

FREE RESOURCE — SEO GUIDE

Keyword Research Guide

A step-by-step guide to finding and prioritising the right keywords for your business. Learn how to identify search intent, evaluate keyword difficulty, and build a data-driven content strategy that earns targeted organic traffic.

15%

OF GOOGLE
SEARCHES
ARE BRAND
NEW DAILY

70%

OF SEARCHES
ARE
LONG-TAIL
KEYWORDS

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SEARCH INTENT
TYPES TO
MATCH

6

GUIDE
SECTIONS

SEO STRATEGY

SEARCH INTENT

LOCAL SEO

UK SME

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01

Understanding search intent

Search intent is the reason behind a query. Google prioritises content that matches intent, so understanding this is critical for ranking. Get this wrong and even the highest-volume keyword will under-perform; get it right and a modest-volume keyword will convert.

INTENT TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE KEYWORDS	CONTENT TYPE
Informational	User wants to learn something	“what is SEO”, “how to build backlinks”	Blog posts, guides, tutorials
Navigational	User is looking for a specific site or page	“Google Search Console login”, “Ahrefs pricing”	Brand pages, login pages
Commercial	User is researching before buying	“best SEO tools 2025”, “SEO agency reviews”	Comparisons, reviews, listicles
Transactional	User is ready to take action or buy	“hire SEO consultant London”, “buy Ahrefs plan”	Service pages, product pages, pricing

HOW TO IDENTIFY INTENT FROM SERPS

Search for your target keyword and examine the top 10 results. If the results are mostly blog posts, the intent is informational. If they are product or service pages, the intent is transactional. If you see comparison articles or “best of” listicles, the intent is commercial. **Always match your content type to the dominant SERP intent.**

Why intent beats volume

A 200-search/month keyword with high transactional intent will out-earn a 20,000-search/month informational keyword for most service businesses. Rank checking only counts when the ranked page is the right kind of page for the query — map intent to format before you write a single word.

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Keyword types

Keywords behave very differently depending on length and intent. Build your list with a deliberate mix — relying on any single type is the most common cause of an SEO strategy that stalls.

Head terms

1–2 words, very high volume, very high competition. Example: “SEO”, “digital marketing”.

Difficult to rank for as a small or medium business. Often too broad to convert well.

Long-tail keywords

3–5+ words, lower volume, lower competition, higher conversion rate. Example: “SEO audit checklist for small business”.

These make up **70% of all search queries** and are the fastest path to organic traffic.

Question keywords

Queries starting with **who, what, when, where, why, how**. Excellent for featured-snippet opportunities.

Example: “how to improve website SEO”, “what is keyword difficulty”.

Local keywords

Include **location modifiers**: “SEO agency London”, “web designer near me”, “IT support Manchester”.

Essential for businesses serving a geographic area. Often lower competition with high buying intent.

AVOID KEYWORD CANNIBALISATION

Never target the same keyword on multiple pages. This confuses Google about which page to rank and dilutes your authority. **Each keyword should map to exactly one page.**

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Research methodology

Follow this systematic process to build a comprehensive keyword list from multiple data sources. Each step compounds the next — skip one and you will miss the cluster that drives the result.

Step 1 — Seed keyword brainstorming

List your **core services, products, and topics** — these are your seed keywords.

Ask your sales team: **what questions do customers ask?** What terms do they use?

Review your **website navigation and page titles** for existing keyword themes.

Check **Google Search Console** for queries you already receive impressions for.

Step 2 — Competitor analysis

Identify your **top 3–5 organic competitors** (not always your business competitors).

Use Ahrefs or SEMrush to find **keywords they rank for that you do not**.

Look for **content gaps** — topics they cover that you have not addressed.

Step 3 — Tool-assisted expansion

TOOL	BEST FOR	FREE / PAID
Google Keyword Planner	Search volume, CPC data, keyword ideas	Free (with Google Ads account)
Google Search Console	Existing queries, impressions, CTR	Free
Google Trends	Seasonal trends, rising queries, regional interest	Free
Also Asked / AlsoAsked.com	Question-based keyword discovery, PAA boxes	Free / Freemium
Answer The Public	Question & preposition-based queries visualised	Free / Paid
Ahrefs / SEMrush	Competitor analysis, keyword difficulty, SERP analysis	Paid
Ubersuggest	Keyword suggestions, content ideas	Free / Paid

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Research methodology (continued)

Step 4 — Volume vs difficulty matrix

Plot every shortlisted keyword onto a 2x2 matrix and let the quadrant decide the order of work. The matrix turns dozens of opinions about “which keyword to target first” into a single visual you can defend in a meeting.

High volume + low difficulty — quick wins. Schedule these first; they pay back fastest.

High volume + high difficulty — long-term targets. Plan link-building and cornerstone content over 6–12 months.

Low volume + low difficulty — easy content. Use to fill out topical clusters and capture niche traffic.

Low volume + high difficulty — avoid. Effort in, no return out.

EVALUATING KEYWORD DIFFICULTY

Keyword difficulty scores (KD) from tools like Ahrefs estimate how hard it is to rank in the top 10.

KD 0–20 = Easy — can rank with quality content alone.

KD 21–50 = Medium — needs quality content plus some backlinks.

KD 51–75 = Hard — needs strong domain authority plus multiple backlinks.

KD 76+ = Very Hard — requires significant authority and an active link-building programme.

PAIR DIFFICULTY WITH RELEVANCE

Difficulty alone never decides a target — a KD 20 keyword that has nothing to do with what you sell is still wasted effort. Always cross-check KD against **business relevance** before committing the keyword to a content calendar.

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Keyword prioritisation framework

Use this scoring system to rank your keyword opportunities and decide where to focus your efforts first.

Priority Score Formula: Volume Score (1–5) + Intent Match (1–5) + Difficulty Inverse (1–5) + Business Relevance (1–5) = Priority Score (out of 20)

KEYWORD	MONTHLY VOLUME	DIFFICULTY	INTENT	PRIORITY

Quick wins (target first)

- Keywords with KD under 30
- You already rank positions 11–30
- High business relevance
- Clear content gap to fill
- Can be published within 1–2 weeks

Long-term targets

- Keywords with KD 50+
- High volume, high competition
- Requires link building campaign
- Needs cornerstone content
- 6–12 month ranking timeline

Content mapping — assign keywords to pages

Each keyword should be assigned to **one specific page** on your site. Map primary keywords to existing pages where possible. Create new pages only for keywords that have no existing content match. Group related secondary keywords under the same page.

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Local keyword strategy

For businesses serving a specific geographic area, local keywords are often the fastest path to qualified traffic and leads. They convert harder than national terms and face less competition for the same buying intent.

“Near me” & location keywords

“**Near me**” searches have grown 500% in recent years — they signal high buying intent.

Target **[service] + [location]** combinations: “SEO agency London”, “IT support Birmingham”.

Include **neighbourhood and borough-level** modifiers for large cities: “web design Shoreditch”.

Create **dedicated location pages** for each area you serve with unique content per page.

Google Business Profile keywords

Your GBP **primary category** is the strongest local ranking factor — choose it carefully.

Use target keywords in your **business description, services, and posts**.

Encourage reviews that **naturally mention your services and location**.

Local pack ranking factors

Relevance: how well your GBP matches the search query.

Distance: how close your business is to the searcher.

Prominence: how well-known your business is (reviews, citations, backlinks).

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Local keyword strategy (continued)

Different industries lean on different keyword shapes — commercial-investigation patterns in B2B, transactional patterns in healthcare and legal. Use the table below to anchor your local keyword list against patterns that already convert in your sector.

Industry-specific keyword patterns

INDUSTRY	EXAMPLE KEYWORDS	INTENT
IT Services	"managed IT support London", "cloud migration services UK"	Commercial / Transactional
Legal	"employment solicitor Manchester", "commercial lease lawyer"	Transactional
Healthcare	"private GP near me", "physiotherapy clinic Leeds"	Transactional
E-commerce	"buy organic skincare UK", "best running shoes 2025"	Transactional / Commercial
B2B SaaS	"project management software for agencies", "CRM comparison"	Commercial

BUILD A LOCAL CITATION FOOTPRINT

Local rankings depend on consistent NAP (Name, Address, Phone) data across the wider web. Submit and verify listings in **Google Business Profile**, **Bing Places**, **Yell**, **Yelp**, **FreeIndex**, and any industry-specific directories your competitors appear in. Inconsistent NAP data dilutes the "prominence" signal even when your on-page SEO is strong.

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Implementation plan

Turn your keyword research into action with this implementation framework. Map every shortlisted keyword to a page and a publication week, then track the KPIs on the next page to prove the work is moving the needle.

Keyword-to-content mapping template

TARGET KEYWORD	TARGET PAGE / URL	CONTENT TYPE	STATUS

Content calendar template

WEEK	TOPIC / KEYWORD	CONTENT TYPE	OWNER
Week 1			
Week 2			
Week 3			
Week 4			

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Implementation plan (continued)

Tracking & measurement KPIs

Organic traffic — total sessions from organic search (GA4).

Keyword rankings — position tracking for target keywords (weekly).

Impressions & CTR — search visibility in Google Search Console.

Organic conversions — leads, sales, or goals from organic traffic.

Pages indexed — ensure new content is being crawled and indexed.

NOTES — REVIEW OBSERVATIONS

COMPLETED BY

DATE

NEXT REVIEW

Need expert SEO support?

Our SEO team conducts keyword research, content strategy, and ongoing optimisation to grow your organic traffic.

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