

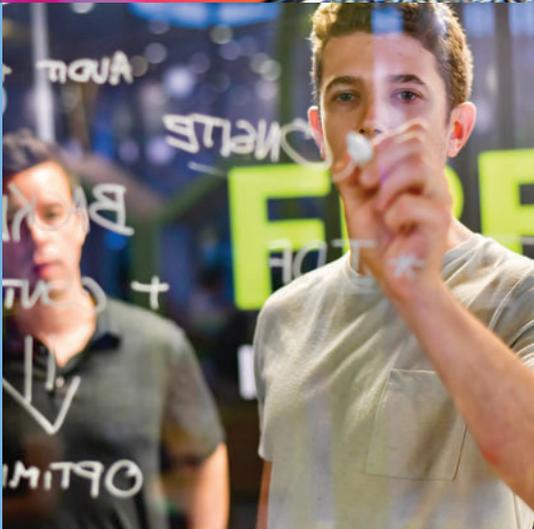
# SEO for CMOs and Beyond: 2022 Edition



VERDICT MEDIA STRATEGIES



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## Introduction

by *Melissa Lane Porter*

Google's organic search traffic currently exceeds 8.5 billion searches per day worldwide, creating more competition than ever to rank near the top of page 1 of the SERPs (Search Engine Results Page).

This whitepaper is about organic SEO: the process taken to achieve non-paid, algorithmic driven placement on the SERPs.

Google's motive is important for understanding SEO. They're a search engine. They want their searchers to be able to find exactly what they're looking for as quickly and effectively as possible.

This is why Google will rank relevant content and user-friendly websites higher on the SERPs. But only if they can verify these factors, by crawling and indexing your website effectively. (Optimising for crawlability is known as 'technical SEO' and it's just as important.)

The following 2022 SEO trends will reinforce your chances of ranking well, while also providing your business a better opportunity to increase traffic, conversions and sales. Here's what continues to matter this year.

## The name of the game

"The basics of SEO Best Practise have remained the same. "I think what Google's asked for hasn't really changed during the course of my career", said Director of SEO at DataCamp, Valeria Kogan-Higgs.

Google has just become more refined in how they evaluate content and user journey. It's always been about quality, relevant content, faster loading websites etc.; it's just that Google wasn't always sophisticated enough to measure this well, and now it has improved tools to do so."

To rank well in the SERPs, these principles of SEO still apply:

- **CONTENT QUALITY:** Unique, relevant, in-depth material that connects your target audience with the answers they are looking for.
- **ON-PAGE SEO:** Google wants to understand your content so embrace the website housekeeping that enables this. Optimise meta titles, meta descriptions, header tags, images, and body text.
- **BACKLINKS:** Earn high-quality backlinks from other sites, guest content and good PR.
- **UI/UX DEVELOPMENT:** Create fast-loading, responsive web pages and check that they are indexed properly.
- **INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC RANKING FACTORS:** benchmark your website against competitors in your industry for factors such as content and speed, in order to know what attributes you should prioritise.

Here are some additional actions points to signpost.

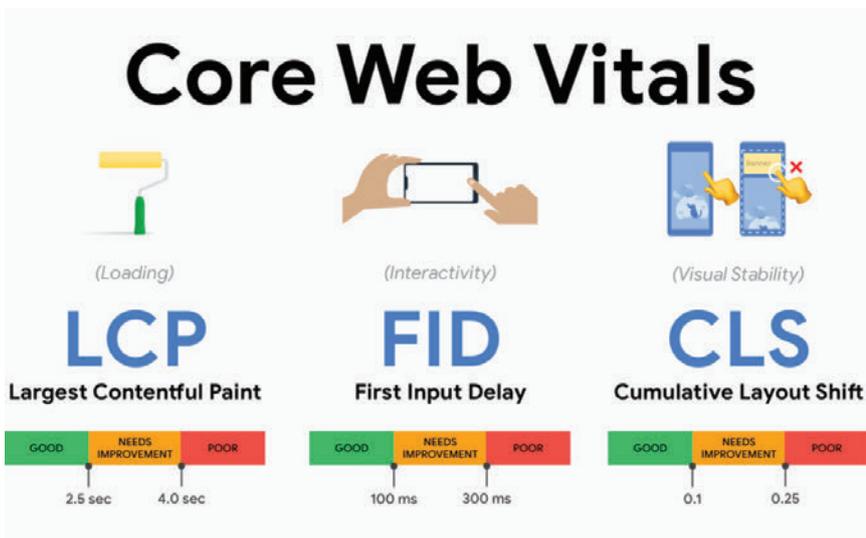


Image credit: In a Day Training and Consulting

## Check your core web vitals

### What are Core Web Vitals?

Google's Core Web Vitals measure user experience features such as load time and shifting content, which impact both organic visitors and conversion rates. Google breaks Core Web Vitals down into three measureable factors:

- Largest Contentful Paint (LCP)
- Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS)
- First Input Delay (FID)

#### Largest Contentful Paint (LCP)

This is how long above the fold content takes for the largest visible content to render. Anything a user has to scroll to see will not affect your LCP.

Examples of LCP content may include a video preview, block of text or image. Optimal LCP is under 2.5 seconds,

2.5-4 is moderate and 4+ is considered poor.

#### Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS)

The text shifts while you are reading it and you lose your place. This can be caused by factors such as delayed load time, images that autosize, too much javascript, font styles, and ads without iframes. Ideal CLS time is under .1 second.

#### First Input Delay (FID)

FID is how much time it takes for the user to interact with the site. This includes the time it takes from pressing a play button to watching a video.

It includes how long it takes to fill out entry fields, access drop down menus, or activate buttons, checkboxes and links. Optimal FID load time is less than 1 second.

### Why are Core Web Vital Metrics Important?

Because wait time leads to a poor user experience; it invites the user

to reconsider converting or to leave the site (increasing bounce rate). There are specific factors that inhibit the user experience, as well.

In Cumulative Layout Shift for example, the shifting content can cause the user to lose their place or click the wrong button. Experiences like these can affect both the perception of your brand and potential sales.

Product Manager for Core Web Vital Metrics Development Team at Google Vivek Sekhar explains in Google's 'Search Off The Record' podcast (episode 25), "There's just so many different parts that contribute to that qualitative feeling that a user gets that: "Oh, this page is fast, or this page is stable.

"And so for a long time, we've had these long running debates about which parts of the user experience really matters and which parts of the underlying browser technology or web technology can make a big difference."

"...And that's why we came up with the three Core Web Vitals. The Largest Contentful Paint, First Input Delay and Cumulative Layout Shift."

“

*There's just so many different parts that contribute to that qualitative feeling that a user gets, that: 'Oh, this page is fast, or this page is stable.' — Vivek Sekhar, Google*

## How do I improve our website's Core Web Vitals?

Though optimisation will need to be completed by a skilled developer, you can start by checking your Core Web Vitals using free tools. We suggest PageSpeed Insights (enter the url and click the analyse button), Google Search Console (view the Core Web Vitals report) and the Web.dev Measure Tool (using the lighthouse speed test). These tools will give you a measure of where you stand in Core Web Vitals and a breakdown of improvements you could make.

## Employ Keyword Clustering

### What is Keyword Clustering?

It's a keyword strategy used to improve your overall ranking that can increase the total number of keywords your page can rank for, and Google's ability to crawl and index it more easily.

How does it work? Simply put, you pinpoint keywords with a similar search intent and then create landing pages that address this group of keywords (or 'keyword clusters').

Search Engine Journal recommends the following steps:

*Step 1: Create a Keyword List*

*Step 2: Segment Your Keywords into Groups*

*Step 3: Build & Optimize Pillar Pages for Keyword Clusters*

*Step 4: Reinforce Keyword Clusters with Content.*

Your website can also potentially bring in more traffic because you are covering topics in greater depth. Here are some free tools that we like to use to create keyword clusters:

- CLUSTER AI — finds keyword variations based on Google rankings.
- CONTADU — easy to use, offers auto and predefined keyword groupings, and lets you export as a spreadsheet.
- SEO SCOUT — Simple to use with accurate clusters and several language options that you can export as a CSV.

## Create Long Form Content

Hubspot defines long-form content as content that's between 1,000 and 7,500 words. Though not technically a ranking factor, longer content is correlated with higher rankings because it has a stronger chance of demonstrating the Google Search Quality Rater guideline E-A-T (Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness).

Long form content also has a greater likelihood of being shared on social, earning more backlinks, creating stronger brand signals, generating leads, and driving referral traffic. When done right, it improves not only your SEO, but your conversion rate.

### How do I create Long Form Content well?

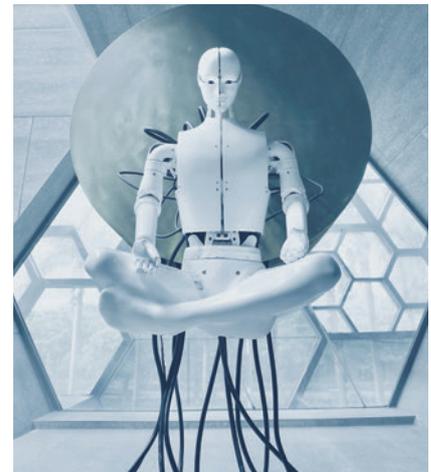
Create high quality long form content through in-depth research and analysis, strong writing, reputable sourcing, and unique, in-depth material.

Here's how we do this:

- Identify goals (lead generation, brand awareness, etc.)
- Decide on a format
- Select a topic (evergreen, narrow topics work well)
- Outline it
- Use emotion-rich, relevant headlines with odd numbers (they perform better according to BuzzFeed)
- Include sources with authority
- Never skimp on design

### How long is long content?

The average long content to rank in the first 10 positions is around 2,000 words. This is a good general rule.



## Use AI generated content as a starting point

There's been an increase in AI assisted content tools ever since machine learning model GPT-3 (third-generation Generative Pre-trained Transformer) was made publicly available last year through OpenAI.

## What is AI generated content?

AI generated content can include AI produced topics, titles, meta tags, paragraphs, and copy. Tools like Hubspot's AI powered Content Strategy Tool, Descript's AI Audio and Video Editor, and Frase's meta description generator are all examples of AI generated content.

## How do I Use AI assisted content tools?

It's best to use AI generated content as a starting point rather than a replacement. It's useful for title and topic ideas, can also create hundreds of meta tags at scale, and drafts of content that you can build on.

Always double check what is produced and avoid using machine written content as more than a jumping off point. Though great for ideation and basic repetitive tasks like meta data, AI has not managed to create the unique, natural, relevant content that Google prioritises in the SERPs.

## Optimise for structured data & rich snippets

While neither are a direct ranking factor, structured data and rich snippet are important for SEO because they make it easier for both Google and Google's users to crawl and understand your pages, products, and website.

[About featured snippets](#) • [Feedback](#)

### People also ask

- How do you rank up in 2022? ▼
- How can SEO help your business in 2022? ▼
- How can I drastically improve my SEO? ▼
- What is SEO and how it works in 2022? ▼

[Feedback](#)

*People Also Ask rich snippet*

## What are rich snippets?

According to Backlinko, rich Snippets (or 'rich results') are normal Google search results with additional data displayed, such as events, reviews and recipes. They have a higher click-through rate and a lower bounce rate because they provide the user with more information up front.

## What is structured data?

Structured Data (found within page's coding) provides Google with the information with which to create rich snippets.

Google's development documentation states:

*"You can help us by providing explicit clues about the meaning of a page to Google by including structured data on the page. Structured data is a standardized format for providing information about a page and classifying the page content; for example, on a recipe page, what are the ingredients, the cooking time and temperature, the calories, and so on."*

There's no guarantee that Google will give you rich snippets when you add structured data, but it

enables Google to create them for the content that they deem as high-quality.

## Keep in Mind People Also Ask

### What is 'People Also Ask'?

People Also Ask is a Google Rich Snippet (additional data provided with search results) that suggests other questions related to the initial user search. Google is anticipating the follow-up or related questions and offering a quick way to access them.

### Why is People Also Ask important?

A recent study found that the People Also Ask rich snippet appears in nearly half of all Google searches. This snippet often appears above position 1 in the Search Engine Results Page (SERPs), so it's a great way to achieve higher ranking for your content.

## How do I rank in People Also Ask boxes?

Make sure your content concisely answers common related questions comprehensively in your H2s, H3s, and H4s. You may also consider adding a FAQ section. Target long-tailed keywords for People Also Ask. Use free tools to help you identify long-tailed keywords that it makes sense to target. These include, but aren't limited to Wordstream, Google Keyword Planner and Microsoft Keyword Planner.

## Be Aware of Passage Ranking

Passage ranking (previously referred to as 'passage indexing') arrived in an update for US English SERPs on February 10th, 2021. It's now used globally.

### What is passage ranking?

Passage ranking is when Google indexes individual sections (or passages) from web pages in order to find and return succinct answers for their users.

Whereas featured snippets are chosen according to an entire website or page's relevance, passage ranking occurs based on the relevance of a section of text within a page.

Let's say a user googled 'How to make tea'. The results will be returned in a section of text, such as seen here to the right (above).



View all

#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Boil water. If using an electric kettle with temperature setting, set it to 208°F for black tea. ...
2. Warm up teapot. ...
3. Put tea into teapot and add hot water.
4. Cover teapot and steep tea for 5 minutes. ...
5. Strain tea solids and pour hot tea into tea cups.

In Google's words:

*"By better understanding the relevancy of specific passages, not just the overall page, we can find that needle-in-a-haystack information you're looking for."*

How to do it:

1. Analyse your target audience in terms of who they are, what they are looking for and why are they searching for it.
2. Make it relevant and unique
3. Use long-tailed keywords to help Google understand your content's context.

## Conclusion

When your goals are aligned with Google, you stand a better chance of ranking well. This includes relevant, original content that Google can crawl effectively. The rest is just details. Long content is shared most frequently, so invest in it.

Core Web Vitals can be easily checked with free tools, AI can assist you in jumpstarting your content, and optimising for rich snippets in various formats gives you a fighting chance to top the SERPs.

Benchmarking industry standards

for the sector you're marketing within will also let you know how to prioritise your SEO work.

A tech company will have a higher benchmark for speed, while a journalistic website will have greater competition for long form content.

Explore what works, continue to measure your progress, and avoid 'black hat' exercises such as purchasing dodgy links on Fiver.

But most of all, give the people what they want. If your content meets the needs of your audience, your site works well for users, and Google can actually find and index it, you're well over halfway there.

Follow us at [Verdict Media Strategies](#) for more actionable B2B strategies, case studies and interviews.

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*By better understanding the relevancy of specific passages, not just the overall page, we can find that needle-in-a-haystack information you're looking for.” — Google*