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Get Found On Search Engines

What is SEO?

Bottom line Google wants to find the closest match on it's search engine results page to what is being searched. To do this it sorts billions of web pages and ranks them according to their value. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a predictive effort to analyse the logistics of that process to optimise page rankings.

SEO is part art, part science, and if you spend too much time looking into its arcane inner workings, it will ultimately seem part voodoo as well. It analyses how (and why) Google ranks one page above another (including a blog post or any page from your website). However, from our perspective as publishers, the art is to achieve this and still maintain the covenant with our users to produce great content. It's worth repeating – content is always king here, all the rest is just a bonus once you have achieved this. This is especially so for professionals. All the SEO in the world will mean nothing in support of poor content, and nowadays Google concurs in this analysis.

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The need for good content is now more pressing because Google has altered its algorithms [1] to elevate the value of good content in search engine optimisation - and penalise sites that are "over-SEOd". The many versions of the "Panda updates" have focused on quality unique content. That means content must be relevant, current and informative.

SEO evolves, so do consumers, and thus Google as well. Google Panda is a code name for a series of Google algorithm updates that commenced in February 2011 – it's aim was to demote sites that were reliant on "non-content" SEO practices to create a heavier focus on reader value and the trustworthiness of the content.

You may find this hard to believe, but nowadays Google can detect "good" writing. That includes grammatical and spelling errors and poor quality links. New content is at a premium. So is unique content.

You have no doubt noted that I talk "Google" in this *MatureMedia Guide*. Yes, there are other search engines, but Google is by far the dominant player and the research concepts are mostly similar across other search engines. In the search engine world, Google is definitely king.

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[1] The way Google assesses rankings - a set of rules that decides how websites will be ranked.

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Patience, patience

A successful SEO campaign is really a long term effort that begins and then continues apace. Later in this *Guide* we discuss the dangers of quick fixes that may sabotage your website, including overblown claims by SEO companies to achieve a "no.1 ranking" on Google. We all want instant results, but any realistic SEO campaign takes time. In fact many people who have become immersed in SEO come to realise that it can be all consuming – we don't recommend this.

So SEO addresses two masters, the search engine and your clients (or prospective clients). What we're looking for are the points of intersection.

Spiders, indexing & ranking

Search engine "spiders" trawl the web 24/7 looking for content (in case there is *anyone* out there who might be confused about this, it's not a real spider - the "spider" is a little piece of code). Importantly, they also return to check on "changes" to sites since their last scan. The results are stored in enormous databases – this is called "indexing".

The Business Of Search

You can pay (and pay and pay forever and a day) for professional SEO. Don't go overboard with this if you are a small professional firm. Commercial SEO can certainly help to improve your search engine ranking, but there is very much you can do yourself. Also, as we will shortly discuss, a higher search engine ranking may not be your priority anyway.

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One more thing – professional SEO can be very expensive, and it is an ongoing expense. This might be a reasonable expense for a larger professional practice. For those of us in the "smaller" business and professional category, first make a careful cost benefit analysis. If you can, try to make sense of the hype. Advertising by SEO companies that guarantee a Goggle "front page" "first page" or "number one position" should be treated with caution. Be especially wary of so-called "black hat" practices, and the use of inappropriate backlinks (we explain this later). This may get you penalised by Google.

PPC

And one more (again!) thing. If you want to pay for SEO, there is also something called PPC (pay per click) which is essentially the same ethos i.e. you place an ad with Google AdWords and you pay Google a fee only when someone clicks on your ad to visit your website. Ads can either be in search engine results pages (SERP) or on websites that are related to your targeted keywords.

The process is somewhat complicated, because it depends on the budget and amount you are prepared to bid for your keywords, and your "Quality Score" (an estimate of how relevant your ads and keywords are to a person who sees your ad). The more you bid the more chance a better listing nearer the top of the ads displayed on the SERP. This means that it has to be carefully managed. In general, if you're looking to bid for a highly competitive keyword, it's going to run to big dollars.

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Google lays it all out

The following from Google is instructive regarding the best way to deliver your content:

"Our advice for publishers [2] continues to be to focus on delivering the best possible user experience on your websites and not to focus too much on what they think are Google's current ranking algorithms or signals…if you want to step into Google's mindset, the questions below provide some guidance on how we've been looking at the issue:

- Would you trust the information presented in this article?

- Is this article written by an expert or enthusiast who knows the topic well, or is it more shallow in nature?

- Does the site have duplicate, overlapping, or redundant articles on the same or similar topics with slightly different keyword variations?

- Does this article have spelling, stylistic, or factual errors?

- Are the topics driven by genuine interests of readers of the site, or does the site generate content by attempting to guess what might rank well in search engines?

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[2] That's you!

- Does the article provide original content or information, original reporting, original research, or original analysis?

- Does the page provide substantial value when compared to other pages in search results?

- How much quality control is done on content?

- Does the article describe both sides of a story?

- Is the site a recognized authority on its topic?

- Is the content mass-produced by or outsourced to a large number of creators, or spread across a large network of sites, so that individual pages or sites don't get as much attention or care?

- Was the article edited well, or does it appear sloppy or hastily produced?

- For a health related query, would you trust information from this site?

- Would you recognize this site as an authoritative source when mentioned by name?

- Does this article provide a complete or comprehensive description of the topic?

- Does this article contain insightful analysis or interesting information that is beyond obvious?

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- Is this the sort of page you'd want to bookmark, share with a friend, or recommend?

- Does this article have an excessive amount of ads that distract from or interfere with the main content?

- Would you expect to see this article in a printed magazine, encyclopaedia or book?

- Are the articles short, unsubstantial, or otherwise lacking in helpful specifics?

- Are the pages produced with great care and attention to detail vs. less attention to detail?

- Would users complain when they see pages from this site?"

In other words, rather than trying to optimise for a mysterious algorithm that apparently requires a Masters degree in IT to fathom, Google encourages you to keep these questions in mind as you focus on developing high-quality content. Your content optimisation should be driven by the best interests of your readers, not an often misguided attempt to guess what might rank well in search engines. And as Panda made all too clear, the rules can change overnight, leaving you stranded.

What will not change, and what will never require change, is well constructed content. In fact, there is a good argument that excellent content is a long way to where you want to be. Most people, with some study, can learn to do the basic

SEO that will help get eyes on their website. But bad content is a handicap that cannot be overcome.

Okay, but I want to understand rankings

Alright! First, you have to think web pages ("web" is inclusive of blogs, which are a type of website) not websites. Search engines rank pages NOT websites – this is an important distinction. So always think in terms of "pages". For instance, you might have a website that promotes your professional financial services, with a focus on family trusts, but surprisingly you find you rank better for the lesser service you provide, let's say the pages that promote your investment strategies for self managed superannuation funds. Why? [3]

If you want your page to achieve a ranking that will likely bring customers and clients to your door, you should know that 90% of the action is restricted to the first ten search results on the results page (i.e. the return results the client/customer sees when they key in a search term). This gives you an idea of the battle ahead, and the degree to which professional SEO is worth your time and money (and remember, even if you do not pay a professional, your own time is money).

To further constrain your options, you should also know that 90% of searchers will make a choice from a site listed in the first page (i.e. ten results). And worse,

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[3] Perhaps because that page has better content that is more attractive to Google, or is in a different competitive category.

the higher the listing the greater the chance that a potential client or customer click through.

Ranking is based on a combination of two things - relevance and authority

Relevance is how close are you to the term being searched (see "keywords" below). But at the heart of Google's algorithm is its proprietary means to measure the **authority** of the page (the "PageRank™" named after Larry Page, a founder of Google). This originated with the innovative work of Google's founders on the authority of academic writing, which sought to rank the weight of an academic paper according to the number of different papers that cited it as an authority. Here's the tricky part - not all of those citation sources are of equal value. For instance, if your academic paper is cited as a research source in a Nobel prize winner's paper, which is also widely cited by others, it would (and should) give greater authority to your paper.

The Google algorithm achieves a similar result, except Google looks for links from other web pages (called "inbound links"), not citations, and the authority is weighed by the number of links to the page that links to you. At least that was the intention in the early days of Google, and why the artificial use of those links became so prevalent, spawning so-called "link farms".

If that all seems too obtuse, think of it in terms of the practical result. It means the name of the game is in part to get links to your page from other sites, especially quality sites that are themselves well trafficked. How do you do this? As Google tells us clearly, by offering the very best content.

Why optimised content is crucial

Think of it this way – to communicate with a search engine you type words. And it is those words the search engine uses to make an appropriate match to your (apparent) needs. And to do this they rely on "keywords".

Here's the way to handle this:

- write the content – don't worry about any optimisation, concentrate on our content rules;

- then optimise content.

There are commentators who suggest the converse. If it works better for you, then of course form the keywords first.

First know your business

Remember, the Goggle updates have placed more and more emphasis on the quality of writing that must be relevant, authoritative, less jargon heavy and written by people who are able to impart their knowledge in plain English. That's hard to achieve by hired hands unfamiliar with the professional area, or at least a similar service profession, which is why professionals should provide basic information about their firms or businesses to those they hire to write their content. Don't expect a copywriter to understand the nuances of estate litigation or self managed superannuation funds or life insurance. Better is to do it yourself.

Whether you are a lawyer or accountant or financial advisor or any other type of service professional, answer this question –"what business are we in?"; "what do

we sell?" We broached this issue in full in our MatureMedia Guide *Your Professional Online Identity*.

To recap that earlier advice - if you are a family lawyer you may believe you are selling legal services. More likely, after some time in this branch of law, you will have grasped the emotional needs of clients in the throes of a life-changing relationship breakdown. So what are you selling? Reassurance? A hand to hold through a legal maze? Hope for the future? The chance for financial security and the alleviation of stress?

What do you understand about the psyche of your client? How does this help you communicate better to fulfill their needs? How can you communicate to prospective clients that you "get them" and understands their needs? The answer to the question, "what business are you in" is what allows you to turn upside down your usual notions of branding, but more important it avoids the knee-jerk descriptions that translate into bad content.

The best bet is to emphasise the benefits that the client derives from your products and services. So if you are a financial advisor, what business are you in? The lazy answer is, "we are in the business of selling financial advice and expertise". This is going to cause real problems if you want to communicate with clients. What if you instead think about benefits? In that case you are also in the business of selling time. Few of us have the time to attain the skills to make the best financial investment decisions. So that's one of the aspects of what you sell - time, and it's a precious commodity. When you focus on the product, and not the benefit, you misunderstand your client's needs and how best to communicate

with them if you want to establish a relationship. Ask yourself, "what do our customers really value".

Know your ideal client

Who is your ideal client, the one you want to be to engaged by your content? If you are a financial planner, what is the demographic of your ideal client? Remember, "ideal" does not mean "gullible", that's your fantasy client who will buy any service you propose. The real world ideal client is the one who represents the client base you wish to build and attract with your content. Ask yourself, what information do they need? What social media do they use? How will they find your content?

Now ask a different question – who is your most profitable client? Let's say you have a streamlined process for the delivery of a self managed superannuation fund. The information can be collected and deposited in a proprietary series of information templates that mean it is (from your side) a cheaper product. If you sell it for 80% of the cost of the more generally available self managed superannuation fund packages, but at the same marginal markup, then it will be an attractive and profitable product. In that case it may be a good strategy to optimise content to your most profitable client.

So bottom line – who do we want to visit our site? [4]

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[4] Have a look at http://empowered.forrester.com/tool_consumer.html to profile groups of potential clients.

Write what you know

Sorry, though you believe your views on an international ballistic missile treaty are both enlightened and erudite, I doubt this will prove of much value to prospective clients. Write what you know. Write what your clients *want* to know. So when you're looking to create a list of keywords/phrases, think in terms of what your clients want, *not* what you have on your mind or what you believe they *should* find interesting.

If you're a lawyer who wants to increase the client base to strengthen your estate planning practice (you've just hired a new lawyer who is an accredited estate specialist), you will not help your cause if you write a post about your work on the Law Society Committee to bring reform to estate challenge laws. No doubt this is a fascinating enterprise, and though your colleagues eagerly gather to hear your riveting tales of the latest planning meeting, I guarantee it will send your clients running from their desks as though their computer is on fire.

Give clients a reason to read

What's the point of writing that leaves the reader without a specific action to undertake? Looking once again at our estate lawyers, what is it they want to achieve? If it's a dual aim – they want to write more wills and handle challenges to wills, using the skill of their latest hiring - then make the reason to act very clear to prospective clients, that is: What are the consequences if you don't have a will? Should you think ahead to a time when you die and your family's fears and doubts most need to be alleviated? Have you missed out on an inheritance? If so, what should you do right now to challenge a will?

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What is SEO content?

Unfortunately the term "SEO" means too many things to too many people, including experts in the field. Imagine this situation in your own profession or business. Take mine – picture this scenario:

I appear before a learned judge, rise from the bar table, and begin my case:

Me: "Your Honour, the law of torts can best be described as dealing with the management of trusts -"

His Honour: "If I might interrupt you, Mr. Winn, I believe a tort could best be described as a civil wrong. It has nothing to do with trusts as such."

Me: "Well, Your Honour, I believe I have a different explanation."

His Honour: "Based on what?"

Me: "Based on my way of looking at it."

And so on. There is *no* lawyer who would attempt to depart from an established pattern of interpretation based solely on their own way of "looking at it". But that is precisely what you will get from taking each perspective of SEO experts – bewilderment about what the hell you have gotten yourself into. For most professionals who go down this path, it leads quickly to handing the reins over to an "SEO expert" who'll charge plenty but, in return, allow you to sleep easier.

Let's call this the "Mechanics Syndrome". For most of us, the work a mechanic undertakes beneath the hood of our car is largely a mystery. Why? Because we know little or nothing about the workings of an internal combustion engine. We

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hope that the mechanic will not dupe us, but other than trust, we have little to confirm the veracity of the invoice. So instead why don't we learn enough about motor vehicle maintenance to be able to better evaluate that invoice? Because it's just not worth the cost in time.

SEO is like that. Yes, we could learn some of the basics, but what the hell, we prefer to let someone else do the work for us – and anyway, it's just so technical.

Here's where you're wrong, and why the Mechanics Syndrome is misplaced in this situation:

- you don't use your car as an intrinsic element of selling yourself. Your words in a website and blog, on the other hand, are pretty much the whole interface with potential clients and customers who do not come to you through word of mouth;

- you have to know a lot about the *whole* car before you can fix a mechanical problem. You don't have to acquire an in depth knowledge of SEO in order to apply some worthwhile principles to your marketing content.

What Google sees

We tend to think that Google "reads" our content as a means to decide our ranking. We see it as an audience, and if there is some prettying up to be done in an SEO sense, then it's Google we are trying to impress. This is an understandable misnomer. After all, so much of our understanding is gained by the use of visual imagery, but in this case it is wrong.

First, Google doesn't "read" our content, and second, the audiences that *does* read it are real people with real brains and real senses. Sure Google is smart, *but it's not human*! There's a term for this – anthropomorphism, attributing human characteristics to non-humans or concepts. It is often used as a literary device, but is also prevalent in our relationship with pets and Nature (we think of hurricanes as "cruel", storms as "punishing", ascribe human logic to our cat's thinking [5]). We have also anthropomorphised Google. So let's start with this principle – Goggle is not a person. Your readers are.

We have already described how Google sorts through the billions of pages it scans. In easy terms, it makes an educated mathematical analysis of what it "sees". We address these Google-centric issues in SEO content production, but that analysis must also look into the very human needs of your very human audience. If you write primarily to suit what you believe will attract the attention of Google, you may alienate the readers you want to read your pages and perhaps purchase your product or hire your professional services.

So what does Google see? Go to any website, right click on text (go to "View Page Source") and you will see what Goggle sees. And the first thing you notice is how much code there is apart from the text that you see on the page. So what Google sees is a lot of code and not a lot of keywords.

Want to see this in action? Go to the front page of the Australian Tourism Commission, which has the remarkable URL www.australia.com – what do you

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[5] Although I'm sure our cat is plotting to kill me.

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see? Lots of colour, maps, logos. Now right click "view source". This is what you see?

What's happened to the pretty pictures? Believe it or not, they are right there in the code. Who reads this code? The web designers (or you, if you have a facility with HTML) and Google (or any search engine).

So one of the things we want to see is code that is "clean" and free from errors.

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Google also reads links that point to new content and XML sitemaps, which are just a list of what is on your site, but set out in a way that Google can "read" [6]. By the way, you might also want some pages *not* to be crawled by Google, for example test pages or exclusive areas for clients [7].

Importantly, if you permanently move content pages (so they have a different URL) that you want Google to index, then you must use a 301 permanent redirect. This tells the search engine that the old URL is no longer active but that the new one stands in it's place.

Does Google "see" your site?

Go to "site:domain name" (i.e. you site's domain name – no spaces) so it might be:

Site:junkyardogs.com

This will tell you how many pages Google has indexed. If you have 100 pages on your website and only 25 are indexed, there is a problem e.g. it might be that there is a technical issue, or there are not enough links to the page. This exercise also let's you look at the Title tag that is being used (we discuss this later), which is the first line in the Google result (the blue link) and the words below, which is usually the description meta tag.

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[6] www.sitemaps.org has instructions about the creation of sitemaps.

[7] See www.robotstxt.org

Who am I writing for?

From my point of view, and after a number of pointed disputes with "SEO literate" professional web designers, you should write first and foremost for your human audience. They are the ones you want to make an enquiry that leads to a sale.

Of course it's also a circular argument, because they may not get to see your content in the first place if it cannot be found on Google, or it is relegated to page 26 of the search engine results.

The answer to this dilemma will not surprised anyone – find the right balance between these competing needs, but place your first emphasis on your human audience and work from there, not the other way around. Of course Google deserves it's due, but you should never detract from the aim to produce content that is useful and enticing to potential clients and customers. Anyway, as we have seen, Google agrees with this proposition

My experience sitting across meeting tables from SEO professionals is that they tend not to be good writers, in fact, their bias towards copy that is SEO-friendly has made them blind to the artificiality of their text, particularly the sacrifice of plain English. Partly this is because (I think, I have no empirical proof) they are largely untrained as writers and unfamiliar with the professional expertise of their clients (you).[8] In part they also write what they know. It's hard enough for a professional to understand their prospective audience (their level of existing knowledge, educational standards, needs) let alone make that assessment

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[8] There are some very good trained copywriters who are SEO experts

according to the strictures of a piece of code trawling the internet on behalf of a beheamouth search engine company.

That's why I suggest you largely abandon the quest to make sense of all of this and concentrate on the stand alone quality of your content. Then apply some basic and achievable SEO content optimisation. Some of these considerations such as "keyword density" (a measure of the number of times you use a keyword in relation to the total number of words used), which was presented to me as a crucial step in the process by an SEO professional, are given short shrift by many brilliant SEO exponents. And thank heavens for that given the dreadful real world results.

It's no use arguing the point with one of these twenty-something SEO experts. For your trouble you will receive a pitying nod ("poor old fool, he has no idea"), supported by jargon loaded rebuttals that are generally meaningless to anyone without a tertiary degree in IT. Like every expert who sees numbers instead of people, they will always (always) have the weight of objective evidence on their side and you will always (always) feel out of your depth.

So first write compelling copy. Then be concerned with keywords, their frequency, their positioning, semantically related phrases or whatever. In truth changes to Goggle algorithms mean less effort is required to optimise for SEO and more effort (or the same effort if you are already on top of this) for user-friendly content. This is precisely where mature professionals can shine.

What is your unique selling proposition?

Now, after all this analysis of traffic generation, we'll let the cat out of the bag by posing a critical question. What's more important, the client you want or the traffic that is never going to *become* a client. In other words, if we are bitten by the SEO bug, don't forget that we are really looking for *targeted* traffic. So perhaps this states the obvious, but write for your client, not for the whole world. Yes, it's very gratifying to generate serious traffic, but money in the bank is where you'll want to see results.

And who are you up against? You may be a financial advisor, but are you AMP? You may be a lawyer, but are you Slater and Gordon? You may be an accountant, but are you Deloittes? Instead ask "what is my unique selling proposition (USP)"? You can't compete with these corporate giants on the broadest field, but you certainly can you look for a niche that will attract potential clients to your website.

What is it about *you* that is unique? What is it your children say about you, your clients, colleagues, competitors? Choose what reflects well on your professionalism and pursue it. Will you work late if a client needs an urgent response (lots of professionals won't)? Are you the type of professional who double-checks everything, whether the client is paying for that extra diligence or not?

This is important, because merely stressing your competence isn't going to cut it. After all, isn't every professional making the same claim? Ask yourself, why do your clients refer you on to their friends and family?

Keywords

This is the painful part. Keywords are central to the whole SEO enterprise, so it must be addressed, like it or not. Some commentators cite proper keyword research as the difference between the rankings of website pages that are architecturally and structurally similar.

Keyword research attempts to predict the words searchers might type into a search engine when they look for the service you want to sell. But how does the search engine know what searchers *specifically* want if (as is usually the case) the searcher does not type those *specific* words (in fact often the searchers don't know, that's why they're doing "research" or "surfing").

The most common failing of businesses is to target keywords that are the most popular, not understanding that the same keyword (phrase) will also be targeted by larger competitors. This will be problematic (at the least) if you are a small firm competing with a much larger firm for the same keywords. We discuss below one of the better alternatives to this dilemma, the use of "long tail" keywords.

There are entire books devoted to the apparently simple but in fact quite convoluted process of keyword research, but it's best to think of it as a brainstorming exercise. By starting the search process with a core keyword that will undoubtedly be highly competitive, you will find many long tail keywords that will be really useful (see below).

Keyword research is basic, and should be looked at by anyone who writes targeted (optimised) content. It should also be conducted for every page on your website, and every blog post you write, so depending on the number of pages, it

is potentially a laborious task if you are going back to review a long established site. To take the other side of the issue, if you have targeted a very large volume keyword (e.g. "accountant"), and this is the target audience you want to attract (people looking for an accountant), you may need to have a larger number of pages or blog posts that use variations of that keyword to cover the field.

From a potential client's point of view, they might type into the search box:

- How do I set up a self managed superannuation fund?

- Where do I get life insurance?

- Accountants in Malvern

- Where do I find a divorce lawyer in Malvern?

- Questions to ask a financial planner

That's the searcher's point of view. You should have an idea:

- what words are used when people are looking for my professional service?

- what words do I <u>want</u> to be found for?

Bottom line we're going to choose the keywords we believe searchers use to look for our services, and then we're going to find related words that are variants of those keywords. So if your keyword (phrase) is "make a will", you might target "why make a will?" "how do I make a will?" "legal will" "planning your will" "estate planning" "planning ahead" "final will".

At the beginning of your keyword journey the use of keyword variations appears counter-intuitive. If you are a financial retirement planner who specialises in superannuation, you may reasonably believe that "superannuation" is your best keyword. As we will see, this is also likely to be the favoured keyword for the biggest superannuation companies. But "superannuation" is a very wide target – ask yourself, what type of superannuation are searchers looking for: Industry superannuation? Retail superannuation funds? Self managed superannuation funds? Which of these types of funds are your specialty, or the most profitable?

What if you specialise in the use of a corporate structure for self managed superannuation fund trustees, especially in relation to the use of superannuation as a protective mechanism against bankruptcy for small business operators. If you make your keywords "the Bankruptcy Act and it's clawback provisions as they relate to self managed superannuation" what will you get? Very little. Why? Because you have misunderstood the basic tenet of keyword research i.e. to put yourself in the shoes of the person who is looking for a service or information. Your choice of keyword may closely reflect the specificity of your work or the service you offer, but no one is going to type those exact words into Google with that degree of specificity (although parts of that phrase may rank).

What's clear is that it keyword analysis is a customer-centric strategy. Why? Because to do it properly you have to stand in the shoes of potential clients as they search for professional services. So at the very least keywords research focuses our minds when we communicate through our content. It compels us to write for our clients and not ourselves. Even if you find the right keywords (no easy matter) it will not be much use if you do not use them properly to optimise your content.

Next we'll look at the competition for our keywords and related phrases to help decide which keywords are worth using.

When to do keyword analysis

Here's a sad truth. It's a lot better to do keyword research before you build your website, not after. As you will see later in the next Guide [9], you can usefully do keyword research after you have drafted a blog (you can also run your draft through a software analysis tool like Scribe). But if you have a wordy website and have only lately jumped on board the keyword train, it's going to be a lot of work. If you do the keyword research beforehand, you can liaise with the designer to gear the site around appropriate pages, meta tags, content and other onsite elements.

The good news? In the "old days" keyword research was a proprietary product of SEO "specialists". Nowadays it is accessible to everyone, largely through the availability of sophisticated (and often free) keyword tools.

Search engine friendly content

To be friendly to search engines, your content should use language that is relevant to the language used by searchers. That's where keyword research helps to make an educated guess about the words that searchers might type into the Google search box when they look for your professional services. That

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[9] *Finding Keywords For Your Website*

means looking at the words and phrases <u>they</u> use to find information. You try to anticipate those keywords, which you then strategically place in your web content.

The best keywords are therefore a balancing act:

1st find words relevant to searcher's needs;

2nd ask: "how many search on that keyword?";

3rd analyse your competition for this keyword.

That is:

* First look for **relevance** – step into the searcher's shoes.

* Next look at how many people search on those keywords – if it is a small number then your higher rank will be largely worthless (you rank higher for that keyword but there are few prospects). It is therefore crucial to know how many people search for that term. You use a keyword tools for this (see below).

* Finally you have to accept that you are in direct competition with others who also wants that first page ranking. If the field is weak, you may do well, but the weakness of the field is revealing in itself. So a high volume search number (i.e. many are looking for it) will not help you if at the same time you are faced with vast competition and the resources of rich competitors (like large corporations, banks, big accounting or law firms, insurance companies etc.).

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The balancing act

So to reiterate, some keywords are heavily trafficked or have a large search volume. Therefore, though the more competitive keywords are prime real estate, they are also more difficult to achieve because of the greater competition. This will be a major problem if you are, for instance, a small financial advisor pitted against a multinational firm with a bottomless marketing budget. Try it yourself - search your preferred (broad industry) keyword in Google and check out the top ten returns. Are they all large businesses or firms? If some are more comparable to the structure of your firm, take a tour around those websites and see what they are doing right.

Again, keywords that are less trafficked can perhaps achieve a better ranking. The downside is obvious. Less people search for those keywords, and so there are also an equivalent lesser number of potential clients or customers to bring to your web pages.

So we have to find a balance between volume, relevance and competition. What is the keyword's popularity? Is this word actively searched? Is the keyword relevant to your site's content? How much competition is there for this keyword?

Understanding the long tail – 30% popular v. 70% long tail

Although you might logically think the most popular search terms are the majority of searches, in fact they account for less than 30% of the total searches performed on the web. The remaining 70% are the so-called "long tail" of search. This is the treasure trove you can mine – the hundreds of millions of unique search terms that appear less often, but when added together represent the largest percentage of all searches.

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Remember, for every person who searches a broad term like "accountant" or "lawyer" or "financial planner" or "insurance broker", there are many more who search for a specific service *by* an accountant or lawyer or financial planner or insurance broker, e.g. "self managed superannuation fund" or "family law financial agreement" or "flood insurance in Malvern" or "family trusts tax returns".

There is another element at work here. A decade ago searchers would be more likely to search for a standard keyword and use the search engine results to sift through the resulting information to clarify what we wanted. Nowadays there is an evolutionary development in the sophistication of searchers, who are more likely to *begin* the search for more targeted words. Those targeted words are more "long tailed" by nature, which makes them ever more important.

Be a little blunt

Look, all the subtlety in the world might win you a trophy from the League Of Literate Professionals, but once you've researched and chosen your keywords you <u>must use them!</u> If you've had the experience of looking at a web page and wondering what it's about, then you are likely a victim of keyword abuse. Yes, yes, pretty words are (well..) pretty, but so what? Be direct in the use of your keyword. Don't be shy.

Research tools for keywords ("key phrases") – what do clients and customers need to know about your firm or business?

Once again, keyword research is a practice used by search engine optimisation professionals to find and research actual search terms people enter into search

engines when looking for information, a service or product i.e. what they type into the Google search box.

But you can do this research too. Try Google's Keywords Tool [10] or SEO Book Keyword Suggestion Tool [11] (both free). It's a good idea to register with Google for the use of their Tool because otherwise you have to negotiate the captcha box every time you load the tool, and that's a pain. You can also use paid keyword tools (e.g. Keyword Discovery, Wordze, Wordtracker, Wordstream, Market Samurai and many more).

It's best to think in terms of "key phrases" and "key synonyms" e.g. for "accountant": "Mysuburb financial planner" or "Mysuburb retirement planner" or "Mysuburb superannuation planning specialist".

How do I find my keywords?

First ask yourself, "what do potential customers and clients need to know before they can decide to engage our services? How do we serve their needs?"

In other words, what is the relevant question that searchers might ask, and then (hopefully) find in the content we provide in our pages?

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[10] https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal

[11] http://tools.seobook.com/keyword-tools/seobook

Remember the Elevator Pitch we developed in the MatureMedia Guide *Your Professional Online Identity*? What does that tell you about your keywords?

So what are the keywords you want for your page? If you're a lawyer looking for estate planning clients, you might want to be ranked highly for the following keywords:

- "estate planning in Malvern"

- "probate of a will"

- make a legal will"

- "testamentary trusts in Malvern"

So, how about a sentence that reads: "If you want estate planning and want us to make a legal will in Malvern or a testamentary trust in Malvern, then get in touch, especially if you need advice about probate of a will".

Good sentence? No! Good SEO? No!

In the next *MatureMedia Guide* we'll find out why.