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MINUTE MARKETER

Search-Friendly Content

11 tactics for getting the most
SEO benefit from your content

30-Minute Marketer

Search-Friendly Content: 11 tactics for getting the most SEO benefit from your content

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Search-Friendly Content: 11 tactics for getting the most SEO benefit from your content

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to *30-Minute Marketer* – a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we show you how to ensure your content provides maximum SEO benefit.

When it comes to search engine rankings, it seems content is still king.

According to [MarketingSherpa's 2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – SEO Edition](#), good content creates buzz and attracts links. As a result, marketers who commit to the effort necessary to create quality content can improve their SEO positions.

But, simply combining words isn't enough. You don't just need content—you need *good* content. High-quality content provides value to your readers (current or potential customers), while also allowing you to enjoy SEO benefits.

In this report, we'll show you:

- How, and why, to wisely choose keywords
- Tips for combining search and social
- Why it's worth investing in good content
- How to avoid Google penalties

We know you're in a hurry, so let's get started. We're eager to share these tips on how you can use content to improve your search rankings.

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, *30-Minute Marketer*

About *30-Minute Marketer*

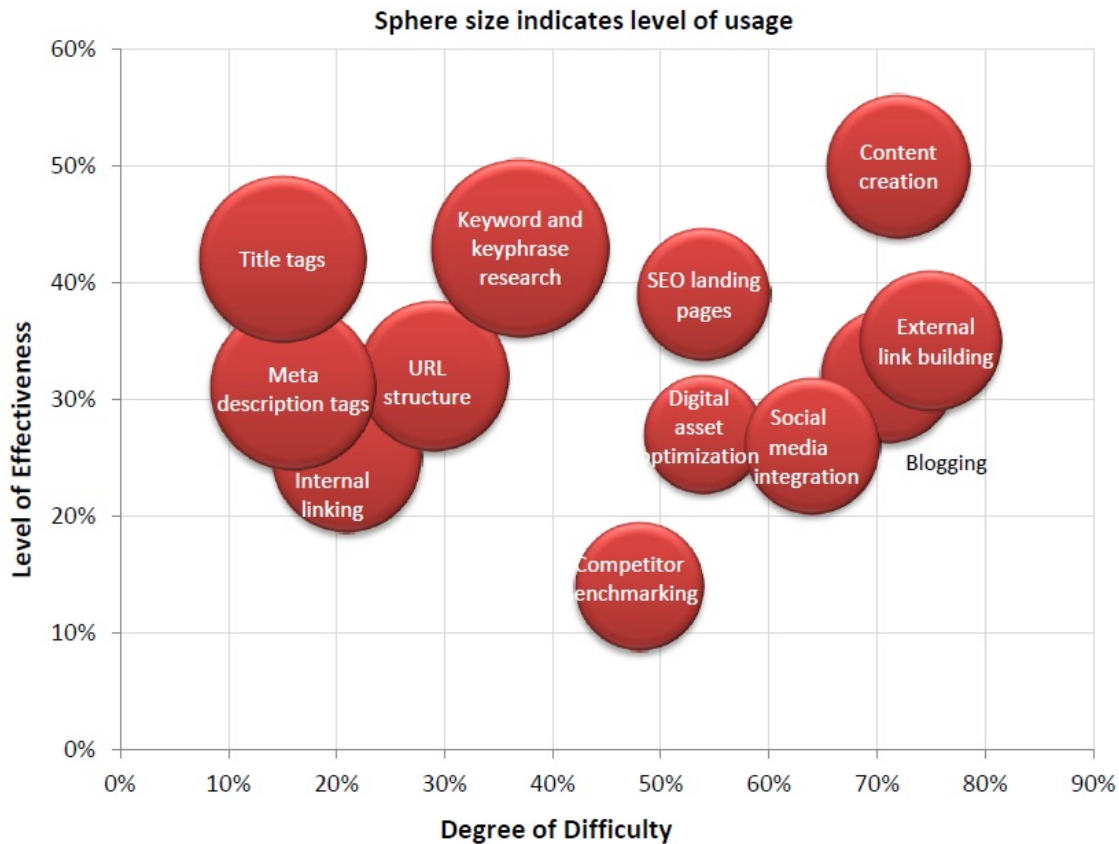
MarketingSherpa's *30-Minute Marketer* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We provide quick, simple tips that you can put into action right away.

For each *30-Minute Marketer*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and benchmark reports, to MarketingExperiments optimization tests and analysis. We highlight tips to help improve your marketing performance right now ... or, at least, by the time you're done with lunch.

Creating good content may not be easy, but it's worth the effort. In [MarketingSherpa's 2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – SEO Edition](#), marketers rated content creation as the most difficult (yet most effective) SEO tactic, as illustrated in the chart below.

To achieve good organic rankings and ensure that their products and services are found across all formats and venues, organizations must be strategic with their planning and processes, and ever-savvy with the creation and optimization of all digital assets. Simply put, good content makes for a better end-user experience.

Chart: Three-dimensional view of SEO tactics



Tactic #1: Understand the qualities that make content valuable

It's important to think about the dual purposes your content must serve. First, it must engage and inform readers. Otherwise, it won't hold interest long enough for them to understand your message. It must also prompt some action (or reaction): interest in your product, awareness of your brand, etc. More so, it also needs to provide SEO benefits, to provide a return on your investment.

Tactic #2 Avoid Google penalties

While judicious use of keywords can be an effective tactic, be very careful not to overdo it. If you appear to be “keyword stuffing,” or loading your text with a high volume of keywords in order to manipulate your search rankings, it will have a negative impact on your rankings.

In addition to keyword stuffing, other tactics that can lead to Google penalties include using hidden text, “cloaking” or using sneaky redirects, and participating in link schemes, such as link purchasing or excessive reciprocal linking. To learn more about how to stay on Google’s good side and steer clear of penalties, check out the MarketingSherpa article, [“Search Marketing: How to avoid and remove Google penalties.”](#)

Tactic #3: Use keywords—carefully

A big component of SEO success lies in selecting and using keywords carefully. The [Google Adwords Keyword Tool](#) can help you identify keywords that might be most effective and relevant for your content.

In the MarketingSherpa article, [“5 Steps for Building Links That Improve Search Results,”](#) Alex Dunks, Manager, Business Development, Webmarketing123, says, “One of the most critical components of an SEO campaign is to consider what words your target market is using. Often, what we find is that there are internal keywords, that your company uses and are familiar with, and external words that your target market is using. Sometimes these are perfectly aligned, and sometimes they are completely misaligned.”

Dunks recommends thinking about the different mindsets of people. Also, consider how far along in the sales cycle they are when they search for a particular term:

- **Introducer** – in research phase, a little less purchase intent
- **Influencer** – someone who is already introduced to your brand but is doing research
- **Closer** – farthest along in the purchasing decision

A closer’s keyword, for instance, might be an actual model number or branded term. Those keywords, the three- or four-word phrases, have the highest conversion rate.

“If people do search for something as specific as ‘men’s red Nike running shoes,’ they are probably going to be ready to buy, or at least bookmark it and come back to it later,” said Dunks.

These types of keywords should be a high priority. Conversely, a keyword like “shoes” is much more difficult to rank for, because it receives many searches. The competitiveness, plus the fact that it correlates to a low probability for conversion, mean that these types of keywords should be a lower priority.

It’s important, however, to use keywords in a way that fits naturally into your message. Carelessly adding keywords will negatively affect the quality of your content, and will likely turn off readers, who will see through this obvious tactic.

(And, as mentioned earlier, using too many keywords may possibly lead to Google penalties.)

Tactic #4: Consider a variety of content types

Content comes in many forms—from press releases and whitepapers, to mobile apps and social media posts. It's important that you consider a wide variety of content formats.

Some people enjoy reading blogs, while others may like the more informative approach of articles. Using many different formats allows you to connect with people in the manner they prefer, and increases the odds that you will connect with a wider group of people with diverse reading styles and preferences. This also creates more potential touch points with prospects and customers.

As a bonus, you are also offering a rich assortment of information and resources, which your audience will likely appreciate.

If you focus on only a few content formats, you limit opportunities to spread your message and make a connection. And, you also will see fewer benefits, from a search standpoint.

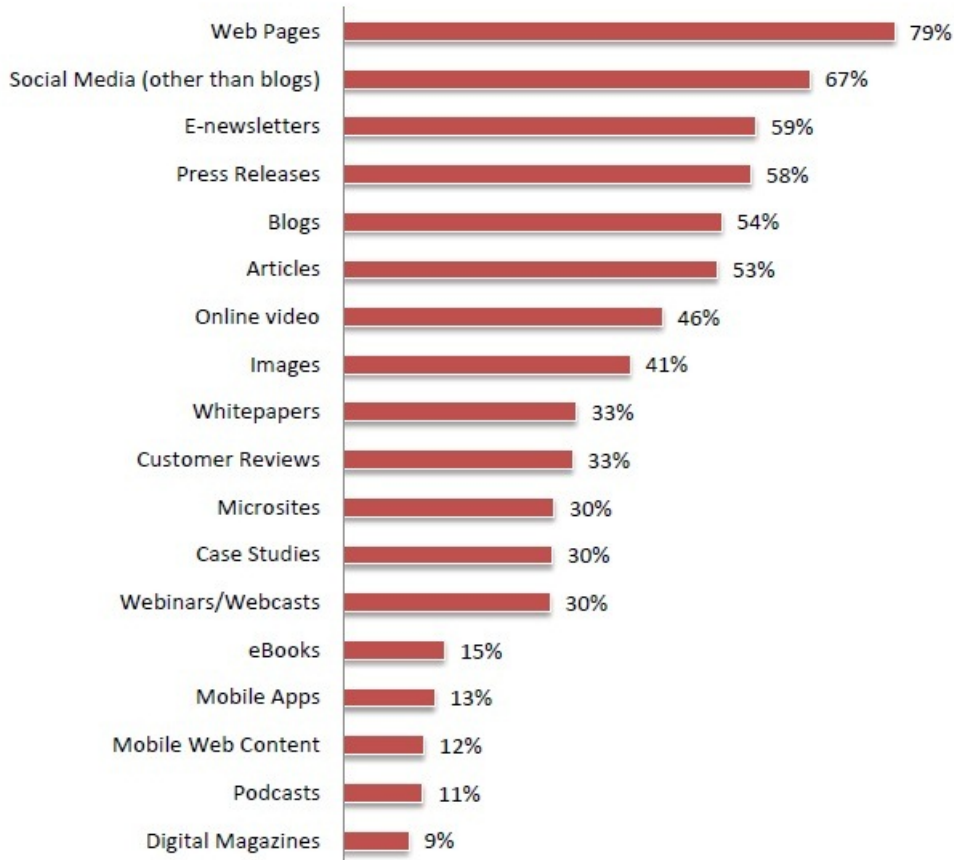
Remember, the specific content in each location or format must be unique and different, or you will lose any potential SEO benefits from having content in numerous places.

As shown in the graph below from [MarketingSherpa's 2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – SEO Edition](#), webpages are the most popular form of content used by organizations, with half of marketers stating that they are very effective in helping them achieve their marketing objectives. This makes sense, as website content is always “on,” and always “there.” Many webpages also act as SEO landing pages if they serve as an entry point from search results. When pages have strong customer-oriented language, good layouts and clear call-to-actions, there is a greater likelihood of “clickthrough” than “click back.”

Content from social media is the second-most widely used form of content. (See Tactic #9 for more information on combining search and social.)

Chart: Mix of content products used as part of total search marketing strategy

Q. What mix of content products do you currently use as part of your total search marketing strategy?



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Exactly which types of content you focus on most will depend on your particular goals and target audience, as well as the time and resources you are able to devote. Whitepapers, case studies and online video take the most time, effort and expense to create. On the opposite end of the spectrum, organizations find that images are the easiest to create.

Tip: Look for ways to repurpose or reformat content for a variety of formats. This will help you achieve the maximum benefit from your efforts.

Tactic #5: Make your content relevant and unique

Unique, well-written content gives search engine spiders something to index, and supports the search engine's goal of providing the most relevant results in response to a query. Relevance means your content fits in with what your target market is talking about. It deals with the questions they have asked, and even other questions *before*

they ask them. Making sure your content is unique will help it earn a higher ranking and stand out from among other search results.

Tactic #6: Be specific

When searching for something online, some people tend to zero in on exactly what they want and will use very specific search terms (this is called a long-tail search). In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Long-tail Search Marketing: SEO how-to content and videos earn 9% conversion rate](#)," Ali Irani, President, MI Technologies, explained how he embraced this online segment.

His company—which sells replacement television parts online—created a site called FixYourDLP.com that teaches visitors how to replace parts in specific televisions. Once visitors learn how to make repairs, they are then presented with the option to visit the team's e-commerce site, to buy the specific parts they need.

The single largest driver of traffic to FixYourDLP.com is organic search, Irani says. The site has the top organic result for "dlp repair" in Google, and it ranks seventh for "dlp parts." Far more important than these broad terms are the narrow, long-tail search phrases such as "JVC DLP Lamp TS-CL110U." The team targets dozens of these phrases with how-to pages and tops the search results for many of them.

Here are some of the tactics the team used to grab the top results for these long-tail searches:

- *Targeted content* – By providing videos, images and how-to content on an extremely specific topic, the team turns these pages into a valuable resource for searchers. The search engines respond by giving these pages priority over others that do not match their depth or focus.
- *Follow SEO guidelines* – The team followed SEO guidelines to target these pages to specific part numbers. For example, each page includes a part number and model name in its title. The images and videos include the related part numbers and other information in their metadata. Additional content such as compatible model numbers and step-by-step replacement instructions provide more information to visitors and search engines.
- *Always grow* – Letting a site grow stagnant can degrade its search rankings, so the team regularly publishes content to the site and maintains its forum.

Tactic #7: Invest in content instead of less effective tactics

Some of MI Technologies' competitors invest heavily in PPC ads, which is something Irani avoids. His team spends less than \$500 per month on search ads. Instead, his team invests in product research and content, which tends to pay off over a longer term than advertising, he says.

"We track some of our competitors, and sometimes they just disappear and they are off the face of the Internet. They are just gone because they have not invested at all in their websites and their content. When you compare some of the organic results to [paid search ads], to me, it's a no-brainer. You turn off [the ads] and the next day, you are gone from the Internet. You disappear."

Tactic #8: Balance quality and quantity

A central goal of creating this content is to help customers solve their problems, not to wow visitors with fancy graphics, Irani says. The content has to be useful and accurate, but it does not have to win awards for presentation.

Rather than creating a handful of fantastic videos on how to repair televisions, the team created dozens of good videos, each on focusing on a specific part in a specific model. “It’s not as difficult as many people think it is,” he says. “You can just start writing and you start shooting. The videos are not exactly high-end, but they’re effective.”

The team uploads videos to YouTube and adds them to FixYourDLP.com through YouTube’s player. Hosting them on YouTube gives the team additional pieces of content that can show up in search results. Had the team hosted the videos on FixYourDLP.com, they would be less likely to appear alongside other search results for the site.

The team follows SEO guidelines for the videos, making sure to include the part number and model name in their titles. The team also adds a good description for each video, fills out all the necessary metadata, and links to Discount-Merchant.com (the team’s e-commerce site) from the video’s YouTube page.

Tactic #9: Combine search and social

The most effective content takes advantage of the intersection between search and social.

In the MarketingSherpa blog post, [“Inbound Marketing: Content is everything in search and social,”](#) Rob Garner, VP of Strategy, iCrossing, and author of *Search and Social: The Definitive Guide to Real-Time Content Marketing*, explains that search engines and social networks could not exist without content.

Content connects a business and its audience, and in the age of the always-on consumer, brands need to know how content travels in real time. Marketers need to understand how to build connected brands by capitalizing on the way search, social and content overlap.

For example, a person with a delayed flight is stuck in Boston during the marathon and needs a hotel on short notice, and she asks a question on Yahoo! Answers to help find one. An astute hotel marketer is watching the keyword and real-time content space for questions such as these, and provides a quick answer for availability, along with directions and other helpful information.

The question and satisfactory answer gets indexed in Google and Bing, and ranks highly for “last minute downtown Boston hotel” or similar long-tail query. Over time, the question is viewed by hundreds of people with similar queries.

The good news is the hotel marketer not only solved one problem for one person, but for potentially dozens or hundreds more with the same question and need.

Garner shares these top five tips from his book:

First, brands need to be present for the “always-on” consumer. Being present means more than having a social profile or content indexed for search, but actually being a present and live curator of your content.

Second, know that recency is the new relevancy. The “newest content first” mentality goes a long way to helping you achieve high visibility. The more you are present in real time, the higher your visibility in both search and social.

Third, know that natural language is the connective element between your company, content, search, social, and your audience. Get robust tools for keyword and language processing for both search and social, and know the language of your audience.

Fourth, if you want great results from search and social, look at content scale like a forest, and not a weed. Go big, and go for high quality. The bottom line is that what you get from search and social is directly proportional to the quantity and quality of your content. Content is defined as everything from social interaction that leaves a digital trail, to articles, apps, databases, and good ideas and memes.

Finally, make content that is unique and personal. Do something brilliant. Being unique is what resonates against the status quo. Networks and search engines will notice when you are unique.

Tactic #10: Don't forget meta tags

You may not exactly consider meta tags to be content, but they help your website look more appealing on a search engine results page (SERP) for a relatively small time investment. Meta tags are HTML components that can include page titles, descriptions and keywords. These components are visible to search engine spiders but do not affect the appearance of the webpage.

In the MarketingSherpa blog post, [“What is the Easiest Tactic to Improve SEO?”](#) Daniel Burstein cites research from the [MarketingSherpa 2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – SEO Edition](#) which found that marketers consider meta description tags to be among the easiest organic search tactics, while being about mid-range in effectiveness, suggesting a pretty good bang for the buck.

“More than 80% of organizations do not find it difficult to add meta description and title tags. As such, these two tactics are also the second- and third-most widely used,” said Kaci Bower, Senior Research Analyst, MECLABS, and lead author of the report.

Tactic #11: Be careful with content changes

Once you've created content that has gone “live,” any changes you make later on could have an effect on your search rankings. In the MarketingExperiments Web clinic, [“SEO Landing Pages: How we achieved 548% more conversions without damaging organic rankings,”](#) Flint McGlaughlin, Managing Director, MECLABS, says when making copy changes you should keep the same keywords in the same relative places to minimize any negative affect on your rankings.

Useful Links and Resources:

[MarketingExperiments Blog: SEO Research: Why opportunity is knocking for marketers doing SEO](#)

[MarketingSherpa Article: Local SEO: How geotargeting keywords brought 333% more revenue](#)

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MarketingSherpa is a primary research facility, wholly-owned by MECLABS, dedicated to determining **what works in marketing** via exclusive case studies, surveys, and results data analysis. Then we publish what we learn so our community of marketers and weekly readers can improve their results and train their teams.

Praised by *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site and Entrepreneur.com, MarketingSherpa is distinguished by offering **practical, results-based marketing** information researched and written by a staff of in-house reporters.

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MECLABS has consulted with companies like Cisco, Johnson & Johnson, *The New York Times*, 1-800-Flowers, and NetSuite to optimize sales and marketing processes and achieve triple-digit ROI gains.

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