

Search Engine Optimization (SEO):

Step-by-Step Checklist

TOPIC IDENTIFICATION AND KEYWORD RESEARCH

Research is the first step to ensure that your content will drive organic traffic in the long-run. SEO keyword research tools, such as [NewsCred's Idea Lab](#), can help you identify topics that are of interest to your audience and drive significant search traffic. Look at factors like **search volume**, which tells you how much people are searching for a keyword; **opportunity**, which gives insight into how hard it will be to rank for a keyword; and **seasonal trends**, to see when people are looking for it.

Have you identified 2-3 target keywords that summarize your topic(s)?	
Is the topic search volume seasonal and have you scheduled it into your editorial calendar accordingly?	
Did you perform a search on Google or Bing to see how competitive the keywords are and what other brands own <i>search engine results page</i> (SERP) real estate?	
Have you identified long-tail keyword variations to develop a targeted and unique angle?	
Did you outline the most frequently asked questions your audience is asking around the topic to address specific needs and/or pain points?	

SEARCH INTENT AND CONTENT FORMAT

At this stage, content creators must get inside the heads of their audience to identify what content format, angle, and style will lend itself best to the topic.

Did you perform a Google or Bing search to understand what formats and topics are being surfaced high in SERPs?	
Are search results primarily product pages or long-form articles?	
Have you determined if there is a Google Answer box to see if the keyword is primarily informational?	
Does the SERP include video, images, carousels, or other search integrations?	

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CONTENT EXECUTION

The following steps will help you understand what elements go into an optimized piece of content. However, it's important to remember that high-quality content is the most critical factor. Focus on producing the best piece of research-backed content you can, while leveraging tags and other elements to ensure it's optimized.

CONTENT QUALITY	
Is the content high-quality, well-written, informative, and useful?	
RESEARCH AND DATA	
Have you identified unique, valuable, and shareable statistics that can inform and validate your content?	
Are you able to prominently call out key statistics that are informational and shareable?	
KEYWORD AND CONTENT OPTIMIZATION	
Does your title tag include primary keywords upfront? Does it have a call to action (CTA) and is it fewer than 65 characters?	
Does the meta description include primary and secondary keywords and a CTA? Is your description fewer than 300 characters ?	
Have you used H1s, H2s, and H3s to structure or outline your article with relevant keywords?	
Do all image alt texts describe the image and include relevant keywords, if possible?	
Does your content leverage structured data such as schema markup or JSON-LD to call out appropriate on-page elements?	
Is the content length appropriate for the user intent of the topic and significant enough to address the topic? (Note: The average content length for the top 10 ranking domains was 1,900 words in 2017, according to the Searchmetrics 2017 Ranking Factors study .)	
EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL LINKS	
Have you included optimized anchor text links out to relevant content on-site and off-site?	
Are there other areas of your website where existing content could link to your new post?	
CALLS TO ACTION (CTAS AND CONVERSION OPTIMIZATION)	
Did you include relevant CTAs (i.e. sign up here) within the body of the content?	
Does the content have email sign-up CTAs?	
Can the content be easily shared through social networks?	
Does the content include contextual CTAs that are relevant to the reader at the appropriate stage of the funnel?	

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CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

[Content distribution and paid amplification](#) are critical to generating backlinks, social shares, and domain authority necessary for content to rank in highly competitive topic areas. Search engines want to know that people have read your content and found it useful before they recommend it to others by giving it a high ranking.

ORGANIC DISTRIBUTION	
Email: Is there an email newsletter in which you can distribute this content?	
Social Media: Can you share this piece of content on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and other social networks? Can you encourage others within and outside of your organization to share it with their social channels, too?	
PR: Can you integrate this content into any PR pushes? Is it worthy of coverage from publications and bloggers?	
Partnerships: Are there partners who would benefit from having this piece of content on their site? Could they drive their audience to it through a backlink?	
PAID AMPLIFICATION	
Paid Search: Are there keywords that you can target in paid search so search engines can put it directly in front of people who are looking for this content?	
Paid Social: Can you distribute this through paid social channels to increase reach, drive social shares, and increase traffic?	
Native Advertising and Content Discovery: Is there a native advertising campaign or push that can help amplify the reach of this content?	
Retargeting and Remarketing: Should you consider retargeting the audience that reaches this content, further nurturing them and bringing them down the conversion funnel?	