

shenshin.co

MARKETING GUIDE



# The SEO Starter Guide

Rank and grow organic traffic from scratch

Igor Shenshin / Head of User Acquisition

# What is inside

- 01 How search actually works

---

- 02 Keyword research and your keyword map

---

- 03 On-page SEO that earns rankings

---

- 04 Technical SEO basics

---

- 05 Writing content that ranks

---

- 06 Off-page authority and E-E-A-T

---

- 07 Measuring with GA4 and Search Console

---

- 08 Your 90-day SEO plan

---

I run user acquisition, and I also own our content and SEO. That mix taught me something useful early on. Paid traffic stops the moment you stop paying, but organic search keeps working while you sleep. A page you publish once can bring in the right visitors for years. That is the whole appeal of SEO, and it is why I keep investing in it.

This guide is the version I wish someone had handed me on day one. No jargon for the sake of it, no gray-hat tricks that get you penalized six months later. Just the white-hat fundamentals that actually move the needle, in the order I would tackle them. If you follow it start to finish, you will understand how search works, how to find what people are looking for, how to write pages that earn rankings, and how to measure whether any of it is working.

# How search actually works

Before you optimize anything, you need a plain mental model of what Google does. It runs three jobs, and every SEO tactic maps back to one of them. Get the model right and most decisions make themselves.

- 1 **Crawl:** Google sends automated bots to follow links across the web and discover pages. If a bot cannot reach a page, that page effectively does not exist to search.
- 2 **Index:** Google reads each page it crawls, figures out what the page is about, and stores it in a giant database. A page that is crawled but not indexed still will not show up in results.
- 3 **Rank:** when someone searches, Google pulls matching pages from the index and orders them by relevance, quality, and usefulness for that specific query.

The last piece people forget is search intent. Google does not rank pages, it answers questions. Every search has a reason behind it, and your page has to match that reason. If someone searches for a definition and you hand them a sales page, you lose, no matter how good the sales page is.

## The four search intent types and what to give each one

Intent type	What the searcher wants	Example query	Page you should serve
Informational	To learn or understand something	how does seo work	A clear guide, tutorial, or explainer article
Navigational	To reach a specific site or brand	shenshin blog	Your homepage or the exact page they are after
Commercial	To compare options before buying	best seo tools for small teams	A comparison, review, or best-of roundup
Transactional	To take an action or buy now	buy seo audit service	A product, pricing, or signup page

### PRO TIP

To read intent fast, just search the keyword yourself and look at what already ranks. If the first page is all how-to articles, Google has told you the intent is informational. Do not fight it, match it.

# Keyword research and your keyword map

Keyword research is not about finding the biggest search numbers. It is about finding the searches you can realistically win and that bring people who care about what you offer. When you are starting from scratch, the money is in the specific, lower-competition terms, not the giant head terms everyone chases.

Head terms are short and broad, like seo. They get huge volume but they are brutally competitive and the intent is vague. Long-tail terms are longer and more specific, like how to write an seo content brief. Lower volume each, but they add up, the intent is crystal clear, and a new site can actually rank for them.

- 1 Brain-dump every topic your audience cares about. Talk to sales and support, read the questions customers ask, and note the language they use.
- 2 Expand each topic with a keyword tool. Google Keyword Planner, the Search Console query report, and autocomplete or the People Also Ask box all surface real phrasing.
- 3 For each keyword, note the estimated volume, a rough difficulty read, and the intent behind it.
- 4 Cut anything off-topic or so competitive you cannot win it yet. Keep the specific, buyable, or clearly useful terms.
- 5 Group the survivors into clusters where each cluster is one topic answered from several angles.

That grouping step is where topic clusters come in, and they are the backbone of a modern content plan. A cluster is one broad pillar page that covers a topic at a high level, surrounded by several focused articles that each answer one sub-question in depth. The cluster articles link up to the pillar, and the pillar links down to them. This structure tells Google you cover the topic thoroughly, and it spreads ranking strength across every page in the group.

Your keyword map is simply a spreadsheet that turns all of this into a plan. One row per target page, so you never write two pages fighting over the same keyword, and you always know what to publish next.

## A simple keyword map layout

Target URL	Primary keyword	Intent	Cluster	Status
/blog/how-seo-works	how does seo work	Informational	SEO basics	Live
/blog/keyword-research-guide	keyword research for beginners	Informational	SEO basics	Drafting
/blog/seo-content-brief	seo content brief template	Commercial	Content	Planned

# On-page SEO that earns rankings

---

On-page SEO is everything you control on the page itself. It is the highest-leverage work you can do, because it directly tells Google and the reader what the page is about. None of it is complicated, but the details matter and most sites get them half-right.

Start with the title tag, the clickable headline in search results. Put your primary keyword near the front, keep it under about 60 characters so it does not get cut off, and write it for a human who is deciding whether to click. The meta description does not directly affect rankings, but a clear one under 155 characters improves your click-through rate, and clicks matter.

Headings give your page structure. Use one H1 that states the topic, then H2s for main sections and H3s for sub-points. This helps readers scan and helps Google understand your hierarchy. Work your keyword and natural variations into headings where it fits, but never stuff it in where it reads badly.

Internal links are the quiet workhorse of on-page SEO. When you link from one page to another with descriptive anchor text, you pass ranking strength and help Google discover and understand pages. Every new article should link to a few relevant existing pages, and older pages should link forward to the new one.

Here is the on-page checklist I run before anything goes live.

- 1 Primary keyword sits near the front of the title tag, and the title is under 60 characters.
- 2 Meta description is written, compelling, and under 155 characters.
- 3 One clear H1 states the topic, with H2s and H3s organizing the rest.
- 4 The primary keyword and natural variations appear in the first 100 words and a couple of headings.
- 5 The URL is short, readable, and includes the keyword, for example `/blog/keyword-research`.
- 6 At least three internal links point to relevant pages, with descriptive anchor text.
- 7 Every image has descriptive alt text and a compressed file size.
- 8 The content genuinely answers the query better than what currently ranks.

## PRO TIP

That last line is the one that actually wins. All the tags in the world will not save a page that is thinner or less helpful than the competition. Optimize the substance first, the tags second.

# Technical SEO basics

---

Technical SEO sounds intimidating, but for a small site it comes down to a handful of things that let Google crawl, understand, and trust your pages. You do not need to be an engineer. You need to clear the obstacles that stop good content from ranking.

- **Speed:** fast pages rank better and convert better. Compress images, avoid bloated scripts, and aim for a page that feels instant. Google's Core Web Vitals measure real loading and stability, so check them and fix the worst offenders.
- **Mobile:** most searches happen on phones, and Google indexes the mobile version of your site first. Your pages must be readable and tappable on a small screen with no horizontal scrolling.
- **Crawlability:** make sure important pages are reachable through links and are not accidentally blocked by your robots.txt file. Check that they are not marked noindex unless you meant it.
- **XML sitemap:** publish a sitemap that lists your important URLs and submit it in Search Console so Google has a clean map of what to crawl.
- **HTTPS:** run the whole site on a secure certificate. It is a baseline trust and ranking signal, and browsers warn users away from sites without it.
- **Structured data:** add schema markup so Google understands your content type, such as an article, FAQ, or product. It can unlock rich results that make your listing stand out.

## PRO TIP

Do not chase a perfect technical score before you have published anything. Fix the blockers that stop indexing, get your sitemap in, confirm the site is fast and mobile-friendly, then get back to creating content. Technical SEO is a foundation, not the house.

# Writing content that ranks

---

Content is where SEO is won. Google's whole business depends on surfacing the most helpful result, so your job is to be exactly that. Write for the person behind the search first, then make sure the page is easy for Google to understand.

The single biggest mistake I see is writing a shallow page and hoping keywords carry it. They will not. Before you write, look at the pages already ranking, note what they cover, then decide how you will do it better. More depth, clearer explanations, a real example, an original insight, a better structure. Give the reader a reason to stop searching.

To make this repeatable, I write an SEO content brief before drafting anything. It keeps the writer aligned with the search intent and stops good drafts from wandering off target.

- Primary keyword and two or three secondary keywords to weave in naturally.
- Search intent, in one sentence, so the format matches what the searcher wants.
- Target reader and the specific question they are trying to answer.
- Suggested title and URL.
- An outline of H2s and H3s that covers the topic completely.
- Questions to answer, pulled from People Also Ask and real customer questions.
- Internal links to include and any pages that should link back to this one.
- A rough word count based on what ranking pages cover, aiming to be thorough, not padded.

When you draft, write in plain language. Short paragraphs, clear headings, and concrete examples beat dense walls of text every time. Answer the main question early, then go deeper for the readers who want more. Keep the keyword usage natural. Modern search understands synonyms and context, so repeating an exact phrase twenty times does nothing but make the page worse to read.

# Off-page authority and E-E-A-T

---

On-page and content get you into the game. Authority is often what decides close calls, especially in competitive spaces. Off-page SEO is everything that happens away from your site to build that authority, and at its center are backlinks. When another site links to yours, it acts like a vote of confidence, and Google counts those votes.

One caveat that matters a lot: quality beats quantity, and buying links or joining link schemes will eventually get you penalized. Stay white-hat. A handful of links from respected, relevant sites is worth far more than hundreds of spammy ones.

- Create genuinely useful assets, like original research, tools, or guides, that people naturally want to reference.
- Write guest articles for reputable sites in your industry.
- Get listed in relevant, legitimate directories and industry roundups.
- Build real relationships so mentions and links happen naturally over time.

The other half of authority is E-E-A-T: Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness. It is how Google's quality guidelines describe a source worth trusting. You demonstrate it by showing real experience with the topic, naming the author and their credentials, citing solid sources, keeping content accurate and current, and making it easy to contact you. It matters most for topics that affect health, money, or safety, but it lifts every kind of content.

## PRO TIP

The most reliable link-building strategy is to publish something so useful that linking to it is the obvious move. Earn links by being worth citing, and you never have to chase them.

# Measuring with GA4 and Search Console

You cannot improve what you do not measure, and the two free tools you need are Google Search Console and GA4. They answer different questions, so use both. Search Console tells you how you show up in search. GA4 tells you what people do once they land on your site.

## What each tool tells you

Tool	Best for	Key things to watch
Search Console	Your presence in Google search	Queries you rank for, impressions, clicks, average position, indexing issues, Core Web Vitals
GA4	Behavior after the click	Organic sessions, engaged sessions, conversions, top landing pages, engagement time

Set up both before you publish, so you collect history from day one. In Search Console, verify your site and submit your sitemap. In GA4, create a property, install the tag, and define conversion events for the actions that matter, like a signup or a form submit.

The most useful habit is a monthly check on a few numbers so you see the trend, not the daily noise. Are organic clicks and impressions rising? Which queries are climbing, and which pages are stuck on page two where a small push could get them onto page one? Search Console's query report is a goldmine here. Terms you rank for on positions 5 through 20 are often your fastest wins, because you already rank, you just need to improve that page.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Search Console shows how you appear in search, GA4 shows what visitors do next.
- Install both before you publish so you have historical data to learn from.
- Pages ranking on positions 5 to 20 are your fastest improvement opportunities.
- Watch trends monthly, not daily, so you make decisions on signal, not noise.

# Your 90-day SEO plan

---

SEO rewards consistency more than intensity. Here is a simple 90 day plan that takes you from a standing start to real momentum. Treat it as a rhythm you can repeat, not a one-time sprint.

- 1 Days 1 to 30, build the foundation. Set up Search Console and GA4, submit your sitemap, and fix any indexing or mobile blockers. Do your keyword research and build your keyword map with topic clusters. Pick your first cluster and outline the pillar page plus three or four supporting articles.
- 2 Days 31 to 60, create and optimize. Publish your pillar page and start shipping the cluster articles, aiming for one solid post per week. Write a content brief for each, run the on-page checklist before publishing, and link every new piece to related pages.
- 3 Days 61 to 90, measure and expand. Keep publishing weekly. Check Search Console for pages ranking on positions 5 to 20 and improve them first. Start light, white-hat link building around your best content. Plan your next cluster from what the data shows is working.

A realistic expectation: you will likely not see dramatic movement in the first month or two. SEO compounds. The work you do in month one starts paying off in months three, four, and beyond, and it keeps paying long after. Most people quit right before it kicks in. Do not be most people.

**PRO TIP**

If you can only do one thing consistently, publish one genuinely helpful, well-optimized piece of content every week. Do that for a year and you will be far ahead of competitors who did everything except stay consistent.

## Where to go next

This guide gives you the full arc from how search works to a plan you can start today. To go deeper on any single piece, the SEO articles on the shenshin.co blog break down keyword research, content briefs, and technical fixes with real examples. And if you want the step-by-step version with templates you can copy, take the free SEO course on the site. Pick your first topic cluster this week and get your first page live. Momentum starts with one published page.

**shenshin.co**