



Content Optimization Manual

Optimize Your Writing Style

What you think you know about content optimization may be killing your chance of getting your pages ranked where you want them. With this manual you will be able to train your staff or school your contracted copywriter on the proper way to structure page content in a way that not only improves your chance of ranking but also converts visitors to potential customers.

“What is the point of a website if it is not a tool to generate real profit?”

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Basic On-Page SEO Copywriting Manual

You have 8 seconds to suck your reader in before you FAIL! There are many SEO copywriting *principals* to master in order to make sure your written content is compliant with the latest in search engine optimization techniques. At the same time you are figuring out how to structure your page you need to avoid scaring people off the site completely. You would be surprised just how common site abandonment is.

SEO content structure

All pages need to contain a targeted keyword in the title, introductory paragraph, two or three supporting paragraphs and a concluding paragraph. Each of these should be divided by logical sub-headings to cater to people who scan first before committing to a full read. These are the basics of proper SEO page *structure* but in order to keep from failing you need **extreme skill** to write the page content in a way that has a natural flow and tone as people read it. Most people hear a negative tone in their mind as they read and you have to change that to a positive one. That can't be accomplished by awkwardly trying to stuff keywords where they don't belong!

How long should an optimized page be?

Pages should have more than 300 words excluding titles, headings, and sub-headings. In-text quotes from other websites should never be included for purposes of word count. It is very difficult to include enough keyword phrases in the page to get good ranking if you try to cram them together in pages that are too short in overall length.

Broad, phrase and exact match keywords

There are three basic types of keyword phrases that you need to be concerned with as they can make or break the SEO of the site they are on. Not only does this matter for website optimization but it makes a GIANT difference in your page “quality score.” Quality score is a generic term for metrics used by Google, Bing and Yahoo to decide how much they are going to charge for clicks when you are using paid advertising (PPC).

Broad match means that the user’s search query contains your keywords in any order. Additionally the query may contain extra keywords. Example: “I need to buy a new car” is a broad match for the phrase “buy car” even though those words don’t appear in the query next to each other. Many websites target broad match queries without ever having a chance of competing successfully. Generally you should only use broad match in your copy for supporting phrases. In PPC broad match phrases are the most expensive with the least return on investment in most cases.

Phrase match means the user’s search query contains only the words in your target phrase but not in any specific order. Example: “buy car new” would be a phrase match of the target keyword “buy new car.” Phrase matches are generally used as the first tier of supporting keyword phrases of the main target phrase. Phrase match keywords themselves, are usually supported by broader types of related phrases and synonyms.

Exact match means the search query exactly matches your target phrase character by character. Example: “buy car” exactly matches “buy car.”

For each page you should be covering at least 1 main exact match keyword phrase, 2-3 phrase match variations of that main phrase. Your page should also contain 2-3 exact match

keyword phrases related to the main phrase with their own 2-3 broad match and synonym variations.

Example keyword grouping

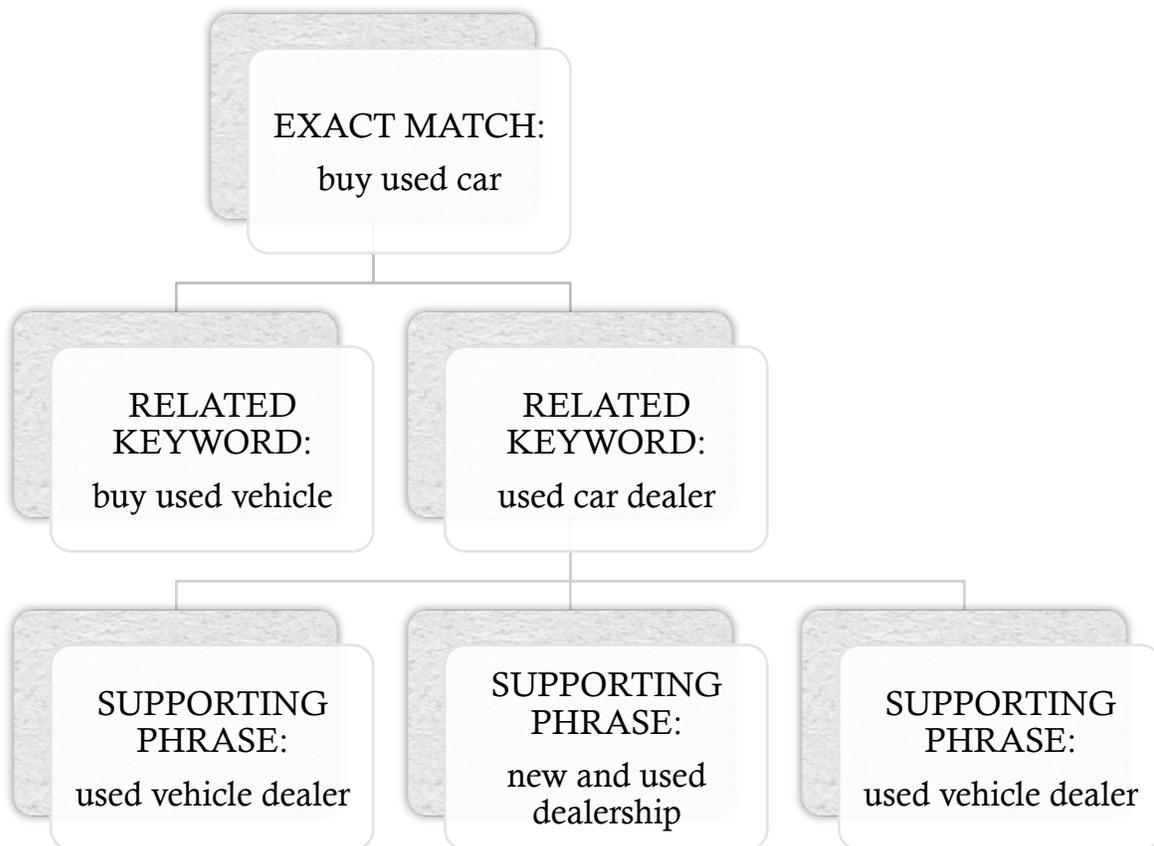
Main page target keyword: “buy used car”

Supporting phrases: “buy used vehicle,” “find used car for sale,” “used car dealer.”

Related exact match phrases: “used car dealer”

Supporting related phrases: “used auto dealer,” “used vehicle dealer,” “new and used dealership

Example keyword phrase tree



Keyword placement in SEO headings

The headings formula is pretty simple. The page should start with a headline; usually it's a "Heading 1" (<h1> tag in HTML), which is the visual title of the page. The content section of a page starts with a summary followed by an H2. Sub-headings are usually H3s. You should have 3 – 5 sections for every page. Each paragraph should have 3-5 supporting sentences. Paragraphs or groups of paragraphs should be grouped and separated by sub-headings.

Start *titles* with your exact match keyword

If you can't start the on-page title with an exact version of the targeted keyword it's not the end of the world. Keep in mind though, that this is your goal. Sometimes it won't sound right. In those cases don't try to stuff it. It is very important that you do not alter the keyword phrase in the title if at all possible. It is important for it to be "exact match" which means character by character **NO** alterations. Some might add an "s" to make it plural or maybe add an "ed" to make it past tense but this will not accomplish the goal of matching the searcher's query exactly. You have to use your imagination and be innovative to make sure that the whole keyword phrase is used exactly as given. Save the variations for supporting phrases.

***First paragraph or summary* keyword placement**

Your summary should be written last after completing the body of your content. It should truly be a summary introduction to what the main body will be discussing but it has to be *catchy* or it fails. Begin the first sentence of your first paragraph with the keyword phrase or at least a slight variation of it. At minimum include it in the first one or two sentences. It is also wise to include a related keyword or two here. If you don't give the reader what they searched for in this paragraph you may lose

their attention. This first paragraph should be a well-written summary of what the reader will learn if they continue reading the entire page. It is a good thing to pick the related keywords based on what you chose for the sub-headings to follow this first paragraph.

Start *page sections* with your keyword phrases

Most pages should have an H2 headline that begins the main body of the content directly after the summary paragraph. Start this first heading tag in your content with the keyword unless it sounds awkward. Because this is the first heading in your content it is important that this have the keyword in it but not sound like the title. Make it different and spicy. This is likely the most influential factor on the page for readers determining whether or not the text contains the information they are looking for. Many people start their visual scanning of the page from the main title but some do not and we want to catch the attention of both group types.

Additional *sub-heading* keyword placement

You should separate sections of the page with H3 heading tags. In these sub-headings creatively work in variations of the keyword phrase you are targeting. If not already accomplished beforehand, make sure the related keywords that you placed in your first paragraph are contained in these sub-heading sections as well. These are basically a mini-title representing the paragraph(s) underneath it. If a user likes your title, your leading heading, or the first paragraph, they may still skim the page looking for the specific section of the page that may contain the information they are looking for. Chunk-a-fying your content in this manner accommodates the skimmer type of reader as well as the thorough one.

Fitting search phrases into *content paragraphs*

Make sure there are at least 1 or 2 related keyword phrases that are on the same topic as your main keyword phrase. These paragraphs that are in-between your sub-headings are designed to provide greater details to the reader on the subjects listed in the sub-headings. This is where the real meat of the content is. The rest of the items we have discussed are more visual navigation related. The purpose of titles, sub-headings, etc. is to lead the reader to the information they are seeking with as little effort as possible. The paragraph is where their desire for information should be satisfied completely.

Meta Title and Meta Descriptions

In most content management systems (CMS) you are given input text boxes to include Meta Titles and Descriptions that will only appear in the code part of a web page. These are called Snippets and are what people see in search engine result pages (SERPS) while doing a search for something.

In-code Meta Titles and target keywords

Start your Meta Title with your exact match targeted keyword if possible. The same rules for the main title apply here with the exception of the purpose. The purpose of the Meta Title is to convince a searcher, while still on Google, Bing or Yahoo, that the Meta Description below *it* may lead to information that they are looking for. Sometimes the title is convincing enough to entice the user to click through directly. Search engines will truncate titles longer than around 65 characters, which will lower your click through rate. Keep your character count below 65 but closer to 60 if possible.

Meta Description and keyword phrases

Start your Meta Description with your keywords as well but it does not have to be exact match. A slight variation of the target phrase is encouraged. The purpose of this part is to convince

the searcher reading the listing that “yes” their hunch, that this listing will lead them to a page that contains the full details of the answer they are seeking, is indeed correct. Keep your character count below 160 and closer to 150 if possible.

Make sure you put a call to action at the end. The power of suggestion is very strong so ending your Meta Descriptions with phrases like: “READ MORE...” “CLICK HERE...” and “CONTINUE...” will increase the chance that the searcher will follow your suggestion and click through to the site. Make sure these are in ALL CAPS similar to how I have shown you here.

Formatting content for best optimization

Most SEO Copywriters ignore the value of text formatting such as **bolding**, underlining, “quotes” and *italicizing*. These serve more than one function. They can tap into subconscious psychological factors for the purpose of getting your written point across to the reader visually. Search engines calculate every on-page factor possible so assuming they ignore formatting, as a signal of phrase importance, would be illogical. It is a good idea to use formatting for SEO purposes sparingly but intelligently.

How to use Bold formatting for SEO

Bolding is something very **easy to get wrong**. Many people bold their keyword phrases excessively. The **goal** of bolding is to give readers who scan the content a specific message. If all a person does is scan your page they should **get the sense** of what it is about **from** looking at the title, headings and **your bolds**. Use bold to tell a story and highlight what the page or paragraph is about. Make it easy for scanners to skip reading your entire page if possible.

Italics as part of your SEO strategy

Italics can play a role in allowing your content to be scanned. The goal however is a little different. Use italics when you really want to get the reader to pay attention to something specific. Typically italicizing a word or phrase *only* helps readers who have already committed to thoroughly reading the content or at least one of the paragraphs.

Optimizing content with underlining

Try to stay away from using colored underlined keyword phrases. Most users on the web associate a colored underline with a click-able link. Even if you use an underline in your subheadings you may still confuse someone into thinking they should click it to get more information if it is not plain black text.

“Quotes” in you content strategy

Do your best to use the quotation tag when you are quoting another website, a book, a report or an actual person. Not only does it help readers know that it is not you saying it, but it gives a signal to search engines that you are not trying to claim this content as yours like many content farm and spam sites do. This can go a long way from keeping your page from getting penalized for containing duplicate content.

Optimizing images for SEO

Images have much of the same SEO structure as a web page. In everyday practice it is almost always the copywriter who chooses the photos to go with the content of each page. This creates an opportunity for your written content to gain an advantage in traffic, link generation and overall SEO. You can designate a title, description and uniquely an alternative description (ALT Tag) for handicap assistance and screen reader programs. Search engines sending websites mass image traffic is the most overlooked referral traffic source today. If

your images have the proper title, description, alt text and file name it is easy to use an image sitemap to get your images ranked in the Google “one box” for images, which in fact is easier than getting your page ranked itself.

Image titles drive mass traffic

One great source of traffic is Google Images. The other search engines index image as well. Making sure that you give your images a keyword descriptive title is important. Don't stuff keywords and don't use the same variations of keyword phrases as the rest of your content if possible. Keep it natural sounding. Most image upload systems use the file name as the default test for the image title. Do **NOT** use the name of the image with dashes in it or other characters as your title!

Image names are important as well

The name of the image file is important. This is an easy opportunity to fit in acronyms of your search phrases and business names. A good example is: SEO-InfoGraphic-Example.jpg. The image should be an example of an infographic with text or imagery related to SEO.

Image description

The description of your image is similar to the Meta Description. Often times when someone is searching they may just be browsing images in the search results or they might be specifically looking for images on a specific topic. Either way this is your chance to describe the content of your image and convince them to click through to your site. “Describing your image” is just another way of saying that you should use your targeted keyword phrases in the description if possible.

Alternative text (alt)

Every screen reader program for the disabled relies on words to describe the image. Use a variation of your keywords in a way

to actually describe what the image is and what it is for in a practical way. To go along with the example above, your alt text could be something like “Info-graphic About Optimizing Your Website.”

Concluding SEO content strategy tips

You may be a good writer

You may even be a journalist. You may have many people telling you how great your writing skills are. It could be that none of these are true and you are just the “doer” type of person who wants to be successful online. No matter who you are you should understand that the psychology behind effective and persuasive copywriting is not something new. All that is new is the fact you now have to add more science to your strategy to optimize your vocabulary for machines called search engines.

Demonstrate mathematically calculable authority

If you want to succeed online then you need to be concerned with demonstrating *authority* as an SEO content strategist. There is no room for eccentricities online. If you are already skilled or just want your content to rank well and gain traffic then pay close attention to the science behind the why’s and how’s of structuring your content. Write clean clear persuasive content with an eye to mathematical topical accuracy and you will be a cut above the rest.