

HOW TO SEO YOUR BLOG

A CARNEGIE WHITE PAPER

The real power of content
marketing lies in SEO.

- + PERFORM KEYWORD RESEARCH
- + WRITE LONG-FORM CONTENT
- + UTILIZE HEADER TAGS
- + OPTIMIZE METADATA
- + PUBLISH + SHARE

HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR HIGHER ED BLOG FOR GOOGLE

Blogs are an extremely important and underutilized marketing tool in the world of higher education. Blogging is free, easy, and if you use a team of content writers, quick. Some schools are starting to realize the power of content marketing. They are publishing blogs and news articles on a weekly or even biweekly basis. But is it good enough to just publish regular blog content?

While it's a good start, the real power of content marketing lies in Search Engine Optimization (SEO). If you combine SEO with your blog and news article strategy, you'll generate more organic traffic and more quality leads for your organization.



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WHAT IS SEO, ANYWAY?

In short, SEO is the process of optimizing your website for search engines like Google. In terms of writing blog content, it means figuring out what words or phrases your target audience is searching for on Google and then utilizing those phrases in a particular way in your content so those prospective students can find you.

In the modern higher education landscape, institutions need to put more focus on SEO. Gen Z is coming to college, as they are now graduating high school and exploring their next steps. Meanwhile, millennials are getting older and are searching for graduate programs and continuing education opportunities. What do these two generations have in common? They live online—they use Google to find information, and they read a lot of content before they make a decision.

If you can figure out what questions these prospective students are searching for, then write engaging, informative, and entertaining content that answers those questions, you'll be well on your way to attracting those students and convincing them to apply to and enroll at your school.

In this guide, we'll discuss how to discover those questions that students are searching for. You'll learn how to turn those questions into blog content ideas and how to format that blog content so it will appear in Google's search results. Lastly, we will teach you how to share that content on social media channels to extend your reach and attract even more prospective students.

Ready to go? Let's get started.

USE KEYWORD RESEARCH TO GENERATE CONTENT IDEAS

Keyword research is an essential part of any on-page content SEO strategy. So what is it? Keyword research is the process of identifying what words, phrases, and questions people use when they conduct a search online.

Your goal with keyword research is to identify:

- + A single target keyword that will be the main focus, or topic, of your blog
- + A short list of secondary keywords that you'll use to guide the supporting details of your blog post

How do you conduct keyword research?

The most important first step is to brainstorm different themes, topics, and subjects you'd like to cover in your blog. These could be related to priority programs, campus life, admission, or even the latest developments in an industry related to your programs. Jot down some ideas you want to write about, such as "our MBA degree" or "recent research coming out of our environmental engineering labs."

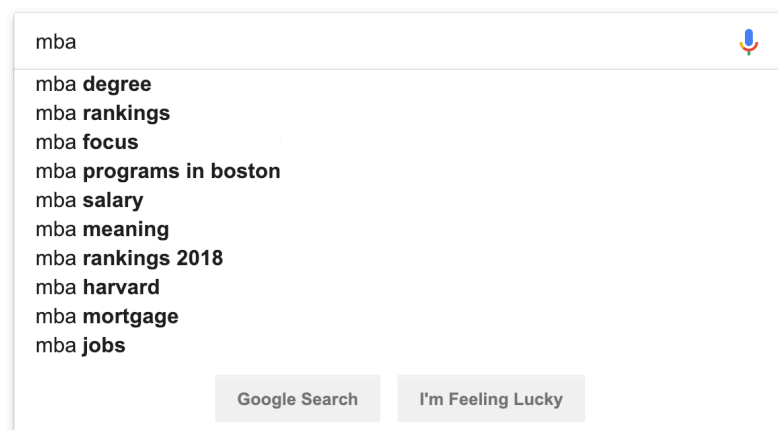
When you're generating these content ideas, feel free to loop in as many or as few people as you want. You can do this as an individual exercise or with a group of writers. The most important step is to make sure you note all of your ideas.

Next comes the fun part.

Start by entering some keywords from your ideas into Google's search bar, such as "MBA degrees" or "environmental research." Make sure you are using incognito mode! Google will show you a list of common search terms in the search bar, and at the bottom of the page you'll get a list of things people also search for. This is Google's way of telling you what keywords and phrases people most often use.

Next, you're going to take those ideas and start to filter them through some keyword research tools to generate actual key phrases that people are typing into search engines.

Keyword research is the process of identifying what words, phrases, and questions people use when they conduct a search online.



Keyword research tools are websites, software, or other platforms that take your idea and show you what terms people are actually using to search for it on Google or other search engines.

Here are three of our favorite (and free) keyword research tools:

- + **Google Keyword Planner:** This free tool from Google is found within the Google Ads platform. You can enter in a short-tail keyword like “MBA degree” and it will return a long list of other (mostly short-tail) keywords, along with some helpful data on search volume (how many searches for this keyword are conducted per month) and PPC-related data. This list can help you figure out which short-tail keywords are worth targeting and which are better forgotten.
- + **Keywords Everywhere:** This free Google Chrome plugin is so simple to use and by far one of the most helpful keyword research tools around. Once installed to Google Chrome, it automatically produces a list of related search terms and long-tail keywords for every search. It also provides much more accurate monthly search volume data. This is a great tool for identifying long-tail keywords you might otherwise miss.
- + **AnswerThePublic:** This powerful website can help you identify what questions people are asking on Google. Simply type in a short-tail keyword like “MBA degree” and you’ll get a huge volume of questions and phrases that people are searching for in Google. This tool can be a huge help for figuring out what to write about on your blog and can be especially useful if you’re trying to target featured snippets.

Keyword ideas		
Q mba degree jobs		
Found 867 keyword ideas		
Show broadly related ideas; Exclude adult ideas Add filter		
<input type="checkbox"/> Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Competition
Your search term		
<input type="checkbox"/> mba degree jobs	100 – 1K	Medium
Idea		
<input type="checkbox"/> mba jobs	1K – 10K	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> mba salary	1K – 10K	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> jobs for mba graduates	1K – 10K	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> mba finance jobs	100 – 1K	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/> mba job opportunities	100 – 1K	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> mba careers	1K – 10K	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> mba it jobs	10 – 100	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> mba opportunities	10 – 100	Medium
<input type="checkbox"/> mba career opportunities	10 – 100	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> mba healthcare management jobs	100 – 1K	High

This is a screenshot from Google Keyword Planner.

17% of students
when asked say they
would like colleges
to make current
student stories more
available.

CollegeXpress User
Survey Insights 2018

WRITE LONG-FORM CONTENT THAT SPEAKS TO THOSE KEYWORDS

The keywords you find during your research will spark a wave of content ideas. You'll start to think of potential questions and issues that your university can write about. Certain keywords will remind you of a campus event or a question that an admission counselor asked once. Write these questions down! They will form the basis of your blog post.

Writing blog content is easy. If you follow a simple blogging structure, you'll be able to pull together a coherent blog post that appeals to your target audience and follows blogging best practices.

What is this magic structure? It's simply storytelling—with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion that bring together a compelling narrative. With innovative messaging that is true to your institution's unique story, the combination of storytelling and SEO can make a powerful impact on your audience.

In the introduction, lay out the problem. What is the question or issue you are going to address in this blog? Make sure you state this in the first paragraph using your target keywords. Take the time to empathize with your reader—show them that you understand things from their perspective.

Then in the body of the blog comes the journey. Discuss the options for addressing the problem or question. Give some examples of other people or instances where this problem or question was addressed. In short: tell your story.

Finally, the conclusion brings everything to a resolution. Offer potential solutions to questions and most importantly, show the next steps! You might direct your readers to another blog post, a program page, or even an RFI form. It really depends on where in the funnel your blog post is targeting.

Always end your blog with a unique call to action (CTA). For example, if your blog was a student profile focusing on a Criminal Justice undergraduate student, you could end your post with something like this:

The Criminal Justice Program at Carnegie University allows Sam to develop his passion for social justice into a career with serious impact on society. If you're interested in studying Criminal Justice, check out our BS in Criminal Justice program today.

In that text, the final mention of "BS in Criminal Justice" would link to your program page, directing readers to the exact information they are looking for once they finish reading your blog post.

Featuring a blog as a key part of your website will give you a 434% better chance of being ranked highly on search engines.

HubSpot's State of Inbound 2018 Report

WEAVE KEYWORDS INTO YOUR CONTENT

After you write a long-form piece of content, you need to take certain steps to optimize it. Chances are, yours isn't the only piece of content on the internet targeting these keywords. But yours can be the leader—the most authoritative piece of content, the one that everyone clicks on.

One step you must take in order to have your content lead the pack on Google is to weave your keywords into your content. Keyword weaving is the process of including your target keywords in your content so it reads like natural speech and doesn't sound forced or inauthentic. This may sound complicated, but if you've already written a post inspired by keyword research, weaving keywords into your content should be a simple process.

The key is to make it sound conversational. Compare these two sentences:

The Communications major at Carnegie U inspires students to develop their passion for journalism into a lifetime of achievement. Visit our campus near Boston and discover all this degree can do for you.

The Communications major at Carnegie U is a leading Communications program near Boston. Visit our campus and discover our degree in Communications today.

Seems pretty obvious which one has artful keyword weaving and which is too heavy handed, right? When done correctly, keyword weaving alerts search engines to the topic of your content without making it obvious that you're using SEO tactics.

The second example uses something called “keyword stuffing,” which describes the process of oversaturating, or stuffing, your writing with keywords so that it sounds unnatural and robotic. Your audience will find this awkward and unpleasant to read, and search engines will penalize you for it.

Here is the incredible thing about Google bots: they can understand synonyms and context. So, if you're targeting “Communications majors near Boston,” you don't need to write that exact phrase in your content five times. You can write Communications majors...Campus near...Boston. You can switch out “major” for “degree” or “program” and even throw in related terms like “journalism,” “broadcasting,” or “media.”

So, how much keyword weaving is too much keyword weaving? A good rule of thumb is to use your target keyword once in the introduction, once in the conclusion, and at least once in the body. If your content starts to get long—over 1,000 words—you can use the target keyword more often.

“I enjoy reading current students' experiences. I can relate better and hear from someone who is getting the experience I might want to get as well.”

CollegeXpress User
Survey Insights 2018

CREATE KEYWORD-RICH HEADERS

Headers are the bold lines of text that break up your on-page content. They include the title at the top of the page and any subheaders that you place in the long-form content. Every post should have at least two headers: a title and a subheader immediately after the introduction. For better SEO impact, include more subheaders as relevant.

Headers and subheaders tell both your readers and search engines what the article is about. They provide an outline of the content. The title header should describe the main topic of the content, and subheaders should describe each of the supporting points. These headers form an outline that alerts Google bots to the general flow of your content. Headers also make it easier for readers to skim your long-form content and find the information that they are looking for. If you utilize headers the right way, your readers will be more engaged with your content.

How do you weave keywords into these headers? Your target keyword must be included in your main header or title. Then, as appropriate, you can put your target keyword or secondary keywords into the subheaders. It's okay to have headers without keywords in them. The most important things are having your target keyword in your title and relevant, helpful, descriptive subheaders as appropriate in your body content.

OPTIMIZE YOUR METADATA

In the SEO world, metadata refers to the title and description of your content that appears in the search engine results page (SERP).

Those little blue links and gray descriptions you often see in Google—you can control them! Most mainstream CMSs will have a space to edit the title tag and meta description of each page.

Video SEO for Higher Education | Carnegie Dartlet

<https://www.carnegiecomm.com/blog/video-seo-for-higher-education/> ▼

Aug 30, 2018 - Earlier this year, we talked about how **video** marketing is on the rise in **higher education**. More and more, prospective students are trying to get ...

This screenshot shows the metadata for a Carnegie blog post in the Google search engine results page (SERP). The blue text is the title tag, while the summary below it is the meta description.

Your title tag should include your target keyword and brand name. The character limit for a Google title is roughly 60 characters or 600 pixels, so you may need to shorten your blog title to the most utilitarian form in order to get it to appear correctly in Google.

An ideal title for a blog post could be:


*6 Things I Learned as a Communications
Major | Carnegie University*

In the SEO world,
metadata refers to the
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in the search engine
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It's important to include the brand name after a bar on the end of every title (i.e., | Carnegie University). You want to make sure you're grabbing branded search as well as non-branded search traffic!

The meta description should be 160 characters or fewer, including at least your target keyword and maybe a secondary keyword if it sounds natural. The goal is to describe your post and entice someone looking at the Google search results to click on your link. That's why it's always a good idea to end your meta description with a call to action such as "learn more" or "request more info now."

Use your institution's unique personality to create titles and descriptions that stand out from the crowd. Bring your perspective to a problem and position yourself as a leader in the industry. The metadata is your first impression, so make it strong.



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unique personality
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PUBLISH AND SHARE

Once you've completed all these steps, your post is ready to publish! But you aren't done. It can take search engines weeks or even months to crawl your new content and position it at the top of the results.

You can speed up this process using the free tool Google Search Console. If your website doesn't have a property yet, it is very easy to set up. Make sure you have a Google Search Console property for each version of your site—http, https, www, and non-www (or whichever selection of those your site has). Ideally, your website would only live under one main instance of these to avoid duplication.

If you want more information about setting up your Search Console, [you can find that here](#).

Once your website is verified, you have the ability to submit a URL to Google for inspection and to request indexing. Doing this can signal to Google that you've updated the content or even added new content to your website and can increase the rate at which your SEO results come rolling in.

From there, you wait for Google to send their bots to crawl your site and pull your new blog post into the organic search results.

SHARE YOUR BLOG CONTENT ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA ORGANICALLY

In the meantime, you can get the word out about your post by sharing it on social media. Where you choose to share your blog post depends on which social media channels you use. As a general best practice, it's best to only focus on the social media channels that you have the time and energy to maintain. So instead of having accounts on every social media channel, focus on having a really active presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or whatever channels work for your brand.

Sharing a post on Facebook and Twitter will earn the most clicks per share. Draft a post that teases the content of the blog without giving it all away. The goal of a social media post is to convince people to click on your link.

For example, if you want to share a post titled “6 Things I Learned as a Communications Major,” you could publish a playful Facebook post that says:

*We are all about this interview with our Communications alumna Jane Doe!
What do you think?*

Or if you have a more formal brand voice on social, something like:

*Curious about a major in Communications? Alumna Jane Doe shares
how her experience at Carnegie U shaped her future career. Read more
now on our blog.*

Blog posts are a great way to create clickable content to share on all your social channels. If you regularly struggle to know what to post on social media, creating one blog post a week gives you something to share and shows your audience more about your institutional identity.

The most important thing you can do is share your post and share it widely!


Blog posts are a great way to create clickable content to share on all your social channels. If you regularly struggle to know what to post on social media, creating one blog post a week gives you something to share and shows your audience more about your institutional identity.

GET HELP WITH BLOGGING AND CONTENT STRATEGY FROM THE EXPERTS AT CARNEGIE

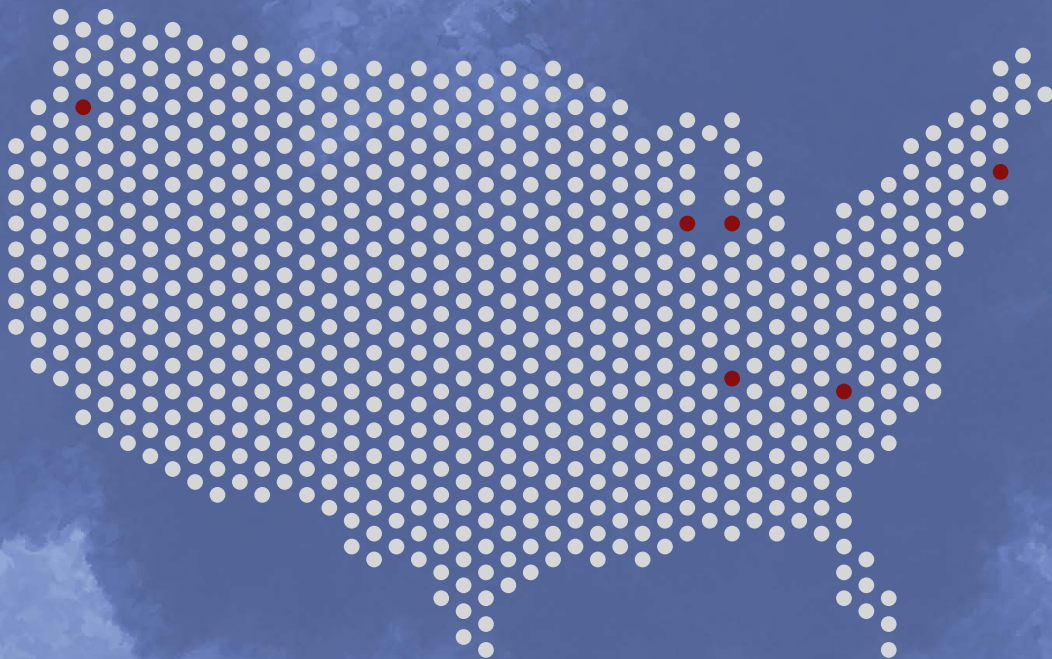
Today, most universities are not using SEO in their blogs, or worse—not blogging at all! There is a huge opportunity to get to this relatively untouched market before the competition. Blogs and news articles can target unique keywords that otherwise don't make sense on regular program or admission pages.

If you utilize SEO and content marketing, your institution could make it to the first page of Google; start drawing in unique, qualified traffic; and build up your brand's reputation organically.

To discuss how you could tap into this underutilized strategy and start using SEO and content marketing to attract prospective students, reach out to Carnegie. We have a team of SEO specialists and content marketers with a combination of technical knowledge, writing prowess, and higher ed-specific insight that can help you launch your blogging strategy. [Reach out to us today.](#)



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