The definitive guide to SEO
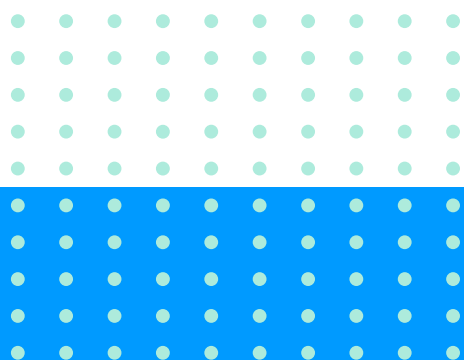
Contents

Seasoned pros and beginners are making many of the same mistakes

So, you want to do your own SEO?

Then this is the guide you've been looking for.

But, the SEO game is tricky, and you should know up front that you're joining a world where one company sets the rules, shares what they choose to, and locks the rest out of sight.

Not only that, but the rules can change seemingly out of nowhere…

… And if you don't like it? Sorry, but you probably know as well as we do, there is no alternative out there with the power that Google search can offer.

So, be prepared for a **battle** that will sway back and forth, as the market leader decides which way to tip the industry on any given day.

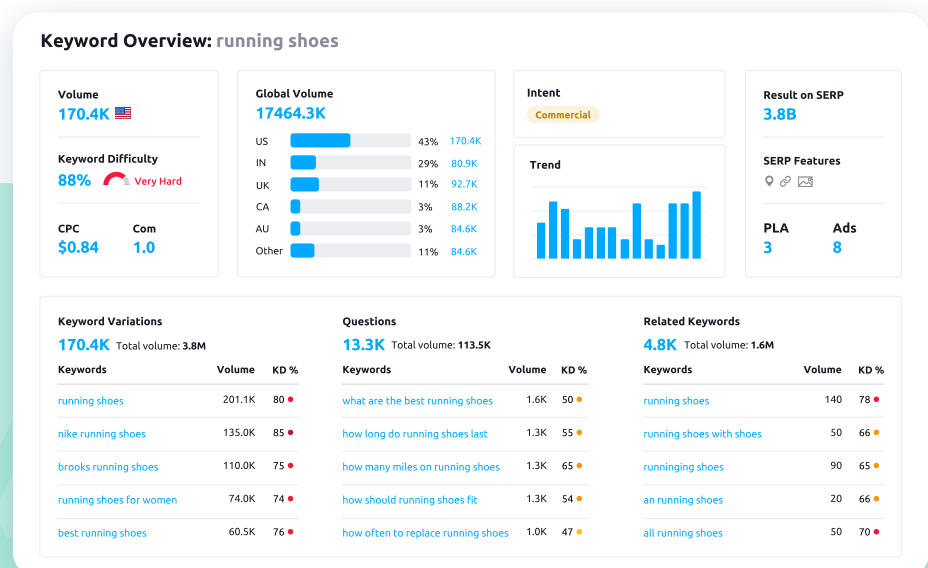That being said, let's get you fit for battle.

What is the most critical SEO ranking factor?

There is no doubt that any professional SEO expert will answer "It depends" to this question. It may be exasperating, but it's the truth.

No one-particular factor dominates all others when it comes to SEO, so the context of where you are starting from, and what activity will represent the lowest hanging fruit for your SEO journey is crucial.

Some great places to start, and subjects which we'll cover in this guide are:

- Meta data with a purpose
- Quality backlinks, not quantity of spam
- Content length to rank for competitive keywords
- The words you use to match your target search term
- The technical elements such as user experience (UX), site speed and mobile friendliness

Keyword Overview: running shoes

Volume 170.4K	**Global Volume** 17464.3K	**Intent** Commercial
Keyword Difficulty 88% Very Hard	US 43% 170.4K	**Trend**
	IN 29% 80.9K	
	UK 11% 92.7K	**Result on SERP** 3.8B
CPC $0.84 **Com** 1.0	CA 3% 88.2K	**SERP Features**
	AU 3% 84.6K	**PLA** 3 **Ads** 8
	Other 11% 84.6K	

Keyword Variations 170.4K Total volume: 3.8M			Questions 13.3K Total volume: 113.5K			Related Keywords 4.8K Total volume: 1.6M		
Keywords	Volume	KD %	Keywords	Volume	KD %	Keywords	Volume	KD %
running shoes	201.1K	80	what are the best running shoes	1.6K	50	running shoes	140	78
nike running shoes	135.0K	85	how long do running shoes last	1.3K	55	running shoes with shoes	50	66
brooks running shoes	110.0K	75	how many miles on running shoes	1.3K	65	runninging shoes	90	65
running shoes for women	74.0K	74	how should running shoes fit	1.3K	54	an running shoes	20	66
best running shoes	60.5K	76	how often to replace running shoes	1.0K	47	all running shoes	50	70

Top Tip

When you're planning your keyword research, take a look at the page 1 results for your most important and desirable search terms. It's often the case that the keywords we think are important, are not the keywords your potential clients are using to find services/products like yours.

Looking at the page 1 results will give you an idea of the content that's being served and may cause you to think again.

# Optimise your meta data for better rankings

Meta data sounds complicated, but it's really quite simple. This is the text selected by Google, Bing and other search engines to display as the title and description on their results pages.

Historically, this was plucked automatically from your site, but most CMS' now provide you with an opportunity to edit your own meta data easily, regardless of the content on the rest of the page.

So, knowing that this is what will appear on the "SERP" (Search Engine Results Page), it's important to treat meta data in a similar way to ad copy. The meta data must perform the job of informing the user about your content, persuading them to select your content vs any other, and doing it all in 160 characters or less.

Within your meta data, you'll need to include keywords which you're aiming to serve for, i.e. appear in the SERPs for, but avoid repeating them within your character limit. Balancing this alongside copy which can "sell" to the prospect can be tricky, and sometimes it's worth trying a few alternatives before landing on the final version.

Give the user a very clear understanding of what they can expect on the other side of your meta title when they click through. Nothing is worse than visiting a site expecting an answer to your question, and just getting a sales pitch instead.
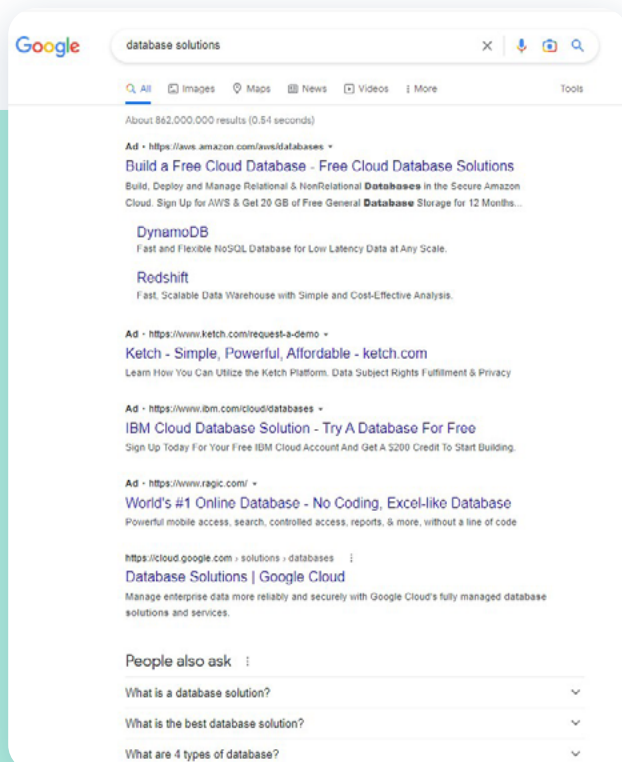
Top Tip

Use your meta data to draw attention to your content – have an ad copy mentality! If you can use your meta data to incentivise clicks, then you will find your site traffic increasing over time.

Answer these two key questions:
Why should people click?
What information are you offering?

Content that is relevant and optimised wins every time

We'll talk later about the importance of some of the technical SEO factors on your site, things like your sitemap, anchor text, URL structure… and other technical SEO terminology. However, no matter how important all those things might sound, you should always remember:

Content is king.

High-quality, optimised content is the core of SEO. For all the talk about changes to search engine algorithms and the importance of their releases, search engines are ultimately just trying to give users the thing they are looking for. If you do a great job with your content, you will find your search engine results improving. The cream rises to the top, right?

Once your content reaches a level of high-quality, much of the rest will fall into place behind it. If your content is relevant, useful to the reader and well optimised, then you'll find that it naturally earns links from other sources, who want to reference credible material.

So what does relevant and well-optimised content actually consist of?

In the eyes of the search engines, there are a few factors to consider:

- In the past, keywords were what mattered most. Now it is all about the context surrounding your keywords. If you stuff your content full of the same terms over and over again, it will likely be recognised as negative by Google. Adding related terminology and talking in terms of the broader subject has become critical in the eyes of the search engines.
- The amount of copy which you'll need to put on the page is not fixed. According to the search engines, length is important but relevance more so, which means that writing War and Peace in response to a simple question you're hoping to rank for, will likely be spotted and penalised
- Google uses programs called "spiders" to crawl content on a web page and decide what should rank. These spiders will look for related secondary keywords, which link to the search query's intent, rather than only looking for the primary keyword. Use related terminology in your web page to rank more highly
- Use keywords within your alt tags for images, URLs and of course, your meta data

Top Tip
Always prioritise human readability over SEO when creating content. It will likely satisfy the search engine as well as your user.

A website's user experience (UX) has an impact on its rankings

User experience is one of Google's more challenging metrics when it comes to making improvements, but the good news is that the act of working on your UX will lead to incremental gains beyond just SEO.

You can begin to measure your UX by making sure that you have properly configured analytics running on your website. At a minimum, you should have Google Analytics up and functional, but you might also choose other solutions like HubSpot, Hotjar, and more.

Some of the metrics which can be most helpful, are things like session duration, pages per session and of course, the dreaded, bounce rate!

Whilst session duration and pages per session need to score appropriately for your content (i.e. longer/more pages isn't **always** better); bounce rate should be low, typically as close to 40 as possible, for B2B websites.

Some easy wins for improving your site's UX are as follows.

- Ensure that users can find the page they're looking for quickly from within your navigation. Less is more when it comes to web pages, and a simple approach will make your site much more digestible.
- Using clearly labelled navigation bars, drop-down menus and site search will help your users get around and find what they need.
- Site speed is critical. The user is expecting to be served with the content they want quickly, and if they don't get it fast enough, they can always go elsewhere.

Using Google's PageSpeed Insights tool, you can see where you stand in terms of site speed and take action accordingly. This might be a job for your developers, but optimising the site's code, page structure, image sizes or even looking at your hosting could make dramatic improvements to your site.

Backlinks are important

At the risk of stating the obvious, backlinks are inbound links to your website or web page, from elsewhere on the internet.

Having backlinks is important to SEO, and something which Google has spent time focusing on, to eliminate some shady practices around this in the past.

In the eyes of the search engines, backlinks show that other sites recognise you as an authority on a particular subject. The more high-quality backlinks you manage to acquire, the better your rankings are going to be, generally speaking.

As in most things, quality of backlinks goes much further than quantity will. If you find yourself acquiring backlinks from household names in the press, or within your industry, then you'll find the impact much greater than several low-traffic blog links.

If you're going to utilise backlinks in your SEO strategy, then target links from high-authority, high-traffic websites to increase your own domain authority.

Enter any domain, and we'll show you top competitive SEO metrics like Domain Authority, top pages, ranking keywords, and more.

| google.com | Analyze domain |

Domain Authority	Linking Root Domains	Ranking Keywords	Spam Score
95	768k	31.3m	1%

Use Moz's free SEO research tool to check out the domain authority or page authority of the sites providing you with backlinks

Top Tip

If you're creating custom images/infographics as part of your broader marketing, then place them on free stock image websites so that they can be used by others, whilst earning you a backlink in return

Mobile matters more than you think

In 2018, Google made the public move to "mobile–first" indexing. This means that the search engine now uses your mobile site to create your rank. As we've discussed already, where Google goes, the other search engines eventually follow.

In our years of working with B2B organisations, we know that most traffic typically comes through desktop channels, but to the search engines that doesn't matter (at time of writing), so your mobile performance is incredibly important.

For that reason, investing your time or money into a responsive site design is well worth it, not only for the ease of use when users access on mobile devices, but also for the material impact it will have on your SEO.

Consistent content across desktop and mobile devices will also help you to rank more highly. Hiding large elements of your pages because they don't render correctly on mobile could damage your rankings. Not only that, you should also look into the load times specifically for mobile. Remember that Google will be looking mobile–first, so for the performance reasons we already discussed, your mobile site must move quickly.

No matter whether you see 5 or 50 percent traffic from mobile, take the time to invest in your responsive site, or risk suffering the search engine consequences.

Top Tip
When testing mobile sites ensure that your Wi–Fi connection is turned off, so that you get the true mobile experience. We have seen mobile website that work fine whilst connected to Wi–Fi but when relying on data, the site can't even load. This is often caused by images being too high resolution.

incisive **EDGE**

There you have it

For as much as SEO is a complicated beast, the message from Google and other search engines is simple.

They want to reward content which gives the user the value they are looking for.

For that reason, the shady practices of click farms, link-spamming on forums and across the web, keyword stuffing etc. have all been targeted and eliminated one by one. If you strive to put the content out there which is most relevant to your business, and therefore your prospects and customers, you will likely succeed.

The tips and tricks in this document come from our Head of SEO Adrian Faiers. Adrian has decades of experience working with SEO, growing his specialism throughout the years where the search engines themselves have evolved the most. His background as a qualified data scientist allows him to apply frameworks and processes to SEO that most people don't have the opportunity to utilise.

If you'd like to benefit from Adrian's experience, then subscribe to our newsletter, check out the Incisive Edge blog, or...

BOOK A 30 MINUTE SEO CONSULTATION.

About Incisive Edge

Incisive Edge is a specialist agency focused on B2B Marketing. We have more than ten years of experience delivering high quality strategic marketing projects for our customers across the entire B2B landscape. Our specialisms include Go To Market Strategy, SEO, HubSpot implementation and optimisation, and pipeline generation.

We're the digital marketing agency for growth-obsessed tech companies.