**Communications
Building Blocks**

Smith
Goodfellow
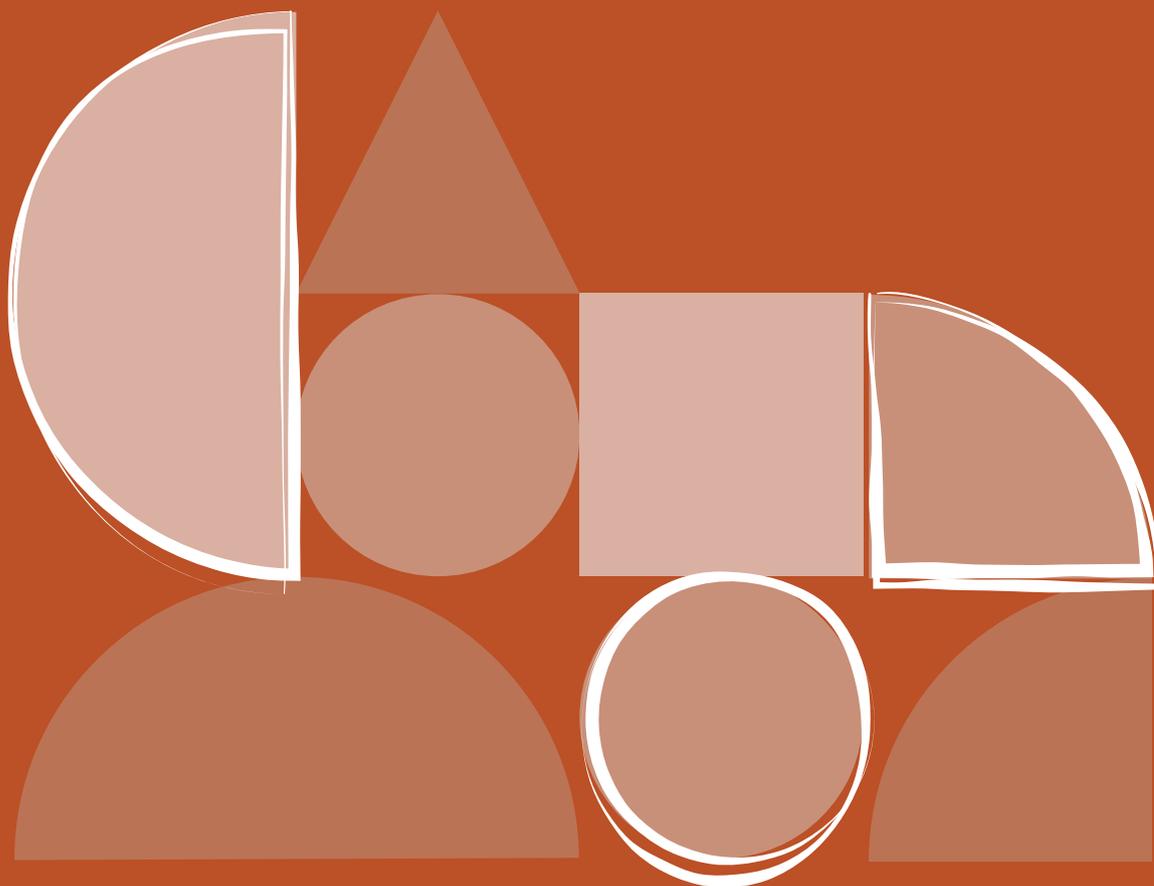
Beginner's Guide to Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

SEO is the practice of increasing the quality and quantity of traffic to your site by making it appear nearer the top of the page in non-paid (or "organic") search engine results for relevant queries. In this guide, we'll cover some SEO basics to point you in the right direction.

In this guide we will explore:

1. **What is SEO?**
2. **Giving your website an SEO health check**
3. **Keyword research**
4. **SEO planning**
5. **Optimising different types of content**
6. **Evaluation**

What is SEO?

This is the process of making the most effective use of your website to ensure the highest volume of quality traffic or conversions resulting from an online search.

In the UK, Google is the primary search engine, and will therefore be our main focus within this guide. If you plan to develop a strategy for an international audience, or if you believe your target audience uses other search engines (eg. Bing and Ecosia or regionally specific ones like Baidu in China and Yandex in Russia), you may need to look into how these avenues differ to Google so that you're optimising for the right market.

In order to create the best possible platform for your business, you need to first understand what you're optimising for. This guide talks about search engines but we should always first optimise for humans. Search engines are constantly working to understand what users want and need so, as machine learning improves to better understand context and intent, this will get closer and closer to presenting the most accurate and relevant results for those searching, as they work to emulate people.

SEO is not a quick and easy job. Whilst it shouldn't be an overly complex task for those with an analytical mindset, if you are planning to embark on this on your own, it will require you to have a decent grasp of website maintenance (content, structure, and some basic backend work), Google Analytics (or other similar analytical tools), and marketing strategy. You must be prepared to put in the effort and time, if you want to see the results your business needs.

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If you plan to employ an SEO expert to do this for you, avoid companies that claim they can guarantee high rankings in short periods of time. This is likely a scam! No business can promise this unless they intend to buy traffic and backlinks, which will negatively impact your website in the long-term, as search engines penalise those who do this and it takes a long time to rectify. This practice is different to using Adwords which can be a useful tool to use alongside improving SEO.
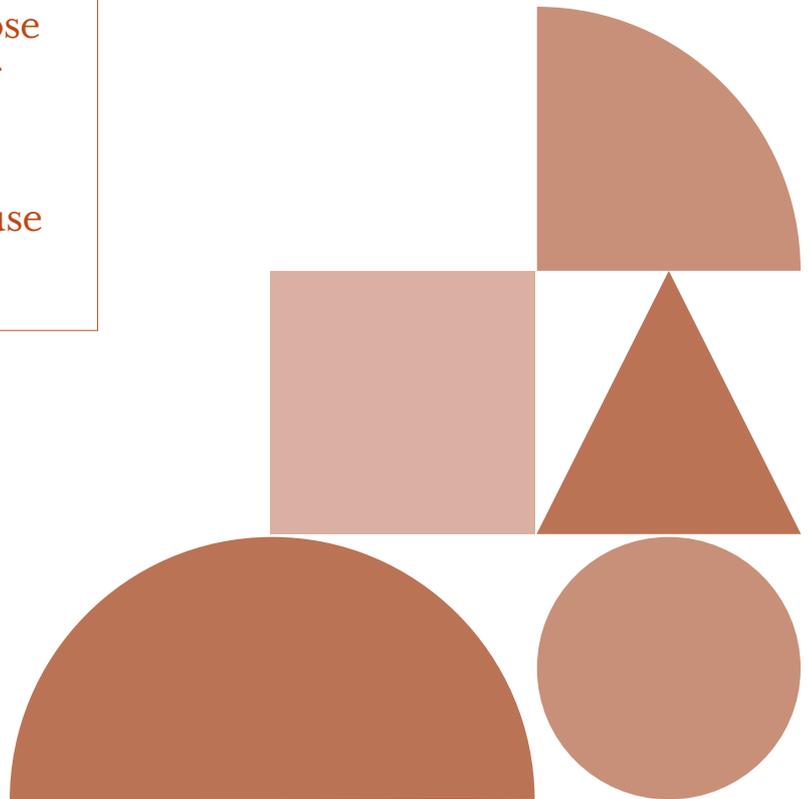
Giving your website
an SEO health check

Before you start trying to get new visitors to your site, it's important to take a look at how it is currently performing. This will help you to understand what it is doing well, and where there are areas for improvement.

There is a vast array of tools available to help you carry out an SEO health check, some costing £100 or more per month. In most cases, however, you can do this effectively with two completely free tools from Google: Google Analytics and Google Search Console.

By following the simple set-up guides, you can quickly get these up and running on your site and start collecting real-time information about how people are using your site.

Google Analytics
When you first log-in to Google Analytics it can be a little daunting to see the sheer range of metrics it offers along the left-hand panel, from the location and demographics of visitors to loading speeds for each individual page.

There's a lot to familiarise yourself with and we would strongly encourage you to spend some time getting used to the platform and exploring the wealth of free training Google provides.
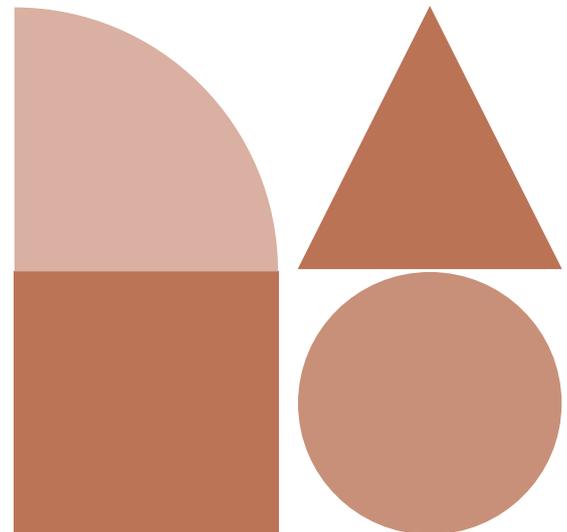
For the purpose of this guide, we'll take a look at two quick metrics:

Acquisition

From your Google Analytics homepage, select **Acquisition** and then **Overview**. Here you'll see a quick breakdown of the different methods visitors are using to find your site. **Organic Search** traffic is the metric we're most interested in here. These are the visitors that are landing on your site from search engines (whether via text or images). In most cases, the traffic under this term will be much higher than other sources such as **Social**, **Paid Search** or **Direct** (people who've reached your site by typing in the web URL). If it isn't, that suggests there is work to be done!

Make a note of the figures appearing as this will be useful in monitoring the impact of your SEO improvement work.

Landing Pages

Select **Behaviour**, **Site Content** then **Landing Pages**. These are the pages visitors initially reach (land on) when browsing your site. This includes all traffic so to focus on just the organic results click the **All Users** button with a blue circle next to it beneath the **Landing Pages** title. From the box that appears untick the **All Users** checkbox then scroll down, tick the box next to **Organic Search** then click **Apply**.

You can now browse through your most popular landing pages. Often your home page will be near the top but some results may surprise you. For example, you may spot your legal notice is near the top of the search results or that a key page has virtually no traffic. Make a note of any discrepancies or areas for improvement.

To try and understand why users are landing on these pages it is a good idea to switch over to [Google Search Console](#).

Google Search Console
As with Google Analytics, Search Console has all sorts of useful tools but for now we'll just be looking at the **Performance** tool.

By selecting this from the left-hand menu you will be shown a chart with the search terms that people are using to find your site, along with the number of clicks and impressions for each. From the boxes above the line graph, select **Average position**. You will now be able to see an additional column in the table showing on average what position your site appeared in organic searches on Google. For example, if a term has a position of 3.1 this means it was typically the third search result users saw.

Keep in mind that Google is increasingly localising search results so the results a user in Anglesey gets to a term will likely be quite different from what a user in London sees. By taking an average, Google helps to level out these differences and give you a more complete picture. By default, this graph covers all users, but we'd recommend localising it to your specific country by clicking + **New** from the top menu followed by **Country**.

Using these results, you should be able to see where there is room for improvement in your key terms (i.e. if a plumbing store only appears in position 30 for "guttering" then that clearly needs to be improved). Make a list of all the terms you want to improve then you can begin identifying opportunities through keyword research.

Keyword research

You can't optimise your website without first understanding what you're optimising for. This section will help you to discover the most relevant terms to meet your marketing objectives.

When you're ready to start your keyword research, begin by setting up a spreadsheet of words or phrases that are most relevant to your business and industry. For example, one of ours might be 'construction'. Expand on these as much as possible, similar to creating a mind map where you start from one word and see how far you can get. Ours may start to look something like this:

A	B
Keyword	
Construction	
Construction PR	
Construction Public Relations	
Technical Writing	
Technical Articles	
CPD	
Content Writing	
PR & Marketing	
PR and Marketing	
Public Relations and Marketing	
Creative	
Website Development	
Graphic Design	
Copy Writing	
Proofreading	
Proofing	
Article writing	
Press releases	
News releases	
Award writing	

Make this a team activity, where possible! Employees within different areas of your business will have perspectives that may result in other terms, search queries, services etc that are relevant, but that you may not have considered.

It can also be useful to do some analysis on your competitors. To do this simply paste their URL into the Ubersuggest app on Neil Patel's website. From the output, you'll be able to see which pages on their site are performing best, an estimate of the amount of traffic they get and which Keywords they're gaining traffic from. Click on the **EXPORT TO CSV** button at the bottom of the page and a spreadsheet with the key terms will download.

Repeat this step for all your main competitors then browse through the results. As you look through the spreadsheet make a note of any terms that are relevant and that your site currently doesn't rank for. Another option is to also look at clients/customers and potential clients/customers. What content do you think would be of interest to them? What services or products do you offer that they

might be interested in? What are the frequently asked questions (FAQs)? Build your list up so that it also includes phrases and possible search queries.

By collating all these terms, you should have a fairly comprehensive list but there is one final step. Visit the Google Adwords Keyword Planner, click **Discover new keywords** then paste your list in and click **GET RESULTS**. The tool will then output a list of keyword terms ordered by relevance. Pay attention to the **Avg. monthly searches** and **Competition** columns. Terms with high amounts of searches but **low** or **medium** competition can provide great opportunities for you to quickly gain some extra traffic. You can also use keyword planners such as Moz, and SemRush to look at each keyword or phrase in more detail.

When we talk about Google rankings, we're referring to where your page falls on the [Search Engine Results Pages (SERP)](). If your business is niche, you may find that you appear on the first search page near the top with minimal effort.

For us, ranking highly just for 'construction' is unlikely to be helpful for us or for searchers, as it isn't specific enough to what we actually do. However, if we change this to 'construction PR', the volume of traffic is lower but tso is the competition. It may seem like a negative to have lower traffic but these searchers are likely to be better leads as they're looking for 'construction PR', which is probably going to mean a higher chance of a conversion.
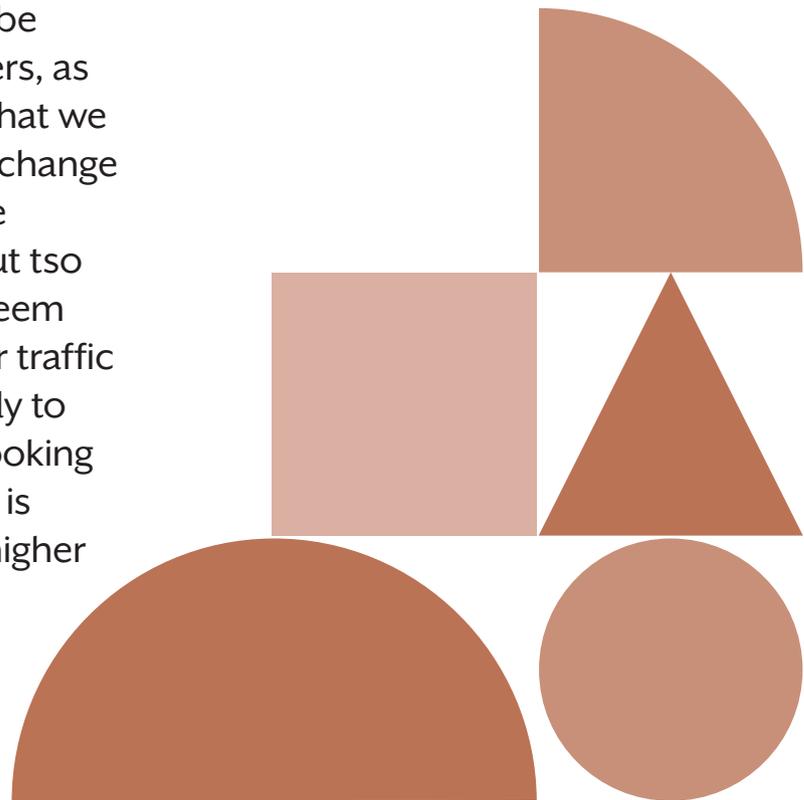
As you build up your spreadsheet, you may also want to consider the use of things like plural vs singular as customers use them for different reasons. Plural terms typically indicate general browsing whereas singular terms may well suggest buying intent, both of which have their benefits within the buyer's journey.

Search engines are much better at getting a sense of what a searcher actually wants based on keywords or phrases than they used to be, and they're improving all the time, even at picking up on misspellings and synonyms. When planning your content consider whether there are some keywords that are commonly misspelled, and whether there are alternative words that you can use within your copy to improve the quality of your content.

Another thing to consider is the

increase in voice assistance and how this impacts the type of query. Typically, when someone searches via a smart device, for example, their query is more precise, detailed and is presented as a question. Such as: 'Is there a construction PR consultancy in Stockport?'

These longer, more specific search terms are known as long-tail keywords. When such searches are made, they're likely to be very high-quality leads as they will have lower traffic but the people searching for them know precisely what they want and are more likely to find your site useful. These terms can make great blog topics!

You can also use Google Adwords to assess how competitive a word or phrase is by looking at the Cost Per Click (CPC).
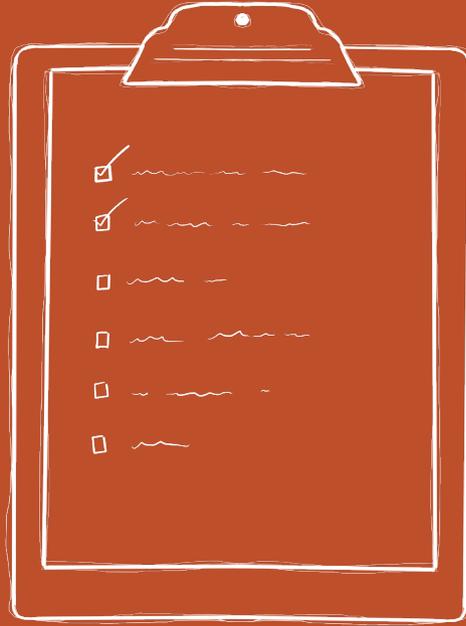
SEO planning

Now that you have a list of keywords and phrases that are relevant to your business and its target audience, it's time to take another look at your website and start planning how to use them.

Start by setting up a spreadsheet or some way of organising information on how your website is structured. It doesn't have to be a fancy document, but something you can build out from. You can include the page URLs, any copy from the pages which include the keyword and so on.

Examplewebsite.com		
Main Menu	**Sub Menu 1**	**Keyword**
Home		Construction PR
About		
	About Us	PR & Marketing
	Contact Us	Company Name
Services		
	Sub-category 1	Content Writing
	Sub-category 2	Website Development
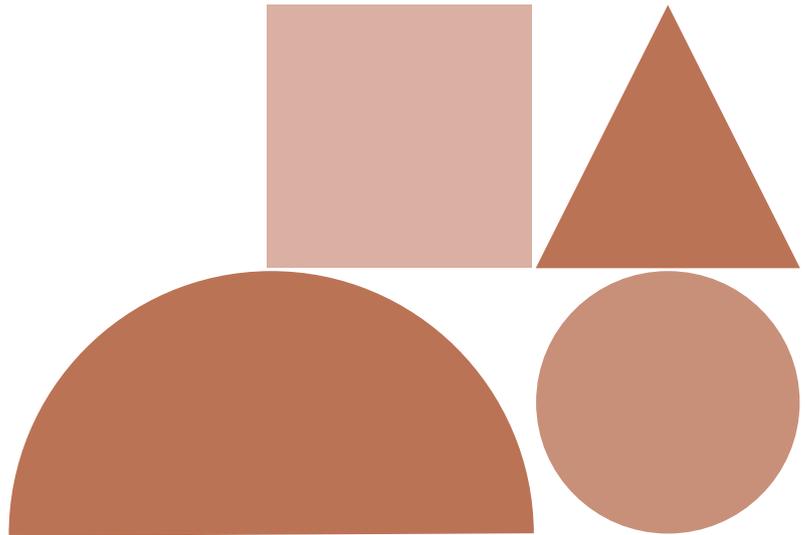
Spreadsheets like these are helpful as they enable you to keep track of what you're aiming for and also help colleagues to understand where you're up to, if they share or take over this task at a later date.

You may also want to set up an editorial calendar for any pages or blogs that you feel need completing to optimise your website. If you're optimising for humans first, you need to make sure that any content you create is also interesting, informative or compelling so that you're giving them what they actually want or need. This, over time, will help to boost your rankings.

For existing content, you can use tools such as Moz On-Page Grader to analyse your website content and assess how well optimised it may or may not be. If you are using WordPress, you can also install tools such as the Yoast plugin or RankMath SEO Tool for when you're creating content, which provide suggestions on how to improve your SEO by amending URLs, your keyword placement or distribution, use of images etc. Remember, though, that whilst these are designed to help, they aren't replacements for your understanding and input. They may make suggestions that you don't agree with, and that's fine. It's not mandatory you make the changes advised as they doesn't always get things exactly right.
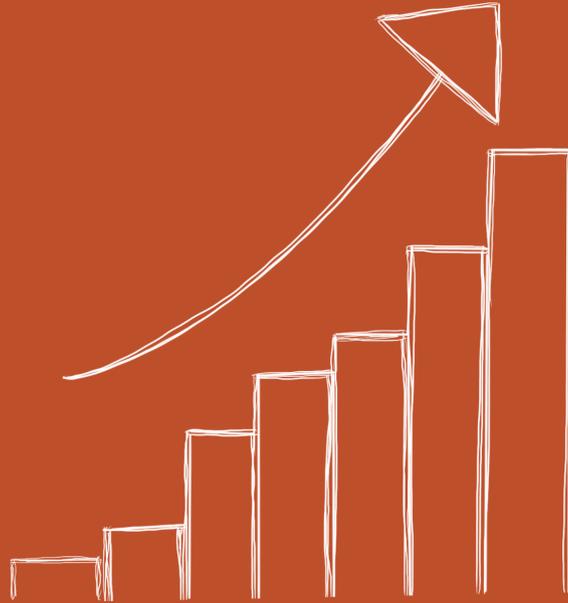
Optimising different types of content

SEO isn't just for blog posts and landing pages. Ensure you look at how you can frame all your content, including images and videos, to help boost your ranking in searches.

Search engines have become pretty sophisticated and, whilst you do need to ensure relevant keywords are used, avoid 'keyword stuffing'. For example, the body copy of a blog shouldn't need more than 2-3 mentions. If you're focusing on delivering useful content that enhances your website visitor's experience, or delivers as close to an accurate result as possible for them, then you shouldn't need to worry too much about this.

Content that can and should be optimised is anything your potential audience may interact with. This can include but is not limited to:

- Text content such as social media posts, blogs, articles and landing pages
- Images
- Videos
- Audio
- Animations
- Graphics
- Games
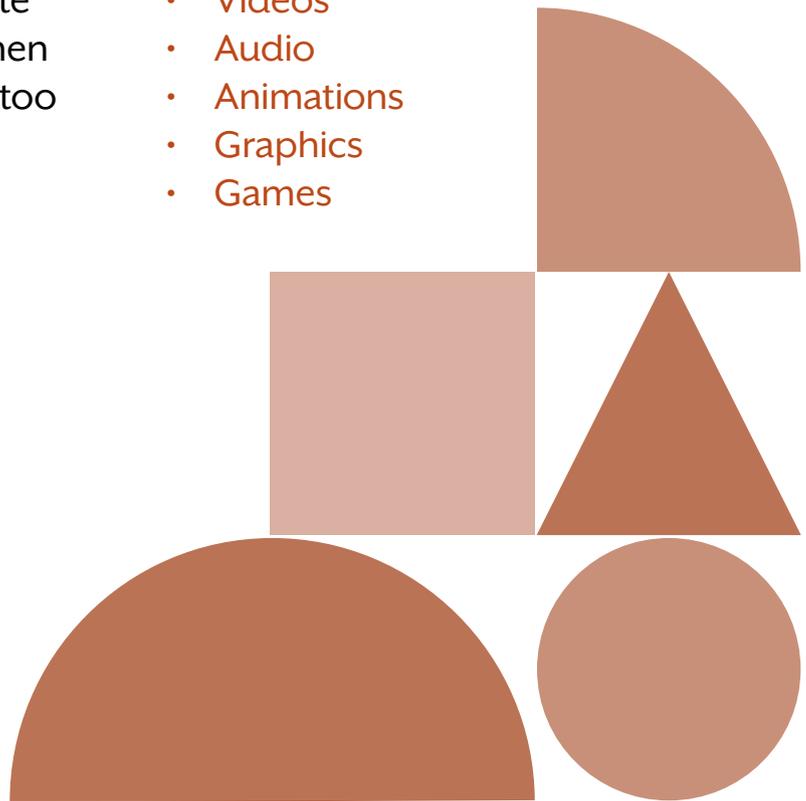
Text

Text content includes more than the obvious body copy. You should also consider the following:

- The title should be treated like a news headline to catch attention but ensure it is relevant to what your page is actually about (such as including a keyword)
- Search engines don't see underscores as spaces in titles so use hyphens between words in your URLs
- Use clear and structured layouts to improve readability
- Use headings and sub-headings (H1, H2 etc) to clarify message and improve results
- Well written content should include synonyms of keywords to cover semantic and thematic variations – this will help search engines understand the relevance of your content in relation to a search query
- Include a meta description (synopsis of your content)
- User-generated content can also be leveraged for SEO, such as using social posts, reviews, blog comments and contributions, but you may want to approve these before displaying on the website to ensure they are suitable

Visual

At this time, search engine crawlers can't 'read' visual content but what they can do is interpret based on the surrounding text. This includes keywords in:

- Captions
- ALT tags
- Description boxes, which should be used to good effect to expand on what the images, videos etc are about
- Transcriptions (which are also good to include wherever possible for accessibility)
- The source URL

Creating new content

Once you've finished making adjustments to your existing content, you'll probably find you still have lots of keywords that you haven't actually had the chance to use. These are fertile ground to start creating new content.

Google loves fresh content and a regular blog is a great way to feed it and to provide visitors with new, relevant material. If you're struggling for ideas, focus on the longer, more specific search terms and try to think about the topic in the form of a question. For example, "How to clear a blocked drain", "What is the best pipe cutter", "When should I replace tap washers" etc. By adding these keywords, you can widen the pool of search terms drawing users to your site. As well as adding extra traffic, this also means you are less reliant on a small selection of keywords and can be particularly helpful if there is a change in the Google algorithm which results in your site dropping down the results list for one term (this is inevitable from time to time).

By planning blog topics you want to cover and assigning a focus keyword for each, you should be able to produce plenty of new content which will further boost your site's performance.
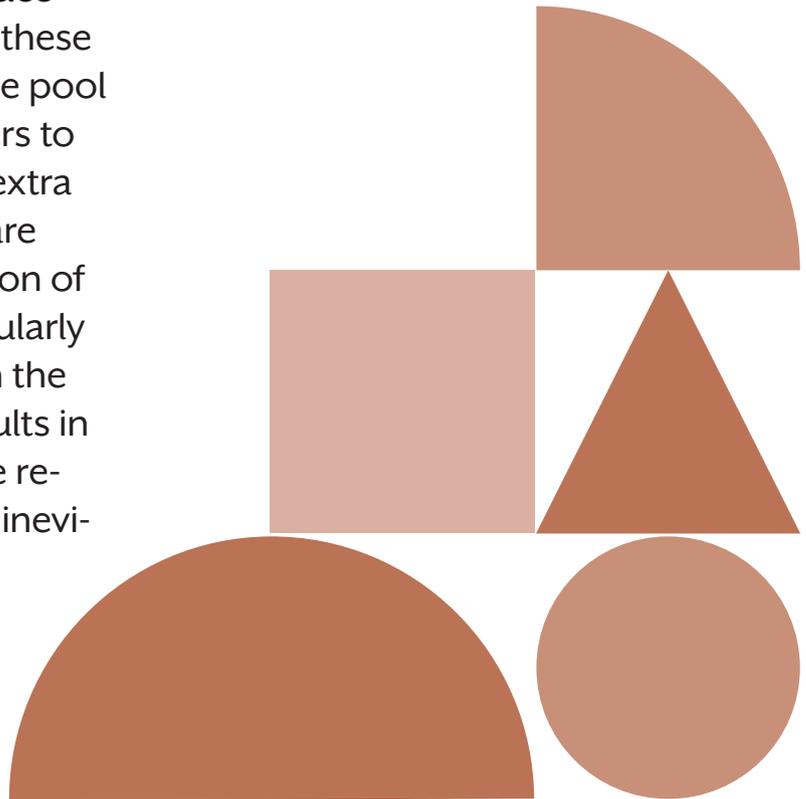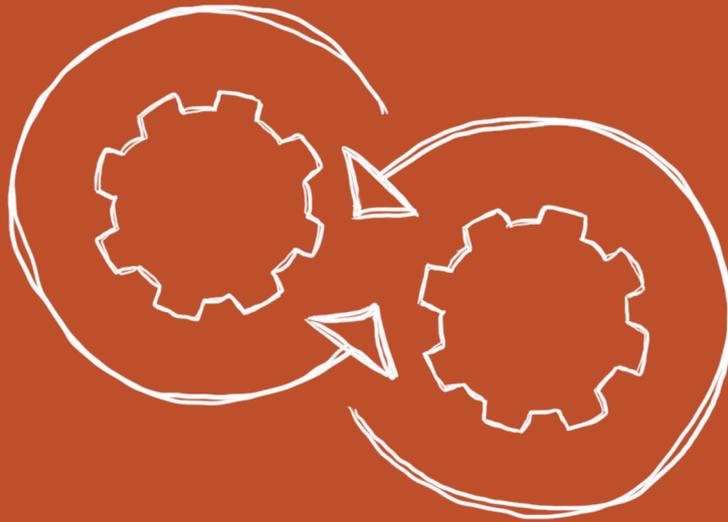
Evaluation

You need to regularly come back to your research to check you're targeting the right keywords and understand if you're reaching the right audience at the right time.

As we mentioned at the start, SEO is a long process. The more you put in, the more you'll get out and the easier it is to understand patterns in your data. You can check reports such as Google Analytics to help you review metrics, including:

- Traffic patterns (visitors, movements through the website)
- Page metrics, such as landing pages, time on page, bounce rate etc
- Referral traffic (backlinks, social traffic)
- Search queries
- Conversions/goal completions (downloads, quote requests, orders)

These should highlight any missed opportunities or areas of weakness within your website that may need to be addressed. Does your internal structure need improving? Is it easy to navigate?

Have deleted or old pages been redirected to relevant ones?

Within most SEO tools, you can access this data as often as you require. We typically pull off monthly reports for updates, in case we need to make any adjustments throughout the year or to check general traffic patterns. For looking more in depth at long-term strategies, this is often done annually. Comparing year-on-year analytics can be useful in identifying seasonal trends or variations.

Don't forget to keep track of your key metrics in order to measure the impact of your SEO improvements over time!
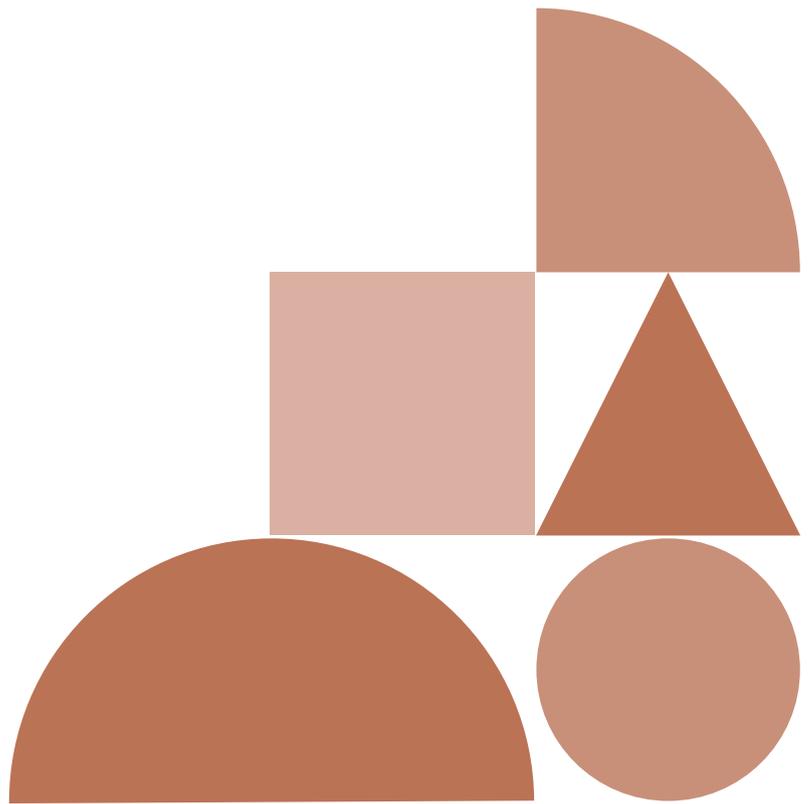
Want some support to put this guidance in place and optimise your website to generate more high-quality traffic? Get in touch - we can help!