



Marketing with Intent:

A GUIDE TO THE FUTURE OF SEO & QUALIFIED B2B SEARCH TRAFFIC



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Nick has led SEO content initiatives at the agency for more than five years and worked with experts on the Search and Content Marketing team to develop this guide outlining TopRank Marketing's SEO content philosophy.



B2B brands and marketers have their work cut out for them

Third-party cookies are on the way out, digital advertising costs are rising, and competition across fast-growing industries – particularly B2B tech – is constantly getting fiercer amid category growth and economic uncertainty.

Scrolling through the industry headlines these days can feel like an ominous exercise:

“RIP third-party cookies: Are marketers ready?”

– AdAge

“The price of digital ads has skyrocketed”


– The Drum

“B2B brands approach 2023 with strained resources” – MediaPost

B2B marketers need to reach a specific audience with a differentiating message

But we're losing the traditional means for digitally tracking and targeting those audiences, and it's getting more expensive to reach them with paid media.

Luckily, there is a solution to all of these converging challenges, and it's right in front of us, sitting atop the proverbial SERP*.

 **What's a SERP? Search Engine Results Pages are Google's response to a user query. SERPs tend to include organic search results, paid Google Ads results, featured snippets, knowledge graphs, and video results.**

If you intend to succeed in the new environment, you need to **market with intent**. Search intent, to be specific.



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What is Search Intent?


Semrush defines search intent (aka user intent or keyword intent) as “the reason why a user types a particular query into a search engine.” Pretty simple.

Using search intent to guide your content strategy means placing these audience motivations at the forefront of planning what you’ll create, how you’ll create it, and where you’ll publish it. When done well, this approach can generate perpetual streams of visitors, who are self-qualifying themselves as relevant to your brand based on the questions they’re asking. And as we’ll explore later in the guide through examples, it can lead to huge increases in organic traffic, overall website sessions, conversions, and more.

Sounds like an obvious way to go, but surprisingly few are doing it in a structured, strategic way. In this guide, we’ll explain how an intent-driven SEO content strategy helps equip B2B brands to overcome some of the biggest challenges ahead while making it easy for their customers to find them.



Part 1: Why Organic Traffic is a Money Maker

 53% of traffic to business websites is accounted for by Organic search, which “remains the dominant source of trackable web traffic and the largest digital channel.”

BrightEdge report

Many things change in the world but this doesn't: people use internet search a lot, and they're using it more all the time. They use it to answer questions, to learn about topics of interest, and to make decisions. Current estimates suggest that Google processes about 8.5 billion searches per day on average.

The folks who arrive at web pages, directed by the search engine through this organic process of searching and finding, are fittingly referred to as “organic traffic.” In the scope of marketing strategy, organic traffic is the flip-side of paid traffic, which is acquired via advertising and usually on a pay-per-engagement basis.

Digital advertising has its place but there are key reasons why the most successful B2B brands, including many we have the privilege of partnering with at TopRank, evangelize organic search traffic and treat it as a primary KPI for their marketing programs:

Organic traffic is cheaper than paid traffic over time

- ▶ Developing an effective SEO-driven content campaign requires up-front investment if you want to get it right, but pays ongoing dividends in the form of sustained, targeted traffic to your website or landing page. Paid media is valuable, especially for capturing short-term demand, but it can't hold a candle to the long-term cost efficiency of content that draws consistent, relevant inbound organic traffic.



Organic traffic is the foundation of a successful content marketing strategy. Unlike paid advertising, which stops generating traffic as soon as ads are paused or the budget runs out, organic search traffic continues to drive traffic to your website for weeks, months, even years after the initial publish or optimization date.”



RYAN LEIGHTY
Search Manager, TopRank Marketing

High-quality SEO content improves brand perception

Internet users today are savvy enough to understand that when a page ranks high in the search engine results page (SERP), it's because the engine deems that content valuable and its source credible – which means its users do. When buyers routinely find your brand in the SERPs for queries they're running, it makes an impression. When they click through and get a great experience that illustrates WHY your content ranks? All the more so.



**60% of marketers say
SEO is their number one
concern when it comes
to inbound marketing**

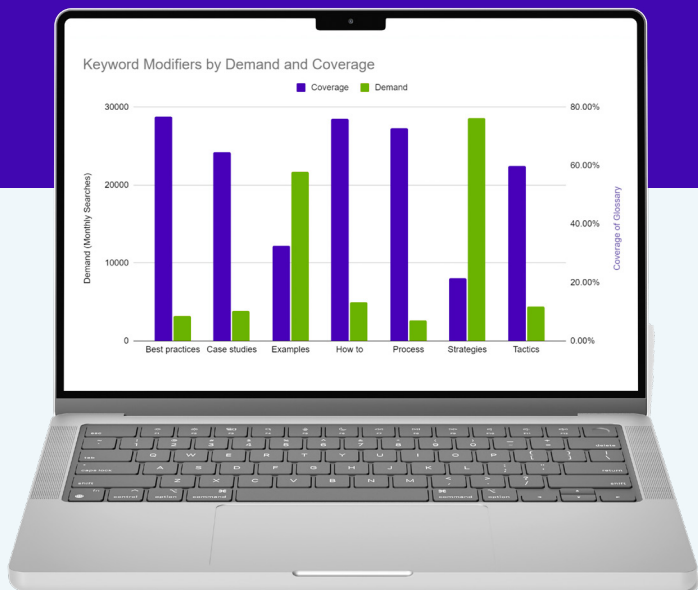
Moz



In B2B, performance in search is a signal of the real-world perception of a brand. The content, interactions, and engagements a brand offers to its audience likely extend to overall authority in the market.



SETH EPSTEIN
Analytics Director,
TopRank Marketing



Studying organic traffic opens a world of insight about your audience.

The process of building intent-based keyword lists and frameworks is inherently a journey into the mind of your target audience. You're diving into data to understand the questions self-guided buyers are asking, why they're asking them, and how best to show up for them. As you publish the content, gather ranking data, and measure engagement, this information compiles.

Organic traffic is great! But not all organic traffic is created equal, and investing in the indiscriminate acquisition of web visitors is a pathway to wasted spend. One all too commonly traveled.

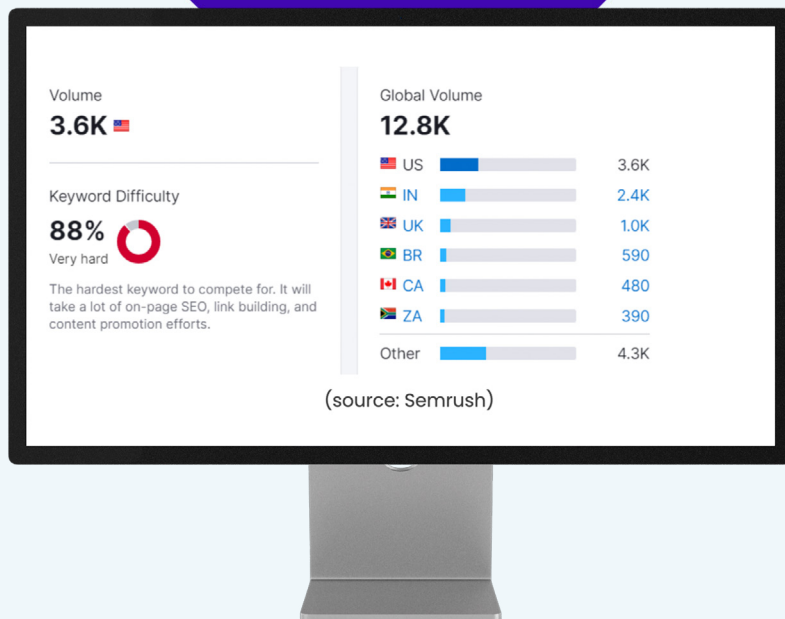



The most advanced B2B content marketers are putting their investment in Organic on double duty. Yes, they're growing brand awareness by publishing optimized and valuable content, but they're also continuously using search data to understand exactly what it is that their prospects deem relevant. Thoughtful marketing based on search insights is what yields the most effective content marketing plans.



JANE BARTEL
Director of Search & Content Marketing,
TopRank Marketing

Part 2: The Problems with Traditional SEO Approaches



 Keywords between 10-15 words in length get 1.76x more clicks than single-word terms.

Backlinko

For a very long time, raw keyword volume ruled SEO. This mindset became ingrained over the years, to the point where a B2B campaign will target a keyword like “what is digital transformation” on the premise that it receives very high search volume and is relevant to their tech solution.

Both technically true! Unfortunately, it’s an impossibly competitive term because it’s relevant to every tech solution.

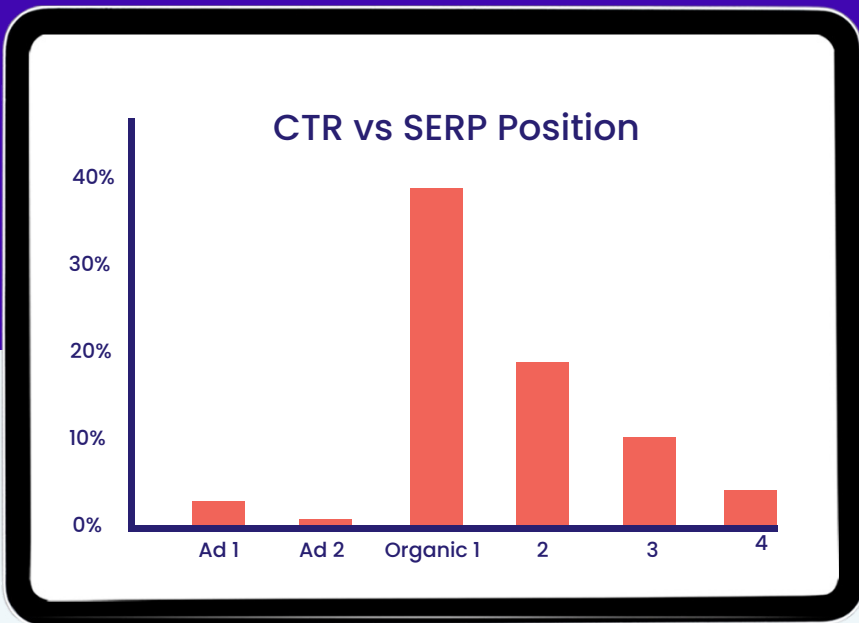
The key to winning organic search traffic today and tomorrow lies in being more focused and strategic with SEO, capturing users who are self-qualifying themselves through the questions they ask. As third-party cookies are phased out, this strategy will become fundamental to reaching your most valuable audience – based not on who they are, but what they’re trying to accomplish.



Savvy marketers understand that establishing a strong organic ranking for your content runs rings around CTRs for paid ads!



DAVE CHAFFEY
Co-founder, Smart Insights
Source



The good news in our realm is that by contrast to B2C, the B2B buyer's journey is relatively predictable. Each path to a purchase is unique, of course, but decision makers tend to have a specific set of questions and curiosities at various steps, and they tend to use online search to answer them.

Let's explore how you can create a modernized SEO content strategy designed to meet their intent, and how you can build content that reaches the top of the rankings.

Part 3: How to Identify and Plan Around Search Intent

Here's a high-level overview of how our agency builds SEO content strategies guided by search intent and audience intel: agency-related).

Start with business priorities

This is where we align the SEO strategy to the commercial goals of the program. Is the objective to raise awareness for a particular product or service category? Are there specific topical areas you want your brand to be associated with?

This step sets the direction for the entire program.

Create high-level topical pillars

Connecting business priorities to SEO opportunities, we develop “keyword pillars” under which all of our keyword targets will nest. These designations will often tie to service areas and subjects of specialized expertise, serving as the starting point for a robust roadmap around searcher intent throughout the buyer journey. For example, at TopRank, we focus on content pillars such as B2B Content Marketing, B2B Influencer Marketing, and Brand (anything directly agency-related).

Develop a keyword glossary based on intent

The keyword glossary pulls everything together into an organized spreadsheet that serves to inform the content plan. Extensive audience and keyword research surfaces a wealth of interrelated keyword targets cascading from the strategic pillars selected beforehand. In addition to their associated pillars, we categorize keyword targets by several parameters to ensure we'll be creating the right content and covering the full spectrum of the buyer's journey:

- ▶ Funnel Stage: Top, Middle or Bottom?
- ▶ Monthly Search Volume
- ▶ Keyword Difficulty
- ▶ Current Domain Rankings
- ▶ Competitor Rankings

A vital step in this process, and one that too many marketers skip to their own detriment, is filtering out keywords that are deemed NOT RELEVANT in terms of intent. This helps build confidence that everything you'll be creating has a purpose.

Analyze search landscape

Once you've selected keywords, reviewing the SERPs for these terms will further inform how to go about creating the content. Looking at the first page of results on Google for any given keyword will help you look past your own assumptions about user intent and gain insight about how the search engine perceives intent (which is what really matters).

This step is also instructive for creating content that ranks. You don't want to copy what others are doing, but you can borrow the elements that seem to be working while finding ways to create something unique and compelling compared to the existing landscape.



Of note: this exercise can also be very helpful for filtering irrelevant keywords that don't fit your buyer's journey. For example, you might want to create content around "agile software" to help people understand the nimble flexibility your product offers, but when you see the SERP featuring all software products teaching Agile methodology, you'd consider a different variation or approach.

Start crafting, publishing, amplifying, & measuring content

From there, it's time to start creating and publishing the content you've planned. This involves both drafting net-new content as well as refreshing and updating existing content identified through the keyword research for optimization opportunities. In the next section, we'll talk a bit more about how to create content suited to meet searcher intent and rise in the SERP rankings.



Don't be shy about creating high-level explainer content around relevant topics, even if it seems elementary for your target audience. People at every level across the buying committee may pull from your content and share it as a resource to drive decisions. In many cases, great B2B content isn't designed to educate, but to help others educate.



JANE BARTEL
Director of Search & Content Marketing, TopRank Marketing

Part 4:

The Qualities of High-Performing Search Content



Many of us have experienced the frustration of visiting a web page that seems like it has what we're looking for, but doesn't live up to our expectations. The content might not have the insights you want, or it may not even seem like it was created for, or even by, a person. We work hard to make sure the pages we show on Search are as helpful and relevant as possible.



DANNY SULLIVAN
Public Liaison for Search, Google
Source

Content marketers aren't just competing against other brands in the race to the top of the SERP – increasingly, we also must contend with advanced AI language models like ChatGPT. But ironically, as content creation tools grow more automated, algorithms keep elevating more human signals in their content evaluation.

There was a time when SEO could essentially be “gamed” based on knowledge of technical ranking factors like keyword density, meta data, and indiscriminate backlinks. But with each passing algorithm update, search engines like Google are growing more complex and sophisticated in assessing the quality of web pages based on human interaction and behaviors.

The best way to overcome artificial intelligence – and all other competing forces – is to put your brand's authentic intelligence and expertise at the center of a humanized SEO content approach, driven by research, intuition, creativity, and skill.



The top 3 Google results receive 54.4% of all clicks from a SERP.

Backlinko

Google's rankings are influenced primarily by a perception of "Trust," which itself is shaped by three key factors: Experience, Expertise, and Authoritativeness. At TopRank, we use this E-E-A-T framework as a guiding light for crafting content that connects with intended audiences, fulfilling their search intent to be as helpful and relevant as possible.

Creating E-E-A-T Content that Ranks

- ▶ **Experience:** "Consider the extent to which the content creator has the necessary first-hand or life experience for the topic." Does the content position the author as someone relatable and worth listening to regarding the topic at hand?
- ▶ **Expertise:** "Consider the extent to which the content creator has the necessary knowledge or skill for the topic." Is this evident through the substance and detail of the content itself? For B2B brands, this is as important for making an impression on the reader as it is for strengthening page quality.
- ▶ **Authoritativeness:** "Consider the extent to which the content creator or the website is known as a go-to source for the topic." This is difficult to achieve through one piece of content, which speaks to the value of a broad yet focused content strategy that enables your brand to build credibility throughout a topical area.
- ▶ **Trust:** "Consider the extent to which the page is accurate, honest, safe, and reliable." This encompasses everything from accuracy of the on-page content to website performance and security. Leading content creators and digital marketers excel at generating authentic content that hits this target.



Trust is the most important member of the E-E-A-T family because untrustworthy pages have low E-E-A-T no matter how Experienced, Expert, or Authoritative they may seem.

Google

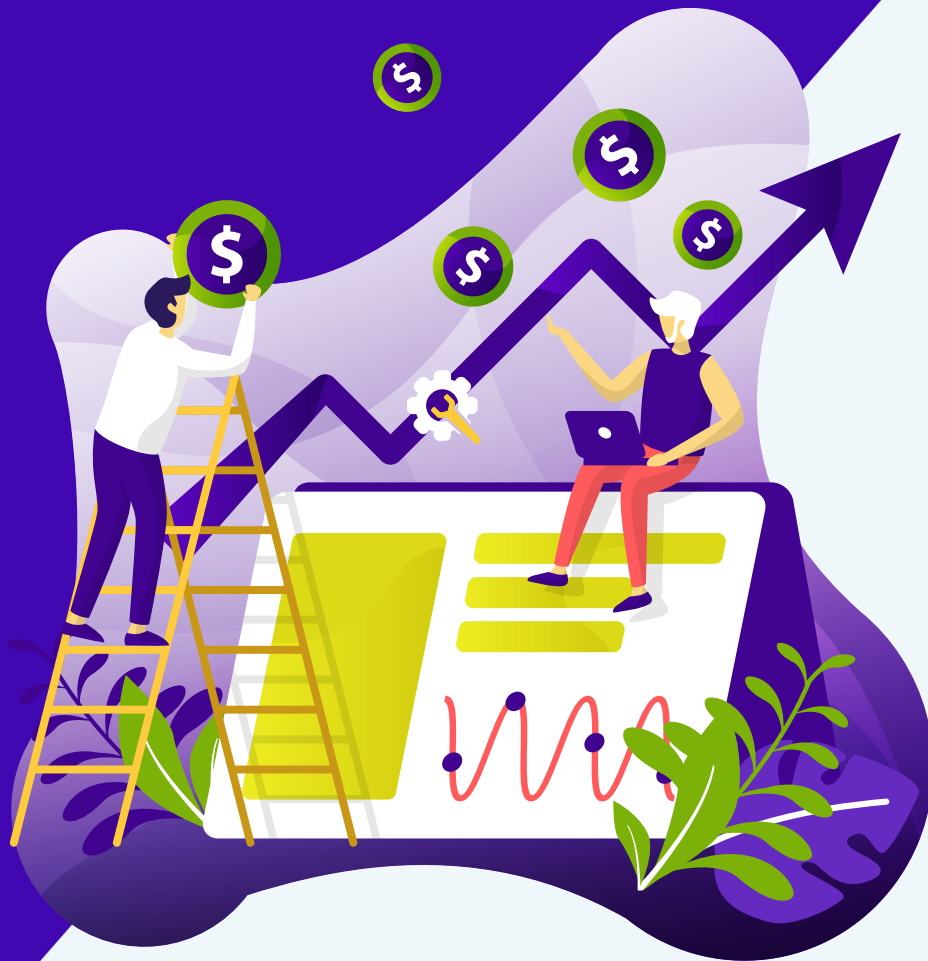


Good writing serves the reader, not the writer. It isn't self-indulgent. Good writing anticipates the questions that readers might have as they're reading a piece, and it answers them.



ANN HANDLEY
Everybody Writes





Ready to Uplevel your SEO and Boost your B2B Search Traffic?

The team at TopRank Marketing is here to help. Connect now to see how we can help your brand increase relevance, connection & conversions!

[Contact us](#) or [Book a Meeting Now](#) >

About TopRank Marketing

Founded in 2001, TopRank Marketing partners with top B2B brands to create authentic brand engagement and impact.

With a mission to elevate B2B marketing through smart, creative, data-informed strategy and content experiences, TopRank has earned the reputation as a first choice marketing agency for B2B technology companies.

The agency's ability to inspire B2B buyers comes from deep expertise in integrating content, influence and SEO to help B2B brands become the best answer for what their customers are looking for. With a network of hundreds of top B2B tech industry thought leaders and an expert team of strategic, creative and analytical B2B marketers, TopRank understand the ever-shifting B2B tech landscape and brings data-driven strategy to partnership.

Cited by the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Forbes, Forrester and The Economist and trusted by some of the top B2B brands in the world, TopRank Marketing is the leader in B2B influencer and content marketing.

[Learn more about toprankmarketing.com](https://toprankmarketing.com) >

Trusted by top B2B brands