- Focusing on enhancing the natural authority of websites, pages, and individual writers, which creates industry influence and trust with Google.

- Doing smart on-page optimization (SEO copywriting) using the language the audience uses when searching and socializing, so Google sees you as the most relevant option.

And guess what? Google absolutely encourages this approach, because it makes their algorithm smarter and their search results better.

Again, it's not just about search results. Smart content marketers derive benefit from audience-focused content and by social media exposure and sharing. This enables you to build a profitable audience that is an asset even if your search engine rankings did somehow disappear.

But if you do content + social correctly, you'd be crazy not to take advantage of better search rankings. Here's why.

Search Engines Send the Most Valuable Traffic

Targeted search traffic is still the holy grail of achieving your business objectives (you know, like sales), as opposed to scoring random traffic. Social media traffic is crucial, but mostly in the sense that it allows you to develop more valuable long-term traffic sources like opt-in email subscribers and high search rankings.

The average order value (AOV) of website traffic
from search in Q2 2012 was $90.40, … more than
40% higher than traffic from social networks ($64.19),
according to an August report from Monetate.

The reason why is simple … it comes down to *intent*. Marketers have known
since way before the Internet that the frame of mind of the prospect makes all
the difference (which is why expensive advertising is used to try to influence
that frame).

Online, people who are searching for something specific are in a very
different, and more valuable, frame of mind than when they are socializing on
Facebook.

To use a nearly obsolete example, think of your state of mind when you used
to reach for the Yellow Pages. Now think of your state of mind when your
favorite TV show is interrupted by a commercial. Next, extrapolate that to
being pitched by a stranger while chatting with a friend at a cocktail party.

A new Forrester report titled "The Purchase Path of
Online Buyers In 2012 shows that fewer than 1% of

transactions could be traced back to social links.

In other words, compared with social traffic, searchers are the most motivated people who hit a website. This is important.

If they're looking for a product or service, there's a good chance they're looking to buy it. If they're searching for information and your site provides it, you've got a great chance of converting that drive-by traffic into long-term attention (an email subscriber) with your content.

Content paired with social media is not primarily a conversion-to-customer path, but instead an exercise in *audience-building*. And if you follow that path successfully, you're able to add long-term, high-value search engine rankings, which in turn continue to grow the audience in a highly-targeted way over time.

In that sense, smart content optimization is more important than ever.

And of course if you're a professional web writer, whether freelance or with an agency, this discussion is purely academic. Go ahead and tell your client not to care about Google traffic, and let me know how that goes.

So, search traffic is clearly important, as long as it's *targeted* search traffic.

Before we look at the elements of modern practice of search engine optimization, however, let's make sure we understand how search engines work.

How do search engines work?

Search engines have become an indispensible aspect of modern life. But most of us don't have a clue about how they actually work.

I'm just guessing you don't want to dive into complex mathematical algorithms.

That's ok. You just need a high-level understanding of the basics.So let's look at the three major components that power search engines, and the general approach to "spoon feeding" them so they understand our content and rank us the way we want.

1. Crawling

You've likely heard of search engine "spiders" that crawl around the web looking for content. These are actually bits of computer code that find information on a web page, "read" it, and then tirelessly continue along their

journey by following links from your page to other pages.

The spider periodically returns looking for changes to the original page, which means there are always opportunities to modify the way a search engine sees and evaluates your content down the road.

If for any reason the spider can't see your content, or doesn't understand what it's about,

your page can't be indexed and ranked. This is why our StudioPress division created the Genesis Framework for WordPress, and why we as a company obsess over making it better. Clean, secure, fast-loading code matters.

2. Indexing

The spider is not just casually browsing content, it's storing it in a giant database. This is called *indexing.*

The spider's goal is to save every bit of content it crawls for the future benefit of searchers. It's also gauging how relevant that content is to the words that searchers use when they want to find an answer to something.

3. Ranking

The final critical aspect of search technology is the way the engine decides to deliver the most relevant results to searchers. This is accomplished by jealously-guarded algorithmic functions. That's a fancy way of saying that search software follows a complex set of rules. These are the ground rules for a duel between your content and other content that might satisfy a searcher's keyword query.

Why you have to spoon feed search engines

Search engines have come a long way since the early days of the web, but they're not as sophisticated as you might think. It's not that search engines are dumb; it's more like they're bright little toddlers who need information delivered to them in a way that works for them.

Think of it this way. You wouldn't set a bone-in ribeye and steak knife in front of a 4-year-old and expect him to have at it. You'd present the food in easily chewable bite-sized chunks with appropriate utensils.

Likewise, you might write an article about "green widgets" using metaphors, entertaining analogies, and smart synonyms. *You* know you're writing about green widgets, and most reasonably intelligent people know it too.

But if you don't use the words "green widgets" in certain locations and

frequencies along with other SEO copywriting best practices, both you and the search engines are out of luck. The toddler goes hungry and you're frustrated and likely dealing with a mess.

That's not to say you want to serve up keyword stuffed crap with less appeal than mashed beets. That would be a really bad idea.

On the contrary, you *must* create that ribeye-steak content that engages people first and foremost, while also spoon-feeding search engines what they need. The end goal is always to let *other people* find you with the language they use when searching.

SEO copywriting is the "last mile" to targeted search rankings

Are you familiar with the "last mile" problem in the broadband industry? You can have thousands of miles of high speed fiber optics carrying loads of data cross country. But if the final connection to the customer's home is aging copper or pokey coaxial, the benefit of the fiber is lost.

Likewise, if you do everything right by building a website Google trusts, but don't specifically tell Google that your page content matches the words

people are actually searching for, the targeted traffic benefit is lost.

That's what effective SEO copywriting does – it tells Google which words are the most relevant ones to the people you want to reach.

You don't necessarily have to fully optimize your on-page copy upfront. But you do have to begin with the ending in mind from a keyword standpoint. We'll go more into that in just a bit.

And if you ignore this SEO stuff?

Sure, you'll get some untargeted "long tail" traffic. But what good does that really do you? Even with an advertising business model, irrelevant traffic bounces off your site quickly, leading to disgruntled advertisers who don't renew. And if you're selling something, you're only burning bandwidth.

The beauty of building a reader-focused online presence based on valuable content is that you can do well even if Google *hates* you, simply by getting people to opt-in and follow you over time.

The cool part, though, is that if you actually follow that path, Google *loves* you.

Take advantage of that. It's the critical last mile of a well-rounded and laser-

focused online marketing campaign that makes a huge difference to your overall success.

Traffic has to convert, or why bother?

Now we come to the big point. Everyone loves traffic – it's addictive and strangely gratifying in its own right.

But traffic doesn't pay the bills. It's people who take the actions you need them to who do. So again, it's not traffic that matters, it's *targeted* traffic reaching the intended pages.

Here's the problem . . . too many people think a search-optimized web page or blog post is some ugly keyword stuffed mess. That might (maybe) be tasty to spiders, but it sends *people* running for the hills.

And you just don't need to create that keyword-stuffed junk.

Search engine expert Danny Sullivan says it well:

"Unfortunately, too many assume that SEO means trying to trick search engines. It doesn't. It simply

means building a site that's friendly to them."

Part of being friendly to search engines is using language in your content that relevant searchers are also using. That's where keyword research comes in.

The 5 essential elements of search engine keyword research

Keyword research is cool. It allows you to gaze directly into people's minds.

Rather than listening to people say what they think they *might* do, you get to observe what they *actually did*, by looking at the words and phrases they used to find information. And when aggregated, you get a nice view of the words people most often use when thinking about and searching for a certain topic.

Once armed with keyword intelligence that's relevant to your niche, you have the unique ability to create highly relevant content that aids your site visitors and enhances your credibility. You're speaking the language of the audience, and satisfying their needs.

And if you get it right, you'll likely rank well in search engines too – after

promoting the content and gaining traffic from social media. It may seem strange to view search traffic as a secondary benefit in a Google-driven world, but that's exactly how you should view it.

> Google won't treat you as relevant until others do first.

The counterintuitive rule of search engine keyword research is to try to forget that search engines can send you traffic.

View the data as free or low-cost *market research* and you'll have the proper mindset to formulate a content strategy that has a shot at ranking well. People need to like your content before Google will.

I've got a more extensive guide to keyword research for you in the Appendix to this report. But here are five essential things to understand when it comes to keyword research:

1. Research Tools

Some use <u>Google's Keyword Tool</u> as a free research tool. Thousands of people use the keyword function built into our <u>Scribe content marketing software</u>.

Business-focused online marketers often use paid keyword tools over those provided free by search engines due to the bias that comes with wanting to sell you search advertising.

2. Get Specific

"Keyword" is the term that gets tossed around, but what you're really after in most cases are keyword *phrases*. For example, a real estate attorney in Austin, Texas would gain very little actual benefit from ranking highly for the single word "attorney" (and good luck anyway), but specific keyword phrases based on geography and specialty would yield highly targeted traffic ("Austin real estate lawyer"). And don't forget synonyms. ("Austin real estate attorney")

3. Strength in Numbers

Don't take as gospel truth the reported number of monthly searches provided by any particular tool. But do pay attention to *relative* popularity among search terms.

You want to make sure enough people use that phrase when thinking of your niche to make it worth your while, especially if this is one of the primary search terms you want to target for your site overall. At the same time, be realistic. If you are trying to rank in a very competitive sector, make sure that a certain

keyword combination can rank for an easier phrase if the more competitive term ends up out of reach.

4. Highly Relevant

Make sure that the search terms you are considering are highly relevant to your ultimate goal. If you're a service provider or selling specific products, keyword relevancy may be easier to determine — you ultimately want someone to purchase the product or service. Other goals may require more careful consideration, such as subscriptions to content publications and contributions to charities, for example.

5. Develop a Content Resource

Here's the key element. Can a particular keyword phrase support the development of content that is a valuable resource to readers and act as a foundational element of what your business is about?

Something that:

- Satisfies the preliminary needs of the site visitor

- Acts as the first step in your sales or action cycle

- Prompts people to link to it

It's this step 5 – a foundational content resource – that translates keyword research into strong search rankings, so we're going to look at it in more detail next.

How to create cornerstone content that Google loves

Imagine with me for a second . . . someone has just arrived at your website, and this person has *no idea* what you're talking about. And this is an *important* visitor.

Pretend further that this single visitor could make the difference between success and failure for your business. She has no time to waste poking around your site trying to figure out what you're all about, so she immediately picks up the phone and calls you, demanding an explanation.

What do you tell her?

You'd probably give her essential information about how you understand her problem, options for solving the problem, examples of how you can help, and explanations of why you perfectly meet her needs, right? And I'm betting

you'd want to explain it in the most compelling fashion you could, given what's riding on the deal.

In a nutshell, that's what Google wants you to do with the content on your site.

When trying to rank well for the central topics your site is built around, creating cornerstone content is your best bet. Whether it's extended tutorials about keyword research, content marketing, or copywriting, a unique frequently asked questions page, or an inspirational mission statement, this content serves a vital function in creating a relevant, compelling, and *useful* cornerstone that provides your site with a solid foundation for search optimization and usability.

A cornerstone is something that is basic, essential, indispensable, and the chief foundation upon which something is built. It's what people *need to know* to make use of your website and do business with you.

And when approached in a strategic fashion, this content can rank extremely well in search engines. The key is creating compelling content that's worth linking to, and then finding a way to get the word out.

Here's a 5-step strategy that I've found useful when developing cornerstone content and getting it to rank well in search engines.

1. Keywords

Taking into account what we know about keyword research, choose the most appropriate keyword phrase for your content. In other words, what is the relevant *question* that searchers are asking that your content and business solution answer?

Will answering that question aid a visitor to your site in getting the most out of the experience? Are enough people asking that question to make ambitiously answering it worthwhile?

Then you have to make sure that search engines think your content is actually about that keyword or combination of keywords. We'll get to that shortly.

2. Title Tags and Headline

No one in the SEO field disputes the importance of using your targeted keyword phrase in your title tag. Search engines want to offer relevant results, so those results should prominently reflect the words the searcher is using in the title of the page.

But remember also, the title tag is a *headline*. You want to speak back to the prospective reader in her own chosen words. Plus, you want to wrap those words in a compelling headline structure that promises to answer the *exact*

question the searcher is asking with the query.

And finally, writing a killer keyword-enhanced headline makes it more likely that someone will simply use your title to link back to you. Since link anchor text is a significant component of search engine algorithms, putting the right keywords into your headline can give your content a significant boost.

3. Content

Can a 500-word article rank well for a competitive search term all by itself?

Absolutely.

But if you have a newer website trying to rank for a competitive search term, you'll need links from *other* authoritative sources to make it happen. That means your content has to be impressive, both in quality and scope.

Develop an awesome multi-part tutorial. Write an inspirational manifesto. Answer the question so much *better and more comprehensively* than the competition does, and chances are much better that your effort becomes worth linking to and your search results improve dramatically.

4. Content Landing Page

If you're going to be ambitious in scope with your content, it makes sense to make things easy on the reader from a usability standpoint. A content landing page is designed to instantly communicate what's going on to the visitor as soon as they arrive, and also acts as a table of contents (via links to each part of the tutorial) that increases clarity.

Here are some of the benefits of the content landing page approach:

Retention: Keeping a reader from hitting the back button is crucial to just about every aspect of successful cornerstone content. You can't score a reader, customer, or link if the benefit of the resource is not quickly communicated.

Bookmarks and Sharing: When presented with a highly beneficial (if somewhat overwhelming) multi-part resource, the first impulse is often to bookmark the page for a return visit. When that bookmarking occurs at a social site like Delicious, it can lead to long-term traffic. And don't forget that sharing killer content is a sign of social media status among influencers. Content landing pages help you score the bookmark and prompt that sharing impulse at a glance.

Links: Likewise, a visiting blogger or webmaster might be instantly impressed with your work, and link to you based on the benefits and scope communicated by the landing page itself. The quicker you can impress a potential link source, the easier you're making it for them to follow through.

Optimization: Optimizing on-page copy will boost your ranking after attracting those links, so a landing page is a key benefit. It's a lot quicker and easier to optimize a content landing page than your undivided 5,000-word opus.

5. Related Content

You may have noticed that I've used the word "website" throughout this report, rather than *blog*. However, I would never try to undertake this strategy without having a blog involved.

Search engines favor websites that have a lot of relevant, frequently-updated content, and they also like a lot of general link authority. Given the ease-of-publishing blogging provides, it's smart to use blog software to manage all that content. And given that active blogging allows for constant participation in the social media space, it's a critical way to build general site authority via links, delve into specific and related topics, and to reference your cornerstone content.

Put a link to your essential content in your site sidebar. And if you've focused on the right topics, you'll naturally keep cross-referencing your cornerstone content and link to it from your future content as well.

Seo copywriting is now all about response-oriented copy – concepts and words that ultimately result in a favorable action from the reader.

Don't go overboard, but do provide context when discussing advanced topics that require an understanding of the basics. Never assume that everyone is aware of your cornerstone resource or understands the basics. Periodically linking to your cornerstone content lets it find new readers — and fresh links.

The Two Huge Benefits Cornerstone Content Provides

The first goal of cornerstone content is usefulness and relevancy to the website visitor, no matter how they arrive. The second goal is to make that content so compelling and comprehensive that people are willing – no, make that *excited* – to link to it.

If you focus strategically on these two goals, this whole search engine thing tends to get a lot easier. Since attracting links is so important, in the next section we'll look at ways to proactively get the word out about your cornerstone content.

Three link building strategies that work

We now know the real secret to modern SEO is creating compelling content that naturally attracts links, rather than *begging* for links to crummy keyword-stuffed "optimized" web pages.

In other words, SEO copywriting is now all about response-oriented copy — concepts and words that ultimately result in a favorable action from the reader.

Since the popularity of our content depends so much on what people do *off* the page, it makes sense that we might also need to step outside the confines of the page itself to get the word out. Luckily, the same copywriting skills you use to conceive and create your content apply to promoting it as well.

The way to create compelling content is to focus relentlessly on "what's in it for the reader." And in the same way, no one is going to link to you unless there's something in it for them.

The key is the same — understand who you're talking to, figure out what will catch their attention, then convince them to take the action you want. Here are 3 ways to do that:

1. Guest Writing

Guest writing on established blogs and other content sites has become the most powerful strategy for getting your own site rolling. You freely contribute content that not only allows you to raise your profile, but allows for links back to your own site.

Once again, creating killer original content will open doors for you, especially when it's created for the benefit of someone else. And you can use that killer cornerstone content you've already produced as an example of the quality you can deliver.

Depending on your relationship with the site owner, you may be able to link to your cornerstone content from within the body of the content itself, but *only if the citation is extremely relevant to the content and beneficial to the reader*. Otherwise, your link needs to go in your byline or bio.

Most people tend to link to their site or blog URL in the byline of contributed content. Turn it around by focusing the byline on the reader instead of yourself, and feature your cornerstone content instead of your home page.

For example, if I were to guest blog somewhere about strategies for attracting links, which byline is more attractive to the reader when finishing my article?

NO: *Brian Clark writes about online copywriting and content marketing at* [Copyblogger](#)*.*

YES: *Check out Brian Clark's free [SEO Copywriting](#) whitepaper, which is all about the new style of online writing that helps your content rank well in search engines.*

Not only is that better for the reader, it's better for you. Your link helps your cornerstone content rank higher for a popular search term. Just be careful about using the same anchor text over and over, as this can send the wrong signal to Google.

2. Social Networking

Twitter and Facebook have become amazing content distribution networks. And now with the growing popularity of Google+, the search engine giant now has direct signals of content quality and popularity coming from social media.

Remember, gaining followers and fans is not about your ego, it's about creating a dynamic network that gets new people to see your content. And the more people see and share your content, the more likely it is to attract those valuable links.

But it's not really about one-off link requests. Networking on Twitter,

Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn is about *establishing and growing relationships with influencers* in the social media space. These are the *linkerati* – prominent bloggers in your niche, top Digg users, relevant web journalists, and social media mavens.

You need to network from a "what's in it for them" perspective. Catch attention, gain interest, and create a desire to help you in the future by offering something that benefits *them* first.

3. Linking Out

Linking *out* to attract links? Yep.

Engaging in dialogue with the owners or staff of relevant content sites in your niche is a great way to get noticed, and it can lead to links back to you. Bloggers definitely watch who is linking to them, and you can take the initiative by linking out *first* before looking for one in return.

Simply linking out for the sake of linking won't accomplish much, especially with bloggers who gets lots of links. The key is to be strategic about how you link and what you say.

It's just like any other conversation. Join in and add your two cents, but make sure you've got something substantive to say that will reflect well on

you. Use a [great headline](#) to make sure you are noticed, and then deliver the goods. And since your cornerstone content is the foundation of what the conversation is likely about, finding a way to mention it in the context of the dialogue will naturally bring it to the attention of influencers in your field.

Content + Promotion = Links and Sharing

The words you put on a web page have no life of their own until they get read. And those same words will not gain prominence in search engines until the words are linked to by relevant, authoritative sources.

Search engines can still be gamed to a degree, just like offline organizations and systems can be exploited. However, the goals of the search engines are similar to society at large, and they are getting very good at finding rule breakers and dispensing swift punishment.

Creating compelling content and beneficial relationships are link attraction strategies that won't get you banned or penalized. You're also simultaneously achieving your overall goal of converting site visitors into customers, clients, revenue and profits.

Now it's time to turn to the "last mile" of search engine optimization – the location and frequency of keywords in your "on-page" copy, and other SEO

best practices that help you outrank the competition.

Five areas to focus on for effective SEO copywriting

When I first started Copyblogger in 2006, I was almost militantly against focusing on "old school" on-page optimization. Seems strange, since I'd been a successful student of SEO since 2000.

It was because I saw so many people focusing *only* on keywords like it's 1999, and yet they had no links. Their content was weak. Their sites weren't trusted or authoritative.

You can't optimize something that's dead. So my initial goal was to get people to focus on content that attracted attention and links first. Only then do you have something you can make better-suited for search rankings (that's what *optimize* means, after all).

Years later, it seems things have swung in the opposite direction for some. Social media "experts" maintain that SEO doesn't matter because search traffic just "happens."

Yes, search traffic "happens" if you produce unique content and make it easy for spiders to find by having clean underlying code and a fast-loading site. But the "right" search traffic doesn't just *happen*, not unless you're lucky (which simply means you don't know what you're doing).

This section is designed to help you *know* how to tell search engines that what you're talking about is the most relevant solution for what people are searching for. That's all SEO ultimately is, and we're about to explore the crucial last steps.

You can't optimize something that's dead.

So let's move on to the five SEO copywriting areas to focus on with your web page, blog post, online press release, whatever . . . they're all the same in the eyes of Google.

Five SEO copywriting elements that matter

Remember when we talked about spoon feeding the toddler? Here are five things that make your content easy to digest for search engines so you can rank as well as possible.

1. Title

Whether you optimize up-front or later, you at minimum need to know what keywords you're targeting and include them in the title of your content. It's generally accepted that the closer to the front of the title your keywords are, the better. But the key is that they appear in the title somewhere.

It's important that your CMS or blogging software allow you to serve an alternate title in the title tag (which is the snippet of code Google pulls to display a title in search results) than the headline that appears on the page. If you use WordPress, Genesis builds this and many other SEO functions directly into your posting interface, in addition to all its design controls.

So, let's say I decide that the most compelling headline for prompting readership, sharing, and linking for an article is:

Five Areas to Focus On for Effective SEO Copywriting

That title contains my keyword phrase (SEO copywriting), but they might not be in the best location for ranking or even for quick-scanning searchers compared with regular readers. By using an alternate title tag, I can enter a more search-optimized title for Google and searchers only, such as:

SEO Copywriting: The 5 Essential Elements

The emphasis on keywords in the title makes practical sense from a search engine standpoint. When people search for something, they're going to want to see the language they used reflected back at them in the results. Nothing mysterious about that.

Having keywords in your title is also important when people link to you. When your keywords are there, people are more likely to link to you with the keywords in the anchor text. This is an important factor for Google to determine that a particular page is in fact about a particular subject.

You should try to keep the length of your title under 72 characters for search purposes. This will ensure the full title is visible in a search result, increasing the likelihood of a click-through.

2. Meta-Description

SEO copywriting is not just about ranking. It's also about what your content looks like on a search engine results page (SERP). The meta description of your content will generally be the "snippet" copy for the search result below the title, which influences whether or not you get the click.

Keywords in your meta-description don't influence rank, but it doesn't matter. You want to lead off your meta-description with the keyword phrase and

succinctly summarize the page as a reassurance to the searcher that your content will satisfy what they're looking for.

Try to keep the meta description under 165 characters so the full description is visible in the search result. Again, you can create a meta description in WordPress right in the posting area with Genesis and other themes and plugins that add SEO functionality.

3. Content

Unique and frequently updated content makes search engines happy. But you know that. For search optimization purposes (and just general reader-friendliness) your content should be tightly on-topic and strongly centered on the subject matter of the desired keyword phrases (this goes back to the spoon feeding analogy).

It's generally accepted that very brief content may have a harder time ranking over a page with more substantial content. So you'll want to have a content body length of at least 300 words.

It might also help to bold or italicize the first occurrence of a keyword phrase, or include it in a bulleted list, but I usually don't get hung up on that. It's also debatable whether including keywords in subheads helps with ranking, but

again, it doesn't matter – subheads are simply a smart and natural place to include your keyword phrase, since that's what the page (and each section) is about.

Which brings us to . . .

4. Keyword Frequency

Keyword *frequency* is the number of times your targeted keyword phrase appears on the page. Keyword *density* is the ratio of those keywords to the rest of the words on the page.

It's generally accepted that keyword frequency affects ranking (and that makes logical sense). Keyword density, as some sort of "golden" ratio, **does not**. But the only way to make sense of an appropriate frequency is via the ratio of those keywords to the rest of the content, so density is still a metric you should pay attention to.

In other words, the only way to tell if your repetition of keywords is super or spammy is to measure that frequency against the overall length of the content. A keyword density greater than 5.5% could find you guilty of what's called keyword stuffing, which tends to make Google think you're trying to game them. Bad idea.

Just keep in mind that you don't need to mindlessly repeat keywords to optimize. In fact, if you do, you'll probably get the opposite result.

5. Linking Out

Linking is the fundamental basis of the web. Search engines want to know you're sufficiently "connected" with other pages and content, so linking out to other pages matters when it comes to search engine optimization.

Here are some rules of thumb for linking based on generally accepted best practices:

- Link to relevant content fairly early in the body copy

- Link to relevant pages approximately every 120 words of content

- Link to relevant *interior* pages of your site or other sites

- Link with naturally relevant anchor text

Again, these are guidelines related to current best practices. Don't get hung up on rules; focus on the intent behind what search engines are looking for – giving those human searchers quality results.

Does writing for people work for SEO?

Hang around web writing circles for any length of time, and the inevitable "write for search engines *or* write for people" debate comes up. It's a little weird, really.

Last time I checked, it's *people* who use search engines, not some other life form. So you're always writing for people.

Obviously, the debate stems from the fact that search engines are powered by computer algorithms. But as search engines have gotten smarter, writing that pleases people and satisfies the "spiders" is not that far apart, if at all.

Let's look at four factors that work well for SEO and see how well they cater to the needs of people.

1. Compelling Content

As we saw earlier, link attraction is the biggest aspect of today's practice of search engine optimization.

Google looks at the links pointing at your domain, and those pointing at particular pages, as votes of legitimacy. Taking it a step further, Google also

takes into account the words people use when linking to you (anchor text) to get an idea of what the right keywords would be for your page.

While it's still possible to buy links (just don't get caught), there's no way to "trick" someone into linking to you. People link because there's something in it for them in some way, and because something about your content compels them to do it. The smartest SEOs create content that's remarkable because it's valuable, controversial, funny, opinionated, engaging, enlightened, etc.

Last time I checked, it's people who use search engines, not some other life form. So you're always writing for people.

Because Google has tons of information thanks to AdWords, AdSense, Analytics, Google Reader, Tool Bar and Website Optimizer, some see search algorithms moving away from links and more to site usage data (how people actually interact with content). Whether that's the case or not, content that people find compelling will continue to constitute the biggest factor in search engine optimization.

Good for SEO? – Check

Good for People? – Check

2. Content landing pages

One smart strategy for content marketing and anyone building an <u>authority site</u> is to create valuable content resources related to the most important topics you discuss. As you know, I call this *cornerstone conten*t, because it's the fundamental information your site is built on.

An example of this on Copyblogger is <u>Copywriting 101</u>. You'll notice that instead of a single post, I did a 10-part tutorial series and aggregated it on a content landing page that's clearly focused on the keyword "copywriting." Years later I transformed that content into an ebook.

This is a strong SEO strategy because I'm aggregating a bunch of content on one search optimized page. This directs the majority of links to that page instead of the individual parts, allows for easy cross-linking in future content, and prompts social bookmarking and sharing due to the scope of the resource.

But the real reason it works is because it's *people* friendly. Given the usual scattered backward chronological nature of a blog, the page is highly usable and useful as a resource for people new to copywriting (and for those who want to link to a resource about copywriting).

Good for SEO? – Check

Good for People? – Check

3. Speaking the language of the audience

Whether Google moves more to usage data over links as an indicator of quality remains to be seen. But one song remains the same – Google has to match up *what a page is about* with *what people are searching for*. Which means your words need to match up with the way searchers most like to talk about it.

Keyword research and the use of keyword phrases within content is the one area where some web writers and bloggers seem to push back, and I've never understood it. Anyone who's not interested in understanding and mirroring the language used by their intended audience is simply not interested in being an effective communicator, search engine traffic or not.

As I've said, telling search engines that what you're talking about is the same as what people are looking for is what SEO really is. But even if search engines didn't deliver traffic at all, the ability to know, understand, and mirror the language of the audience is an amazing gift we've been given thanks to search data. Why not use it when people respond well to it?

Good for SEO? – Check

Good for People? – Check

4. Enhanced readability

What? Good SEO makes content more readable? You're probably thinking I've lost it on this one.

It's true. When you implement the whole range of SEO best practices, you rank well with exceptionally reader-friendly content (that's why it got links in the first place). Keyword stuffing is not what Google wants. And neither do people.

It's true that you can *underuse* keywords in relation to the overall length of the content and hurt your ranking potential. But most people new to SEO copywriting tend to *overuse* keywords beyond what's necessary.

> The myth that search optimized content is ugly and unreadable is simply that – a myth.

When you approach SEO copywriting in a logical, informed fashion, your content isn't keyword stuffed. It's natural, and compelling, and artful.

Good for SEO? – Check

Good for People? – Check

At this point, I hope you have a better feel and understanding of the modern practice of SEO copywriting. But it can still be a little overwhelming, especially in the context of the balancing act that is your business or profession.

How to make SEO copywriting simple

Given the demand for loads of fresh, compelling content combined with the need to carefully optimize for search engines, modern SEO copywriting is critical for website owners and an even bigger business for professional web writers. Those same demands make creating search optimized web pages, blog posts, and press releases time consuming at best and mystifying at worst.

Even after teaching this approach to SEO copywriting for over 4 years and mostly practicing what I preach, we started neglecting the "last mile" of on-page optimization ourselves.

We were constantly producing quality content and attracting links, and yet we were:

- Neglecting on-page content optimization due to time constraints

- Slipping up on SEO best practices for our key landing pages

- Failing to train our new writers in content optimization

Back in the summer of 2009, a colleague named Sean Jackson approached me and said he and his technical team were building an SEO copywriting software solution based on the content strategies I'd developed over the years (in other words, what's in this report). I was certainly skeptical, but he had my attention.

Sean's approach was different than that taken by most SEO tools, in that the software *put the content first and foremost* before the optimization. I liked what I heard, and started working with the team to evolve the early prototype into a testable beta version.

My approach to new product development is simple – I'm a web writer and content producer, and so are the people who read Copyblogger. If a tool makes my life easier and my content better, it'll make your life easier and your content better.

Simple philosophy, and yet this approach has never let me down.

Once I began using the earliest version of the software service, my skepticism disappeared. Suddenly, the "last mile" to prime search optimization became a whole lot more manageable:

- Optimizing became more efficient, eliminating time concerns

- Evaluating on-page SEO best practices came at the push of a button

- Training new writers went from a chore to a "hands-off" experience

> Even after teaching this approach to seo copywriting for over 4 years and mostly practicing what I preach, we started neglecting the "last mile" of on-page optimization ourselves.

But I didn't stop there. I assembled a group of hard-nosed and skeptical beta-testers ranging from ornery new bloggers to cynical SEO pros, and let them use and abuse this new tool any way they saw fit.

The results were remarkable.

Self-professed SEO haters like blogger Johnny Truant came to realize that SEO copywriting was not a soulless creativity killer when done correctly. Veteran SEO Michael Gray helped us refine the service during the beta period, and now uses it to train his team of freelance writers in effective content optimization.

At that point, I was convinced. It was time to give this thing a name.

I decided on *Scribe*.

Scribe makes SEO copywriting and content marketing simple

In the old days, a scribe was a writer entrusted to record the most valuable and important information for kings, nobles, and cities.

These days, Scribe™ helps writers create content that gets found online, and that's become as valued and important as any old scroll or parchment.

Scribe is an SEO software service (a web-based application plus and/or an integrated WordPress version) that analyzes the content of web pages, blog posts, online press releases, you name it . . . all at the click of a button.

Scribe then reports back and tells web writers, bloggers, affiliate marketers, and small business owners how to tweak their content to get more search engine traffic, all while maintaining quality reader-focused copy.

Scribe 4.0: Way Beyond SEO

After reading this ebook, you know that targeted search engine traffic bring the most valuable site visitors you can get when it comes to meeting business objectives.

Here's the thing … those great search rankings are a beneficial outcome of an integrated content marketing process. One that involves audience-focused content, social media distribution, and on-page and site-wide optimization in a way that Google likes.

In other words, you win with content, you win with social, and you end up also winning with search.

Three years ago, we created Scribe as simple SEO copywriting software that made one huge promise – to constantly evolve as the search engines did. Two years ago, we started transforming that initial approach into content marketing software that better reflected the way the Copyblogger process works.

Then Panda and Penguin hit, and the "Copyblogger way" has pretty much become the way SEO has to be done. Fortunately, the new Scribe has been specifically designed to deliver a battle-tested process that embraces the fact

that great search rankings are a lucrative result of audience-optimized content and social media exposure.

With that said, I'm proud to introduce Scribe 4.0 — our highly-evolved content marketing software that's been designed to bring you more traffic and leads with less time and hassle.

Three Simple Steps to Content Marketing Success

In line with the online marketing trinity of content, social, and search, Scribe v4 makes content marketing effective and efficient with three essential actionable functions: Research, Optimize, and Connect.

1. Research

Scribe shows you the language the audience prefers when searching and discussing on social networks, before you begin to create content. Once your content is created, Scribe reveals other profitable topics and keyword phrases based on what your audience wants.

2. Optimize

Scribe analyzes your content, and tells you exactly how to gently tweak it for better search engine rankings. Scribe also analyzes your overall site content to help you execute on your go-forward content strategy, which has become vital since the Google Panda update.

3. Connect

Scribe helps you crosslink your content to increase usability, time on site, and indexing, identify relevant websites for guest content, strategic alliances, and link building, recruit authoritative industry writers, and locate social media users who'll want to share your content.

Scribe for WordPress, Microsoft Word, or Web-Based App

Scribe for WordPress uses our included plug-in to tap into the Scribe API and integrates all Scribe functions inside your WordPress interface. Sean Jackson and Chris Garrett of Copyblogger Media did this detailed demonstration of Scribe version 4.0 for WordPress. This demo was for our existing Scribe customers, so it's no-hype and all valuable "how to" and "why" information.

Scribe for Microsoft Word is the newest platform for those who create

content is the popular word processing program. Now you can do research, optimization, and content promotion right in your native creation environment – powerful content marketing from the desktop. See a detailed demonstration of Scribe for Microsoft Word here.

Scribe Web is completely turn-key – we provide you a user name and password when you subscribe. Once you're logged in you can do research, content optimization, relationship and other connection activity all from one place, then publish your content with the push of a button to WordPress, Drupal, or Joomla. You can also generate customizable optimization reports for clients with a click.

See Scribe For Yourself

Take a look at everything Scribe can do. Then, take Scribe on a risk-free test drive today. Scribe delivers the exact content marketing process that helped Copyblogger evolve from a simple blog into a software company with 100,000+ customers – and it will work for your business, too.

Are You Ready to Take Your Business Even Further Online?

We've put together the most comprehensive online marketing training Copyblogger has ever produced, we call it Authority ...

Click Here to Find Out More

The ebook you've just read has covered the very basics of building Authority online as a writer and content producer ... but that's only the beginning.

We've been building the software and marketing training business known as Copyblogger Media for over seven years online. We've been fortunate to enjoy a lot of success in that time, but it took a lot of work ... and we've made our share of mistakes along the way.

What if you could directly benefit from those years of experience – and avoid those mistakes?

What if you could easily keep up with the state-of-the-art marketing tools and trends?

What if you could effortlessly build a powerful network of entrepreneurs and writers, all working toward the same goal you are?

We've got something to show you. We call it Authority, and it's the biggest thing we've ever done ...

Click Here to See What Authority Can do for Your Business Online