

How to research content topics

Researching interesting topics is one of the foundation tasks of content creation and strategy.

Elsewhere on our platform you'll find templates for laying out your blog content calendar and social media calendar. Have one (or both) of those spreadsheets open as you're going through the tasks on this document, so you can populate it as you go.

Spark a few ideas

Come up with topic ideas is tough. Luckily you have lots of inspiration at your fingertips - you just have to know where to look.

- Speak to your sales team or go through your client emails to find the most commonly asked questions. Note the specific language customers use to describe your products/services - you can use that in the next step.
- Look through industry news and publications to get a sense of where the world is going and how general topics intersect with your industry.
- If you have industry events, look at the topics the speakers are talking about.
- Do some recon on your competitors - what are they saying? How is your business' philosophy different from theirs, and how will that make your content better than theirs?
- Search through social media, YouTube and discussion platforms like Quora and Reddit to find conversations and communities related to what you do. Even if you're in a niche industry you'll find some areas of overlap you can use for inspiration.
- Join Facebook and LinkedIn groups to see what people are most interested in and talking about.



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Refine wording + optimise for SEO

Once you have a few topics in mind, you can start to craft these into SEO-optimised pieces of content that will grab the attention of your audience.

Here are the tools that can help you find those exact keywords. You'll also discover a few new topics in this phase of the research.

Free Tools

If you're just starting out creating content, don't pay for a content tool - there are plenty of free services at your disposal which will do the job just fine for now. We even use some day-to-day for quick answers even though we have access to the powerful paid tools! Here are a few we use:

Answer the Public

Using the free version of Answer The Public, type in your broad topic and ATP will serve you up all the related questions people are asking. It won't give you anything completely new but it will help you step into your audience's shoes and see things from a different perspective. Just don't get freaked out by the man staring back at you!

Google Keyword Planner

Google's Keyword Planner is an awesome free tool connected to Google Ads - so you do need an account there before you can begin, but it's easy to set one up. Enter your chosen topic and Google will give you words or phrases people are searching for.

Paid Tools

Paid tools are a bit more powerful, and most take you all the way from ideation through content creation and publishing and then tracking and measuring the performance of your content. Here are a few paid tools we like and have used:

BuzzSumo

BuzzSumo is a paid tool that helps you generate ideas, create high-performing content, monitor your performance and even identify influencers. You can get a few results free but most of the functionality is in the paid version. There's a seven-day free trial.

SEMrush

SEMrush is a tool which helps you with SEO, PPC ads, social media, content marketing and market research. It's known for its powerful keyword research tool but there are over 40 tools included with the paid version.

Breaking down your list of keywords

It's not uncommon to end up with a list of over 100 content ideas following this research.

Once you've got your list together, here are some questions and actions you can use to drill down and organise your keywords:

- Are there any keywords that can be grouped together? By doing this you can create one 'pillar article' which is an overarching centre piece of content, with relevant but more specific content pieces linking to and from that article. You can also split your content into 'themes', either publicly or just to keep everything organised internally.
- Are there any easy-to-answer questions that could be added to your FAQs?
- Are there any big questions with lots of volume (and maybe more sales intent) that would be better suited to a sales or landing page, rather than a blog article?
- Remove any keywords that have low volume or aren't specific to your product
- Can each keyword be directly linked to a product, service or top of funnel offer you provide?
- Are any keywords timely that should be shared during a specific time of year?

Populating your content/social media calendar

Once you're happy with the list of topics and have applied the above principles, add them into your calendar (you can find templates on the (DIY) Marketing Project platform). Here are a few golden rules to keep in mind:

- How much content you post is ultimately up to you but try to do as much as you can manage with the resource you have. 3 social media posts per week, per channel is a good base to start from.
- Map out at least six months in rough detail (including important dates, sales, seasonal offers etc) and three months in finer detail, week-by-week.
- Mix up your content themes so you have a good mix of topics – some 'human' pieces, some showing off your industry knowledge, and some showing your audience that you're on an exciting journey (and they should want to come along!)



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Optimising for SEO

When you're creating a piece of content for your website based on one of the keywords you've chosen from the above research, it's important to follow these on-page SEO tips for every single article:

- Content should be at least 300 words, but it's recommended to have over 800 words per article
- The article needs to be 'skimmable' with sub headings, bullet points, images and anything else that can make your content engaging and easy to read
- Your keyword should appear in the title of your piece – the H1 tag
- Your keyword should appear in the sub headings of your piece – the H2 tags
- Link your article to other blogs or pages on your site
- Add images and ensure they have alt tags. Add your keyword to the alt tag if possible
- Ensure you use a plugin such as Yoast or Math Rank to add your keyword to the meta title and meta description of the page
- If you can, have the keyword in the URL slug of the page
- Use your keyword throughout the copy – but avoid 'keyword stuffing'. Only use your keyword in a natural tone of voice where they fit in with the content. As Google's algorithms get smarter, they can understand human language better, which means if you're using the keyword unnecessarily, they can understand that, which may negatively impact your rankings.



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