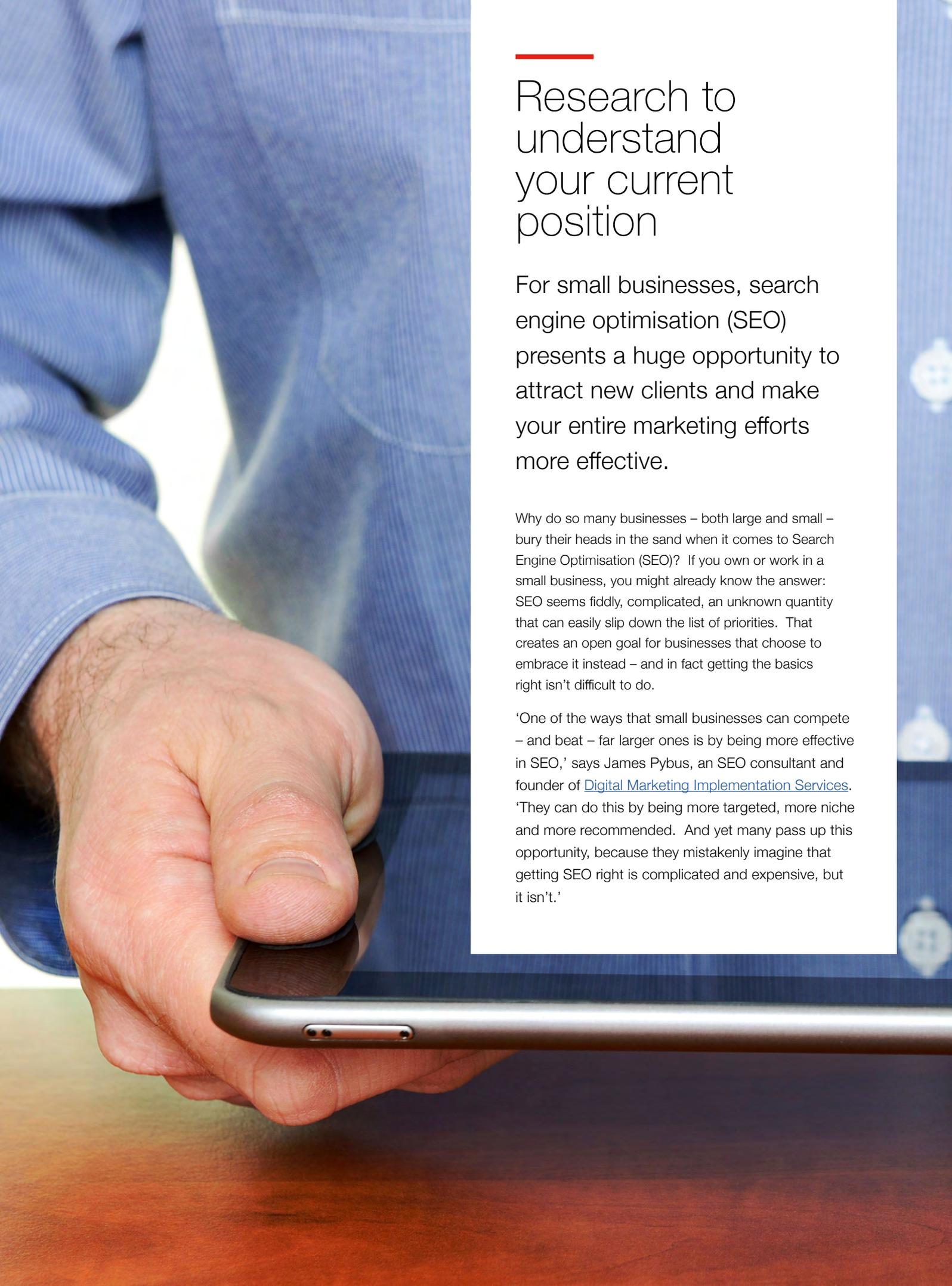




SEO digital marketing guide
for SMEs - Part one

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a smartphone. The person is wearing a blue, vertically striped suit jacket. The background is a blurred office setting with a wooden desk in the foreground.

Research to understand your current position

For small businesses, search engine optimisation (SEO) presents a huge opportunity to attract new clients and make your entire marketing efforts more effective.

Why do so many businesses – both large and small – bury their heads in the sand when it comes to Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)? If you own or work in a small business, you might already know the answer: SEO seems fiddly, complicated, an unknown quantity that can easily slip down the list of priorities. That creates an open goal for businesses that choose to embrace it instead – and in fact getting the basics right isn't difficult to do.

'One of the ways that small businesses can compete – and beat – far larger ones is by being more effective in SEO,' says James Pybus, an SEO consultant and founder of [Digital Marketing Implementation Services](#). 'They can do this by being more targeted, more niche and more recommended. And yet many pass up this opportunity, because they mistakenly imagine that getting SEO right is complicated and expensive, but it isn't.'

Areas to target

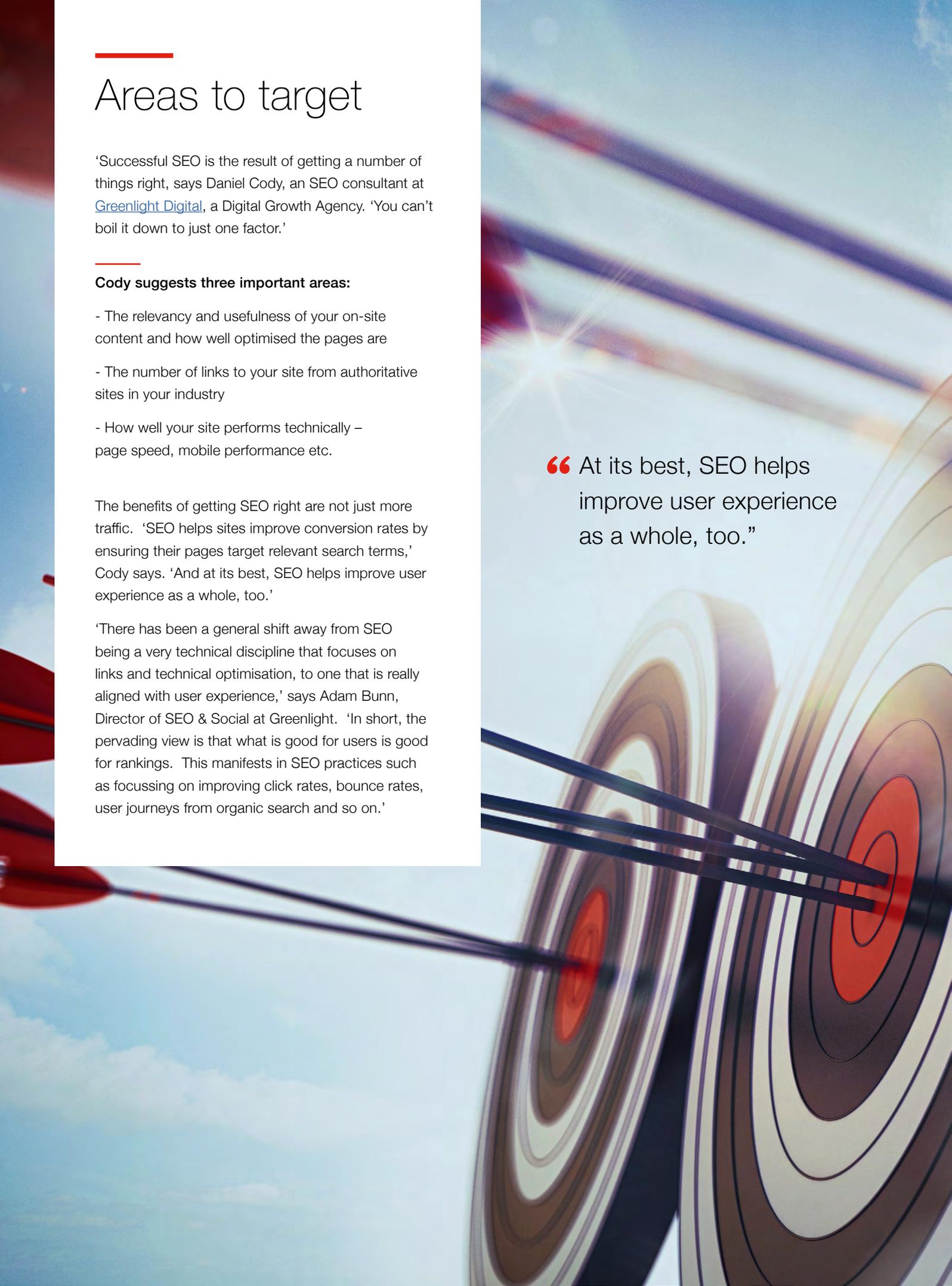
'Successful SEO is the result of getting a number of things right, says Daniel Cody, an SEO consultant at [Greenlight Digital](#), a Digital Growth Agency. 'You can't boil it down to just one factor.'

Cody suggests three important areas:

- The relevancy and usefulness of your on-site content and how well optimised the pages are
- The number of links to your site from authoritative sites in your industry
- How well your site performs technically – page speed, mobile performance etc.

The benefits of getting SEO right are not just more traffic. 'SEO helps sites improve conversion rates by ensuring their pages target relevant search terms,' Cody says. 'And at its best, SEO helps improve user experience as a whole, too.'

'There has been a general shift away from SEO being a very technical discipline that focuses on links and technical optimisation, to one that is really aligned with user experience,' says Adam Bunn, Director of SEO & Social at Greenlight. 'In short, the pervading view is that what is good for users is good for rankings. This manifests in SEO practices such as focussing on improving click rates, bounce rates, user journeys from organic search and so on.'



“ At its best, SEO helps improve user experience as a whole, too.”

Anna Fiorentini

Founder of London-based dance and acting school Stage & the City

'I set up Stage & the City three years ago to create acting and singing classes for adults. It's aimed at people who want to have fun after work in performing arts classes while learning new skills for personal or career development, such as public speaking and leadership. All profits go towards funding the Fiorentini Foundation, which helps underprivileged children to take part in performing arts classes.

SEO is very important for us, but I know it will take time to build up to being on the first or second pages of Google. Our students seem to love our classes and they are very willing to spread the word. But in order to expand, SEO is vital too.

The kinds of keywords that we target are things like "Acting classes for adults London" and "Musical theatre classes London". At the moment, what stops us doing more SEO is time. I am currently looking into getting investment so that I can expand on my social media and SEO efforts. I know we could really be rocking it if we were on the first page of Google but the guidelines on how to do this do seem to change quite a bit, so it seems like a full-time job.

We have started to blog a bit more and whenever anything is written for the website we make sure our target keywords are used. It is always fun to think of new things to blog about. For example, last week I had an idea to start a blog called "Don't give up the day job..." where we would interview one or two of our students a month to find out what they did in their day jobs. I know we have a variety of adults that come including an air steward, bankers, lawyers, primary school teachers, doctors, taxi drivers etc. This would kill two birds with one stone: show potential students that other students are "normal" and not "highly theatrical and daunting" - and the increased blogging helps with SEO.

I think building up your SEO is a slow process. In the meantime we have done things to increase our Twitter, Instagram and Facebook followers and I am always thinking of incentives for current students to spread the word.'

www.stageandthecity.com



“ SEO is very important for us, but I know it will take time to build up to being on the first or second pages of Google.”

Phil Watson

Freelance Wedding Photographer and Graphic Designer

'I'm a wedding photographer living in London, so if I target my SEO as 'wedding photographer London' I will be at the bottom of a very long list. This means that I have had to target my SEO to my specific area of London, which is Crystal Palace.

All of my friends in wedding photography place great importance on SEO. It's such a crowded market that ignoring SEO would be pretty short-sighted. One of my friends has launched five separate websites to target individual towns in his catchment area. Each site is targeted at a specific town, so his overall chances of potential consumers finding him are greatly improved.

My site is designed using WordPress, so I employed the free Yoast plugin for SEO. This allows you to add keywords for each page, along with other useful tools to boost your rankings. I also registered my site with Google and worked through all the steps on Google Search Console, which is a must for effective SEO.

Another great Google tool is the free business listing they provide. You can use this to add a photo of yourself, the location and hours of your business and even reviews from customers. The benefit is that it puts you on the first page of your targeted business listing, which Google references from its own first page.

There are definitely more ways that I could improve my SEO, such as by joining wedding directories – because they rank highly in SEO themselves. The downside of this is the cost of listing and the question of whether they will translate into bookings.

www.philwatsonweddings.com



“ My site is designed using WordPress, so I employed the free Yoast plugin for SEO. This allows you to add keywords for each page, along with other useful tools to boost your rankings.”

So where do you begin?

1. The first thing to do is to actually research the search terms that you want to target to enable people to find you.
2. From there, it's about optimising your pages to make them relevant for the keywords that you want to target.
3. Next, build trusted links – both from internal pages and from other websites.
4. At the same time, make sure your domain and server are optimised too.

By following these steps, you will be able to set yourself on the path to helping more of your target audience discover what your business can offer them.

How to do the keyword research

When someone searches in Google, they type words into the search query. Google then tries to find websites that it deems most relevant to the search, by finding matches between the words in the query and the content on the site. Rather than leaving this to chance, you can proactively affect what Google finds – effectively **signalling to Google what the different pages of your site can offer. It's the equivalent of putting up a menu outside a restaurant.**

Finding suitable keywords that you want to target is critical for SEO success.

A keyword is a particular word – or phrase – that someone looking for a specific product/service might type into search engines to find your business. To make sure that you are directing relevant 'buying' traffic to your website, your keywords need to be carefully researched and targeted.

'A mistake a lot of companies make is to guess the search terms that they think people are searching for,' Pybus continues. 'It is of course far better to make informed decisions on what keywords to target. That's why doing research online, with tools such as Google Keyword Planner, is vital.'

'There is no point using a keyword that is unrelated to your business just because lots of people search for it,' Pybus says. 'This would result in a high bounce rate when people get to your website and find that it's completely unrelated to what they are actually looking for; what's more, if your website doesn't actually do what the keywords you choose suggest it does, your 'trustworthiness' rating (calculated by search engines) may reduce and you could see a drop in your Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) rankings.'

“The first thing to do to make sure that your website is visible to an appropriate audience is to get your keyword research right,’ Pybus says. ‘But this is where so many companies get it wrong.”



Choosing keywords

How do you choose which keywords to target?

The ideal method combines:

- common sense thinking
- offline in-person research
- analytic tools like the [Google Keyword Planner](#)

This tool enables you to research the number of people actually searching for a specific keyword and compare that to the number of people searching for similar terms.

Before you use the Keyword Planner, start with an offline brainstorm, on paper, of what you would search for, suggests Bunn. 'Ask friends, and ideally customers too, what they would search for so that you are not restricted to your own thought process.'

Next, take the ideas from your offline research and put these into the Keyword Planner. In order to get access to more accurate data within the Keyword Planner, you may need to set up an Adwords account with Google. (However, you don't need to spend money, just have the account set up).

'When you are selecting keywords, try to avoid jargon or technical language unless your customers have a detailed understanding of these specific terms,' Pybus advises. **'Generally I would look for keywords that are less than 1000 searches and have competition medium or low.'**

Bunn recommends using not just the Google Keyword Planner but other free-to-use tools too, such as [Keyword Tool](#) and [Übersuggest](#). There's also the quirky [Answer The Public](#), which visually clusters questions people ask around a particular keyword.

Another important keyword research tip is to be specific. 'If your business is a Bed & Breakfast in Aylesbury, you need to make sure you specify this,' says Pybus. 'If you leave out 'Aylesbury' you will have people looking for a Bed & Breakfast in Sweden or Glasgow or Birmingham - clicking through to your website, and probably clicking straight back off again, as your product or service isn't what they are looking for.'

Keyword research will uncover whether more people search for 'B&B' than 'Bed and Breakfast' - and you can of course target both terms. **Make your keywords location specific or more tailored to your particular customers.** 'You should see improved results in terms of sales/ conversions from your website as you are appealing to a narrower but more relevant audience.'



Creating keyword lists

Break your keywords into different classifications, such as commercial keywords for your main pages, and informational keywords for your blog, says Bunn. 'You might do it by commercial value, thinking about products that are higher value for you. There's no limit to the ways that you can value keywords. If you have a small keyword set, you might not need to classify, but if you have lots of items you'll want ways of dividing the data.'



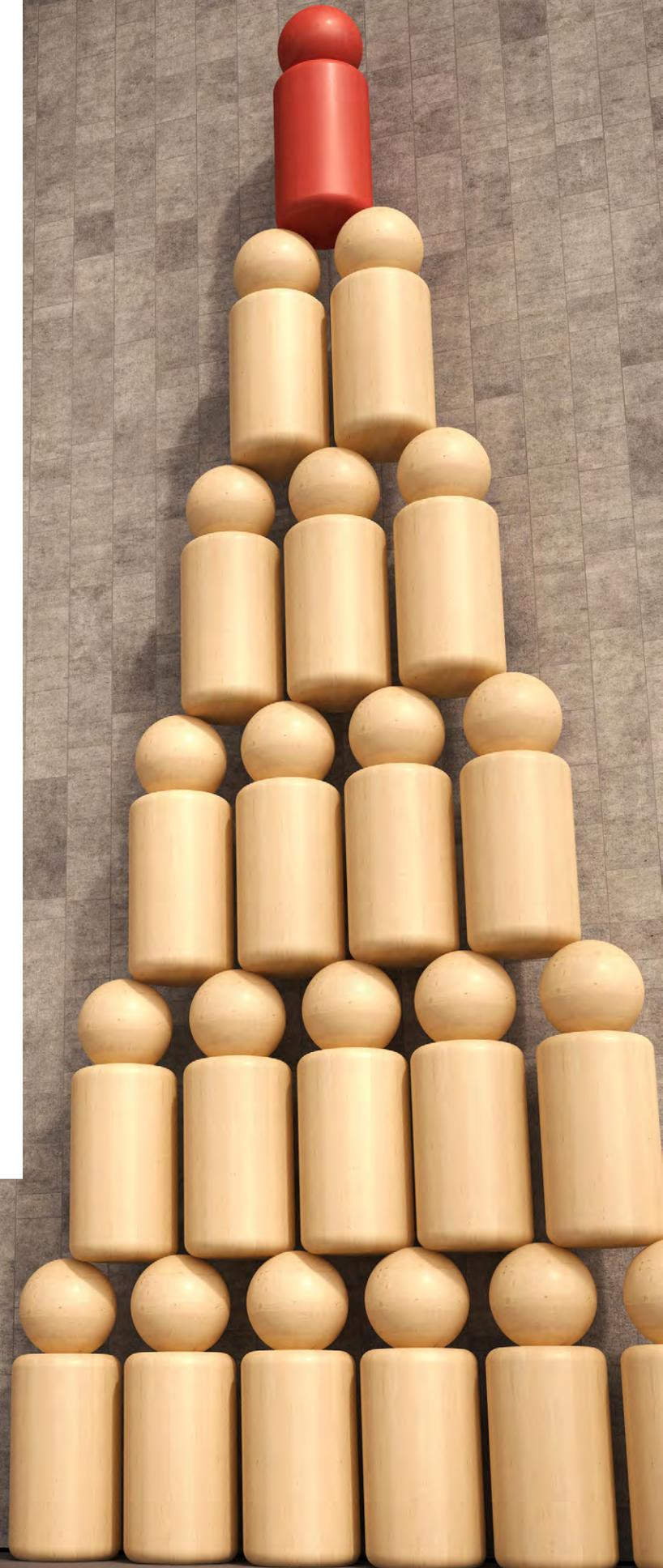
How to understand and measure where you are currently for SEO

If you are going to spend time and resources on SEO, it's sensible to measure where you rank on keyword terms in search engine results pages (SERPs), before you begin the process of optimising. This way you'll be able to assess and measure any changes.

'Once you've done the keyword research, check if your site is ranking for search terms that are relevant to your business,' says Cody. 'And most importantly, when searchers arrive at your site, are they finding what they want? Are they converting? Local performance can be particularly important too. Are searchers finding your business when they search for a service in their local area?'

As well as checking the results by simply typing keyword searches into Google, a useful tool is the [SERPs rank checker](#).

When checking search terms, keep your end goals in sight. 'As far as primary metrics go there is no substitute for organic visibility, traffic and goal conversion,' Bunn says. 'Looking more holistically, your SEO efforts should be improving usability and brand awareness, so you might want to measure those too. Bounce rates, brand sentiment, brand search demand and so on should form part of the reporting suite for any business committed to SEO.'





Further Resources

Google Keyword Planner

<https://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner>

Keyword Tool

www.keywordtool.io

Answer The Public

www.answerthepublic.com

Übersuggest

www.ubersuggest.io

SERPs Rank Checker

www.serps.com/tools/rank-checker

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