



Unlock SEO Growth— How Strategic Keyword Research Drives Results

*A Practical Guide to Finding & Targeting
the Right Keywords for Your Audience*

By [MKG Marketing](#)

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Overview—

Keyword research is the foundation of any successful digital marketing strategy. It's not just about ranking on Google—it's about understanding your audience, their challenges, and how they search for solutions.

In today's competitive landscape, guessing what your customers are looking for is no longer an option. Strategic keyword research ensures that your content, website, and messaging align with real search intent, driving not just traffic, but the **right** traffic.

By identifying the keywords that matter, businesses can attract high-intent visitors, increase conversions, and position themselves as industry leaders. In this guide, we'll walk you through the **why, how, and what's next** with keyword research, equipping you with the tools to build a scalable, results-driven SEO strategy.





Overview— Before You Get Started

Before you dive into keyword research, you need to deeply understand your buyer. [On Tea Time with Tech Marketing Leaders](#), we've seen a growing trend: you can't launch and figure out product-market fit on the fly anymore. We live in a world where thoughtful planning and research must come first.



If you don't have a clear grasp of who is actually searching for a solution to the problem you solve, then keyword research becomes an exercise in guesswork. Instead, slow down, ask the right questions, and ensure you have buyer clarity before moving forward.



Overview— Why Keyword Research Matters



At its core, keyword research is about **understanding your audience and how they think**.

People don't just search for products or services—they search for solutions to problems. The words they type into Google reveal their intent, whether they're looking for information, comparing options, or ready to buy. By analyzing keyword intent, you can align your content strategy to meet potential customers exactly where they are in their journey.

This ensures that your website attracts visitors who are **actively looking for what you offer**, rather than just generating passive traffic with little chance of conversion.

Competitive Advantage

The digital marketplace is crowded, and simply having a great product or service isn't enough—you need to ensure **your brand is discoverable**. Competitor websites may be already ranking for valuable search terms, and without a keyword strategy, you risk falling behind.

Effective keyword research allows you to **identify gaps in the market**, target niche opportunities, and optimize your content to outperform competitors.

Whether it's ranking for underutilized long-tail keywords or improving on existing content, a well-researched strategy ensures you stay ahead in search rankings and maintain visibility in your industry.

Maximizing ROI

Investing in marketing without keyword research is like throwing darts in the dark.

Without understanding what your audience is searching for, you risk **wasting budget and resources** on content that doesn't drive real business results.

By focusing on high-impact, intent-driven keywords, you ensure that your marketing efforts attract **qualified leads**—people who are more likely to engage, convert, and become long-term customers.

A data-backed keyword strategy means every piece of content, ad campaign, or SEO effort is working **smarter, not harder**, delivering measurable business value.

Long-Term SEO Success

SEO isn't a one-time effort—it's a **long-term strategy** that requires adaptability.

Search trends evolve as industries change, new competitors emerge, and Google updates its algorithms.

A strong keyword research process helps future-proof your SEO efforts by **identifying patterns, emerging topics, and shifts in search behavior** before they happen.

This allows your brand to **stay relevant, rank consistently, and maintain authority** in your space, ensuring that your website continues to drive sustainable growth for years to come.

Our Standard Operating Procedure—

Step 1: Start with Data-Driven Insights

Before diving into keyword research, gather insights using a combination of **SEO tools and AI-powered analysis**. This ensures your strategy is based on **real search behavior** and **aligned with audience needs** rather than assumptions.

Tools to Use:

- **Google Search Console** – Analyze existing search terms bringing traffic to your site.
- **Ahrefs, SEMrush, or Moz** – Identify keyword opportunities, search volume, and competition.
- **Google Trends** – Spot rising search trends and seasonal shifts.
- **ChatGPT & Other GenAI Tools** – Brainstorm keyword variations, analyze search intent, and generate content ideas tailored to your audience.

 **Pro Tip: Prioritize low-competition, high-intent keywords over broad, high-volume terms to rank faster.**

Our Standard Operating Procedure—

Step 1: Start with Data-Driven Insights

How to Do It

1. **Audit your current keywords** – Look at what your site is already ranking for and identify strengths.
 - a. **Go to Google Search Console** > Performance > Search Results.
 - b. Filter by queries and pages to see which keywords drive traffic.
 - c. Note high-ranking keywords and underperforming ones for improvement.
2. **Find keyword opportunities** – Use SEO tools to find related keywords with high potential.
 - a. **In SEMrush:** Navigate to **Keyword Magic Tool** and enter a seed keyword.
 - b. Filter by **Search Volume, Keyword Difficulty (KD), and Intent**.
 - c. Select relevant keywords and **add them to a Keyword List**.
3. **Use AI to expand keyword possibilities** – Ask ChatGPT to generate **long-tail variations, related terms, and niche topics**.
 - a. Example: *“Generate long-tail keywords for ‘zero-trust security’ with a mix of informational and transactional intent.”*
 - b. Compare AI-generated keywords with SEMrush suggestions to spot unique opportunities.
4. **Validate keyword intent** – Use AI to check how well a keyword aligns with **searcher intent and ideal customer profiles**.
 - a. Enter a keyword in **Google Search** and analyze top-ranking pages.
 - b. Use ChatGPT: *“What search intent aligns with the keyword ‘endpoint security framework’?”*
 - c. Ensure the keyword matches the type of content you plan to create.
5. **Export keyword data** – Gather search volume, keyword difficulty, and click-through rates.
 - a. In **SEMrush**, go to **Keyword Manager** and select your saved list.
 - b. Click **Export** to download a CSV file for deeper analysis and content planning.

Our Standard Operating Procedure—



Step 2: Organize Keywords into Topic Clusters

Search engines favor **comprehensive content**, so grouping related keywords into **topic clusters** boosts rankings. Instead of targeting individual keywords, think **themes**.

How to Do It:

1. **Identify Core Topics** – Define the 3–5 primary themes your business should rank for.
 - a. **Go to SEMrush’s Keyword Manager** and analyze keyword groupings.
 - b. Review competitors' core ranking topics in **Organic Research**.
 - c. Ensure topics align with your business’s value proposition and audience needs.
2. **Find Supporting Keywords** – Use SEO tools and AI for deeper keyword variations.
 - a. **In Ahrefs:** Use “Matching Terms” and “Related Terms” filters.
 - b. **Ask ChatGPT:** “*What are niche keyword variations for [your core topic]?*”
 - c. Cross-check against SEMrush’s **Keyword Overview** for search volume and difficulty.
3. **Map Content to Clusters** – Assign blog posts, landing pages, and resources to each core topic.
 - a. **In SEMrush:** Navigate to **Site Audit > Pages** to list existing content.
 - b. Align identified keywords with relevant pages in **Keyword Strategy Builder**.
 - c. If a keyword has no matching content, flag it for a **new page or blog post**.
4. **Validate with AI** – Use AI to refine keyword targeting and ensure alignment with search behavior.
 - a. Ask ChatGPT: “*How would a [buyer persona] search for [your topic]?*”
 - b. Compare AI-suggested queries with **People Also Ask (Google SERP feature)**.
 - c. Adjust keyword mapping based on **intent validation from AI and search results**.

🎯 **Example:** If your core topic is “Zero-Trust Security,” related subtopics might be:

- “Zero-trust security framework”
- “Zero-trust vs. traditional network security”
- “Best tools for implementing zero-trust”
- “Common challenges in zero-trust adoption” (AI-generated insight)

🔥 **Pro Tip:** This approach strengthens **domain authority** by signaling expertise to search engines.

Our Standard Operating Procedure—

Step 3: Focus on User Intent, Not Just Keywords

A keyword is only valuable if it aligns with **what the searcher actually wants**.

Understanding **search intent** helps optimize content for engagement, not just rankings.

How to Do It:

1. **Determine Business Goals:** Are you prioritizing **brand awareness** or **capturing high-intent users**?
 - **For Brand Awareness (TOFU)** – Focus on **Informational** queries:
 - i. "What is endpoint security?" → Blog content.
 - **For Lead Generation & Conversion (MOFU & BOFU)** – Focus on **Navigational & Transactional** queries:
 - i. "Best zero-trust providers" → Comparison page
 - ii. "Buy enterprise firewall solution" → Product page

2. **Identify & Prioritize Landing Pages:** Ensure each keyword aligns with an existing or planned landing page.
 - **In SEMrush:** Navigate to **Keyword Manager** and filter by **Intent**.
 - **Match each keyword** with an existing page using **Site Audit > Pages**.
 - **If no page exists**, flag it for content creation in a **Content Calendar** or **SEO Roadmap**.
 - Assign a **priority level** based on **business goals** (e.g., high-intent transactional pages first).

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How to Do It Continued —

1. **Check SERP Results to Validate Keyword Fit:**
 - **Google the keyword** and analyze the **top-ranking pages**.
 - If the top results **don't match** your intended page type, reconsider the keyword.
 - Compare **Google's 'People Also Ask' and Related Searches** for user expectations.
2. **Use AI to Validate Intent & Optimize Keyword Targeting:**
 - Ask ChatGPT: *"What type of content best satisfies 'zero-trust security framework'?"*
 - Adjust keyword targeting to **align with searcher needs and content format**.
3. **Refine for Account-Based Marketing (ABM) & Persona-Specific Queries:**
 - **CIOs & Executives:** Likely searching for "strategic benefits of zero-trust security" → Whitepaper or report.
 - **Security Engineers:** More technical searches like "zero-trust implementation best practices" → Technical blog or case study.
 - **Use AI:** *"How do different job titles search for zero-trust security?"* to refine targeting.

 **Pro Tip:** Optimize for both **SEO & conversions** by matching keywords with the right type of content.

A **CIO** and a **Security Engineer** have different priorities, responsibilities, and decision-making processes when searching for cloud security solutions. Their search queries, evaluation criteria, and pain points will differ significantly. Here's how each might approach their search:

1. CIO (Chief Information Officer)

Focus: Business impact, ROI, compliance, strategic alignment

Search Behavior:

- Broader, high-level searches related to **business outcomes, compliance, and risk management**.
- Likely to include terms like **"enterprise cloud security platforms," "cloud security compliance solutions,"** or **"best cloud security for hybrid environments."**
- Might look for **industry reports, analyst reviews (Gartner, Forrester), and case studies** from companies with similar challenges.
- Interested in **integration with existing IT infrastructure** and potential cost savings.

Common Search Queries:

- "Top cloud security solutions for enterprises 2025"
- "How to reduce cloud security risk at scale"
- "Cloud security compliance for financial services/healthcare"
- "Gartner Magic Quadrant for Cloud Security"
- "ROI of cloud security investments"

Decision Factors:

- **Scalability** – Can the solution support company growth?
- **Compliance & Regulations** – Does it meet industry requirements (GDPR, HIPAA, SOC 2, etc.)?
- **Integration** – Does it work with existing security tools (SIEM, IAM, DevSecOps pipelines)?
- **Cost & ROI** – Does it justify the investment over time?
- **Vendor Reputation** – Does the provider have a solid track record?

2. Security Engineer

Focus: Technical capabilities, hands-on security measures, implementation details

Search Behavior:

- More **technical, hands-on** queries about specific security features and implementations.
- Likely to include terms like **"zero trust architecture," "cloud workload protection," "API security,"** or **"how to secure AWS workloads."**
- May visit **Reddit, GitHub, security blogs, and technical documentation** for in-depth insights.
- Interested in **open-source security tools, attack vectors, and automation**.

Common Search Queries:

- "Best cloud security tools for DevSecOps"
- "Cloud security best practices for AWS/Azure/GCP"
- "How to prevent misconfigurations in cloud security"
- "SIEM vs XDR vs CNAPP – which is best?"
- "Cloud security automation with Terraform"
- "Best WAF solutions for API security"

Decision Factors:

- **Detection & Response** – How well does it identify and mitigate threats?
- **Ease of Implementation** – Can it be deployed quickly without disrupting operations?
- **Integration with DevOps** – Does it support Infrastructure-as-Code (IaC), CI/CD pipelines, and automated security policies?
- **Customization & API Access** – Can it be fine-tuned to fit internal security needs?
- **Performance Impact** – Does it slow down applications or increase latency?

Key Differences in Approach

Would you like me to refine this based on a specific type of cloud security solution?

Direct example from ChatGPT to validate search behavior based on a leadership vs end user.

Case Study: Illumio's SEO Growth with MKG Marketing



Illumio, a leader in Zero Trust Segmentation, engaged MKG Marketing to overcome a decline in organic search traffic and improve website performance. Through our strategic, data-driven SEO approach, we helped them achieve triple-digit growth in key metrics in just one year.

The Challenge

Illumio was experiencing a decline in organic search performance, which directly impacted their inbound traffic and engagement. Despite having high-quality content and a strong brand presence, their website was not capturing the full potential of organic search opportunities.



Their main challenges included:

- A noticeable drop in organic sessions and engagement rates.
- Existing content that wasn't fully optimized for search intent.
- A need for scalable, enterprise-level SEO strategies that aligned with their marketing goals.

Illumio needed an SEO partner that understood the complexities of B2B enterprise marketing and could execute a plan to reverse the traffic decline—without requiring an extensive website overhaul.

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The Strategy

MKG Marketing developed an SEO optimization strategy that focused on enhancing existing content rather than creating entirely new pages. This allowed for a faster, more efficient turnaround while maximizing the value of Illumio's existing content assets.

Our approach included:

- **Search intent-aligned keyword optimization** – Ensuring the right keywords matched user expectations and industry trends.
- **On-Page Enhancements** – Improving metadata, headers, and internal linking structures to boost discoverability.
- **Content Refinement** – Optimizing copy, readability, and engagement factors to align with Google's ranking algorithms.

Using our proprietary On-Page Recommendation (OPR) Checklist, we systematically optimized 55 high-priority pages across Illumio's website, including:

- Homepage
- Products section
- Solutions section
- Customers section
- Partners section
- Blog section

This structured, page-level approach ensured that every optimized page contributed to the overall goal: boosting organic search performance, increasing engagement, and driving new users to Illumio's website.



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The Results

Within just 12 months, MKG's SEO strategy delivered massive improvements in organic search performance, leading to:

Organic Traffic Growth (Jan 2025 vs. Jan 2024)

- Total Sessions: 36,211 (+105% YoY)
- Engaged Sessions: 19,391 (+104% YoY)
- Total Users: 19,796 (+67% YoY)
- New Users: 16,701 (+64% YoY)

These results illustrate how targeted on-page SEO optimization can double organic traffic and significantly improve user engagement—without requiring a full website redesign.



"MKG Marketing consistently delivers high-quality work. The team is invested in fostering strong connections and adds a familiar aspect to their workplace relationships. Honesty, professionalism, and digital expertise set them apart from other SEO partners."

~ Dan Santos | Head of Global Demand & Growth MKTG at Illumio

What's Next?

Turning Keywords into Action

Keyword research is just the beginning. Now, it's time to **implement your findings**:

- ✓ **Optimize existing pages** based on keyword insights.
- ✓ **Plan new content** around topic clusters.
- ✓ **Monitor rankings & adjust** as trends shift.

📌 **Coming Next:** Our guide on **on-page SEO recommendations** will walk you through optimizing your content for **maximum impact**.





Thank You



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