

# The 2018 Keyword Optimization Guide



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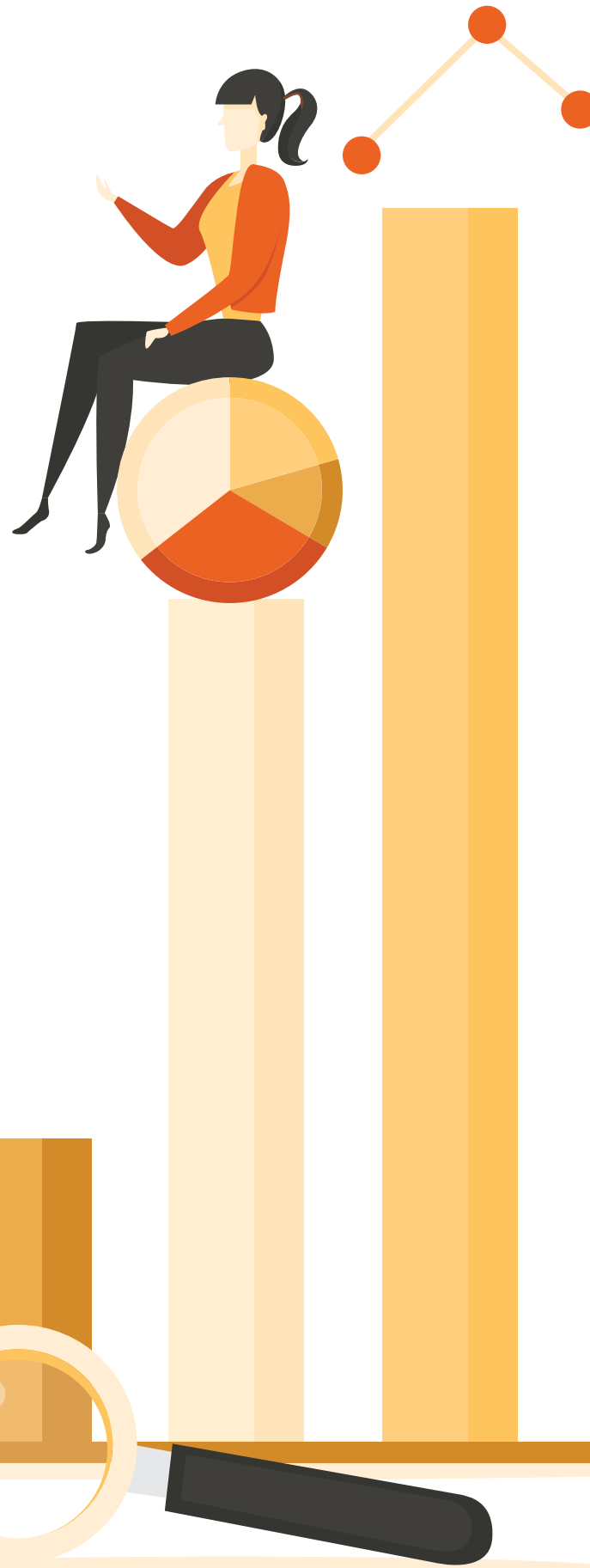
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# Introduction

As Google's algorithms have evolved, grown more sophisticated and become more discerning, marketers' old bag of keyword tricks has become less and less effective. We preach it here all the time: **Quality and relevance rule above all else.**

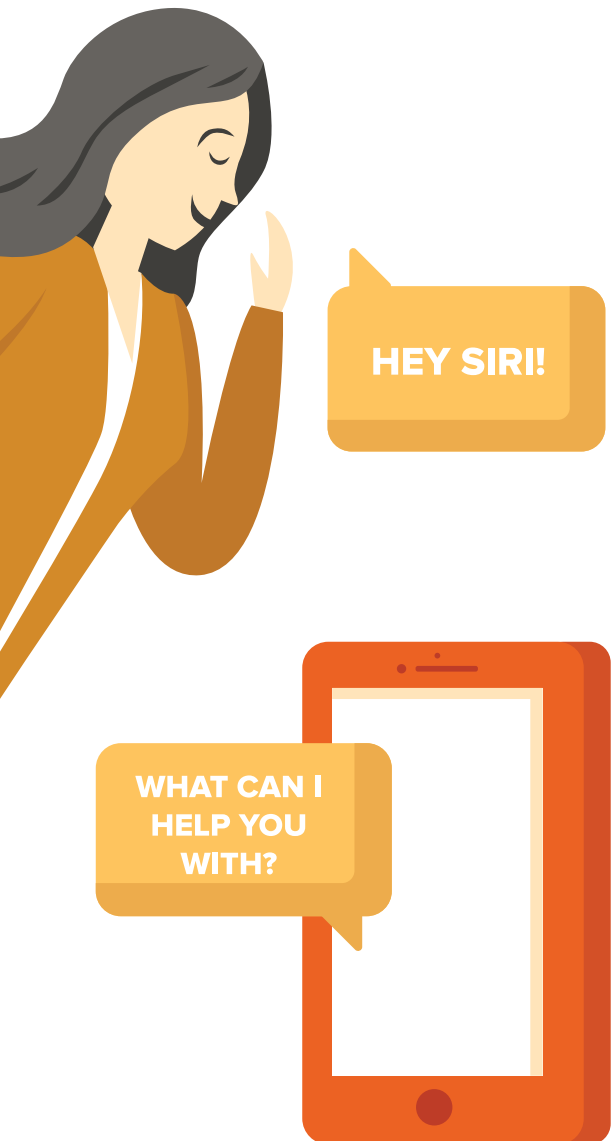
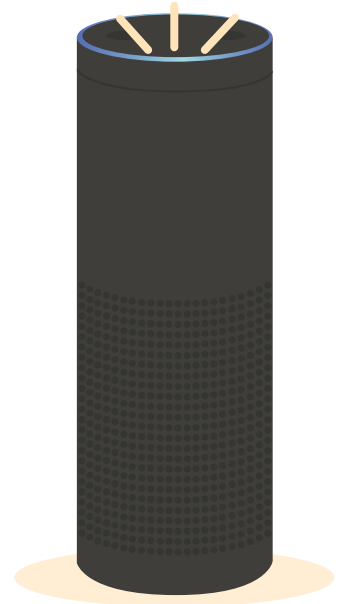
Still, keyword optimization remains an essential component in any successful content marketing strategy — it's just gotten more nuanced. "Keyword stuffing" will no longer game the system and will, in fact, work against you. Year after year, Google moves the goalposts back on keyword optimization best practices. Techniques that worked just one year ago may no longer be relevant.

With that in mind, let's take a look at the keyword optimization techniques that are dominating the industry in 2018.



# Voice Search and Long-Tail Keywords

The shift toward long-tail keywords has been even more essential to SEO success in 2018. Why? Because of voice search. Virtual assistants like Cortana, Siri and Alexa dominated the consumer space in 2017. Just about everyone has one of these programs or some kind of voice search capability available in their home, on their phone or even on their desktop PC.



Mobile users, in particular, have gravitated toward voice search rather than mess around with swipe controls or chicken-pecking out a search query. According to Google's Behshad Behzadi, 55 percent of teenagers and 40 percent of adults use Google mobile app's voice search tool every single day. That's a huge audience to potentially miss out on if you're not tweaking your keyword strategy to meet their search terms.

**Voice search queries and traditional search terms are inevitably going to diverge from one another.** When someone speaks into a voice search app, they will almost certainly use a more conversational tone. Whereas if they might type "keyword optimization best practices" into the Google search bar, they are more likely to say "Google, what are the best keyword optimization techniques I should use?" when using the voice search tool.

As such, long-tail keywords that reflect that conversational tone will become more useful and better match the user's intent with the right piece of content.



# How to Find the Phrases People Use to Search for Your Key Terms

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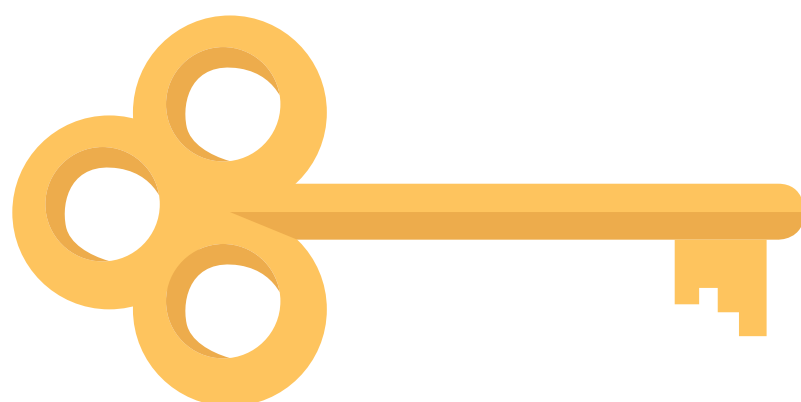
Thankfully, there are numerous tools available to generate search queries, offer suggestions and help build out initial keyword lists. In fact, there may be too many out there, making it difficult at times to cut through the noise and find the most effective platform.

Here are a few our team recommends to help get you started:

- **ANSWER THE PUBLIC**
- **GOOGLE KEYWORD PLANNER TOOL**
- **MOZ KEYWORD EXPLORER**
- **SEMRUSH**

Getting voice search right has been extremely important in 2018, and will continue to be years down the road. As Search Engine Watch's Rebecca Sentance noted, Google's algorithms have become so efficient and accurate when connecting search terms to relevant answers and content, that people expect to find precisely the information they're looking for on the first try.

Moreover, although the Internet of Things hasn't exactly set the world on fire just yet, it's growing at a pretty considerable rate, and more connected devices are finding their way into people's everyday lives. It's not that far-fetched to imagine a day when every home has various devices that have voice search capabilities and people can simply spout off whatever questions come to mind and expect immediate, accurate answers.



# Keyword Placement and On-Page SEO

Do you still rigidly adhere to a specific keyword placement practice? If so, you might be a little behind the times. These days, there's no need to bang your head against the wall making sure that every single blog or piece of content has a keyword in the title, first subhead, etc. That being said, **keyword placement still matters when it comes to on-page SEO.**

So, where should keywords ideally appear on the page? Keep these guidelines in mind when creating content for your website:



**1. TITLE TAGS:** Although this is nothing new, title tags should still contain keywords whenever possible, the earlier the better. That being said, don't force a keyword into your title tag if it doesn't fit organically. Whatever SEO benefits you might earn could be offset by having an awkwardly worded title tag.

**2. SUBHEADS:** If you can fit your targeted keyword into one of the subheads on your page, great. Again, though, it should be a natural fit. And it doesn't need to appear in the very first subhead, either. You can get just as much SEO value out of keyword placement in lower subheads.

**3. OPENING PARAGRAPH:** Some content marketers will cram a keyword into the first 100 words of every single blog, come hell or high water. While it's certainly still considered a good practice to have your primary keyword appear early on, you don't want to miss the forest for the trees.

**4. URLS:** This is another area where a keyword could help, but it's just as important to keep your URL structure relatively clean and concise. URLs should not be lengthy strings of alphabet soup.

**5. IMAGES:** Images that appear within a blog are additional opportunities to inject some SEO-boosting elements into your site. Most notably, keywords should appear in the image file name and image alt text, if possible. It's a pretty easy win for SEO-conscious marketers.



# How to Find the Right Keywords

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KEYWORD...



All of this information doesn't do much good if you don't have the right keywords in the first place. How should marketers go about conducting keyword research and pulling together the best list possible?

One possible starting point is your existing sales collateral and marketing materials. Marketo content marketing specialist Katrina Niemisto recommended combing through these documents to find specific words and phrases your business uses to define your products and services. Once you have those terms in hand, enter them into Google's search bar and it will provide recommendations for similar search queries.

That's, admittedly, kind of old-school, but in the absence of sophisticated marketing automation and keyword research tools, it's a pretty useful workaround.

Shoestring101 creator Kurt Frankenberg has another DIY keyword research method: Interview your existing customers. Frankenberg argued that to really understand what problems your potential clients are looking to solve, you should speak with people who have been in the same position.



# The Best Keyword Research Tools for 2018

If you're in the market for keyword research software, these are the top tools to check out in 2018:



## AHREFS KEYWORD EXPLORER

For those content marketers who want as much information as possible and who love combing through long lists of potential keywords, Ahrefs Keyword Explorer is for you. A single query could bring back several thousand keyword suggestions, which could become overwhelming for some users.

Ahrefs' keyword database is refreshed on a regular basis, helping marketers find the latest trends in their targeted search terms. It also provides pretty comprehensive SERP and ranking difficulty analysis, giving users more context to the viability of a specific keyword. Ahrefs has a number of features included to help guide content marketers to the best possible search phrases — it's as close to an all-in-one package as you're likely to find.



## KWFINDER

Depending on your comfort level with keyword research and analysis, something as dense and extensive as Ahrefs may not be the right tool for you just yet. And that's OK, because there are plenty of options out there for people who want a more streamlined and simplified process. Pound for pound, KWFinder is probably the best of the bunch. It balances ease-of-use with accurate and deep keyword insights.

The layout and dashboard are very user-friendly and intuitive to navigate. Filtering data and results is extremely easy for newcomers and results are presented clearly so anyone can dive in and get the information they need without dealing with a huge learning curve.



### SEMRUSH

SEMrush advocates often come back to the same point when talking up the tool's capabilities: competitor analysis. SEMrush's competitor analysis tools are second-to-none. You can see which keywords are performing the best for rival companies, analyze their own keyword strategies and even discover new competitors you didn't even know existed.



### MOZ KEYWORD EXPLORER

Despite some stiff competition, Moz's keyword research tool remains as relevant as ever. Its keyword difficulty analysis and data filtering capabilities rank especially high compared against other options out there. He may be a tiny bit biased, but Moz founder Rand Fishkin called out its CTR Opportunity feature as an especially unique and helpful tool.



### SPYFU

Want to know what keywords your competitors are not only ranking for but making the most money off of? SpyFu's got you covered. This tool downloads the competition's most profitable keywords across both paid and organic search, giving you previously unthinkable insight into your rivals' SEO and content marketing strategies. There's no shame in replicating their most successful tactics and poaching lucrative keywords — imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, after all.



### Wait, what about Google Keyword Planner?

Google's massively popular keyword tool is definitely useful — in the right context, though. It wasn't really designed with organic search in mind; rather it's geared more toward PPC terms. The more Google tweaks Keyword Planner for that specific use, the less relevant it becomes to organic search keyword research.

### I'm good picking just one keyword research tool, right?

Odds are you'll get great results simply through one of the platforms above, but if you really want to cover all of your bases, it's a good idea to compare research from different tools. It may just validate what your preferred keyword research tool already told you, but it could also highlight some competitive search terms you missed out on. If you have the time and resources to try out multiple keyword research tools, go for it!

# Let Keywords Serve the Content

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If there's one overriding keyword optimization trend to keep in mind, it's that the SEO rules of the past aren't nearly as inflexible anymore.

Is it good practice to place targeted keywords in particular locations within your content? Absolutely. But don't be a slave to those recommendations. In the end, good content will win out. As Katrina Niemisto put it, there's no magic formula to keyword density, so don't focus too much on getting every blog just right in that regard.



If the content's well-written, offers relevant, useful information and is enjoyable to read, people will find it — and search engines will too.

- ◆ So, what's the best way to approach keyword optimization? **To remember that it's not the end-all and be-all of SEO success.** Important? Unquestionably. But the content you put on the page will ultimately be a major deciding factor in your search ranking. You could have the best keyword strategy around, but if the high-quality content isn't there to back it up, it won't mean much.

Keep these guidelines in mind, create excellent content and you'll do just fine.



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