

How to Rank for a Keyword in 10 Steps

(8 MIN READ)



The view from the top ain't bad

Step 1: Lay the Groundwork

This is really more of a pre-step than a first step. You'll need to have some basics in place before you can hope to rank for any random keyword. These pre-requisites include:

- **A strong website** – The longer your website has been around, accruing authority and links, the better. It's also key that your entire site follow SEO best practices – start with [Google's Webmaster Guidelines](#) if you don't know what that means.
- **A network to draw on** – In order to rank quickly for a keyword, it's very useful to have a built-in network to share new content with – a blog following, an audience on social networks like Facebook and Twitter, email contacts you can reach out to for occasional help with a link.

Don't rush this stuff in your race for Internet gold. If you don't do things right the first time, you'll just have to do them again later.

Step 2: Do Your Initial Keyword Research

You may think you know what keyword you want to target, but fact-check your instincts. Use several keyword tools to get a sense of the search volume for the keyword as well as the competition before you finalize your keyword choice. Your main considerations will include:

- **Choosing a keyword with good volume, but not too much volume** – In general you don't want to target a keyword that has low relative search volume if there's an equivalent term that is much more popular. For example, there are usually over twice as many searches for "blah blah jobs" versus "blah blah careers." However, don't always automatically go for the keyword with the highest volume; some keywords are simply too competitive and not worth your time. You're not going to rank for "airline" unless you are, in fact, an airline.

Find keywords

Based on one or more of the following:

Word or phrase

Website

Category

Only show ideas closely related to my search terms [?](#)

[Advanced Options and Filters](#)

[Sign in with your AdWords login information to see the full set of ideas for this s](#)

Download ▾ View as text ▾ Sorted by Relevance ▾

✓ Save all **Search terms (2)** 1 - 2 of 2 ▾

Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches ?	Local Monthly
<input type="checkbox"/> web design jobs ▾	High	60,500	
<input type="checkbox"/> web design careers ▾	High	27,100	

✓ Save all **Keyword ideas (100)** 1 - 50 of 100 ▾

- **Choosing a keyword that's relevant to your business model** – You're more likely to succeed in ranking for a keyword if the term is relevant to your site and your business. You're also more likely to get some real return on your ranking – remember that rankings in and of themselves aren't particularly valuable, unless they're driving worthwhile traffic and leads. For example, a party planning business might target "how to cook for a party" – but "how to cook rice" isn't really going to be relevant to them or their target audience.

At this stage of the process, you should also make a list of close variations on your primary keyword. These will be helpful in writing and optimizing your content later on.

Step 3: Check Out the Competition

Once you've settled on a keyword, do a search for it on Google and a few other search engines to see what your competition is already doing. Pay particular attention to:

- **The domains and URLs** – How many are **exact match domains**? Does every URL in the top 10 include the keyword?
- **The titles** – How do the **title tags** incorporate the keyword?
- **The type of content that's ranking** – Product pages? Blog posts? Videos?
- **The types of businesses that are ranking** – Are they huge brands? Small businesses? News sites?
- **How authoritative those sites are** – You can use a plugin to check the age of the sites in the top 10, the size of their link profiles and so on.

You're looking for ways that you can differentiate yourself. You'll need to do at least as much as your competitors are doing to beat them. Ideally, you should be doing more, and doing it better.

Step 4: Consider Intent

The more specific the keyword (think **long-tail keywords**), the easier it is to gauge the searcher's intent, and the easier it will be to serve up what those searchers are probably looking for. In search marketing, "**intent**" is our best guess at what the person using the search query really wants. Consider the following keywords and notice how much easier it is to guess the intent from the words alone as you go down the list:

- glasses
- eyeglasses
- discount eyeglasses
- discount eyeglasses frames
- discount eyeglasses frames for kids

Ask yourself, **what kind of content best serves the keyword?** In this case, it would obviously be a selection of kid's eyeglasses for sale. From the first term, you can't even tell if the person is looking for eyeglasses or drinking glasses. And even for the second, the person might just be looking for pictures of eyeglasses; there is no clear intent to buy. An e-commerce business is mostly going to be trying to rank for **commercial keywords**.

Google's founders have said that the perfect search engine would serve only one result. **You want to be that one result** that satisfies the searcher's need so they don't bounce back to the search results, looking for a better answer.

Step 5: Conceptualize the Content

Next, form a plan for the actual content you're going to create that will – hopefully – rank for your chosen keyword. There are many paths to ranking for a keyword, including but not limited to:

- An article
- A blog post
- A product page
- An index or directory of links (to other pages on your site or around the web)
- An authoritative guide
- An infographic
- A video

How long will it take to create the content? Who should create it? Will you be doing everything in-house or outsourcing? Do you have all the resources and budget you need? Don't get defeated: No matter your size or your budget, you have the ability to create a blog post. Content like **infographics** and **videos** will require more resources. Sometimes, the best way to answer a search query is with some sort of tool, like a mortgage calculator. If this is the case, you'll need engineering resources.

Step 6: Execute

Here's where the rubber meets the road. Execute on your plan. Again, you shouldn't rush *any* of these steps, but it's especially important not to rush this one. More and more, **search engines are looking for high-quality content** that benefits the searcher, not keyword-stuffed spam or pages full of ads that only benefit you. If you'd rather buy traffic than put in the effort it requires to earn “**free**” organic search traffic, investigate PPC. “SEO isn't easy” should be your mantra.

Step 7: Optimize for Your Keyword

In reality, steps 6 and 7 should be intertwined. **Optimize your content while you're creating it**, rather than applying optimization after the fact. This is where the list of keywords you formulated in step 2 comes in. Leverage those keywords where you can in your content, but not to the point of sounding like a crazy robot. Remember that there are a lot of “invisible” places for keywords, and I'm not talking about using white text on a white background or anything else that violates Google guidelines. I mean stuff like image file names – users won't see these if they're not looking for them, but they can increase your keyword rankings.

A good tip to have a full list of on-page optimization factors is to copy Wikipedia, whose pages tend to have stellar on-page optimization.



Before you hit “publish,” it’s a good idea to quickly double-check your keyword research. It’s possible that your content has evolved during the development and creation phases, and you’ll need to make sure that there’s still alignment between keyword and content.

Step 8: Publish

It’s (finally) time to push your content out into the world. Depending on the type of content it is, you may need to be careful about scheduling this step. This isn’t usually a consideration for **evergreen content**, but it may be important for content that’s tied to something in the news, an event or a trend. You may also need to coordinate with PR or other interested parties at your company, for example when launching content related to a new product or service.

Step 9: Promote

This step is important and should come immediately after publishing – in fact, for big pieces of content, it's great if you can do some media outreach *before* the piece goes live. Make sure you do what you can to get your content in front of as many eyeballs as possible before it even has a chance to rank for the keyword:

- **Share your content through your business's social accounts** – Twitter, Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn et al. If you can, do this through your personal accounts too.
- **Use social buttons or widgets on your site to promote independent sharing** – Make it easy for readers and viewers to keep the chain going. They're more likely to tweet or share your article if all they have to do is click a button.
- **Build links to your content** – Whatever the future of PageRank, link building is still a huge part of SEO (even if it is the most annoying part). Check out our blog archive on the topic if you're looking to learn about link building.

Accruing page views and social shares will help you accrue links, which will help you earn that ranking.

Step 10: Analyze

You're not *quite* done yet! The web is a living medium, and it's never too late to better optimize your content. Check your keyword ranking manually (be sure you're signed out and not seeing overly **personalized results**) or with a rank checking tool. Also use your analytics to see what keywords your content is actually ranking for – they might not be the exact ones you initially targeted. If, after a couple of weeks or so, you're not ranking for the right keywords, you have more work to do. Make sure that your content:

- Is truly optimized
- Is truly high-quality
- Is truly visible

It's also possible that the keyword you chose is too competitive and you need to scale back your ambition. Try targeting less competitive keywords until you've built up more authority.

That's it! This is the process we follow to rank for hundreds of keywords related to search marketing. Whatever your business niche, you can make the same process work for you. So **GET STARTED!**