Inbound Content Strategy:
The Impact of Topic Clusters on SEO

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About the Author

Justin Champion has been a digital marketer since 2009. Over the course of his career, he's been dedicated to helping thousands of brands effectively tell their brand's story while increasing their visibility online.

Currently, Justin is the Principal Growth Product Manager for HubSpot's Community. Previously, Justin was the Content Professor for HubSpot Academy and creator of the Content Marketing Certification course, which offers a globally recognized industry credential upon completion.

This course is the go-to training for anyone looking to learn content marketing; Content marketing is the main discipline needed to become an effective content strategist.

Since 2016, over 100,000 people from across the globe have earned their Content Marketing Certification.

The results and feedback received from these two projects inspired Justin to keep the momentum going. He did this by compiling everything he's learned over his career, pairing it with other research and experiments, and expanding it all into his first book, _Inbound Content: A Step-by-Step Guide to Doing Content Marketing the Inbound Way_. If you're looking for a helpful aid to getting started with content marketing, then consider _Inbound Content_ your textbook. Plus, once you finish, you'll be ready to earn your Content Marketing Certification from HubSpot.

You can engage with Justin on Twitter or email.

Introduction

From 2017–2020, the author, Justin Champion, hosted a content strategy workshop series through the HubSpot User Group program. The goal of this workshop series was to teach a framework for businesses to create content both humans and search engines will love.

During this time, Justin worked with various businesses across different industries as well as his outdoor lifestyle brand, Wild We Wander, to continuously improve this content strategy framework; he wanted to make it more clear and actionable for anyone to implement.

This research paper is a detailed account of the qualitative and quantitative findings.

Explanation of How Search Engines Operate

Consider this: How have search engines evolved? They've come a long way over the past decade. But today Google reigns supreme, [processing millions of search requests per minute](#).

That's a lot of people looking for information and answers to questions. And on top of that, there are millions of pieces of content published online every minute. So on one side, you have millions of people searching for content, and on the other side, you have millions of pieces of content being published online. This all makes Google's job, which is to connect you, the searcher, with the most relevant, high authoritative results possible, increasingly difficult.

Over the years, Google released a series of algorithm updates with the goal of solving for searcher intent. In short, if you want your content to rank on Google, then you need to produce high-quality content search engines will deem authoritative and solve for the *intent* of a searcher's query.

Explanation of Google's algorithm updates

One thing I find fascinating about SEO is that everyone's always trying to figure out how to trick/decode the latest algorithm — but really, every single one of Google's algorithm updates has been a technological update meant to mirror human behavior even more closely. Therefore, if you take an organized approach and think about how a human would like to navigate a site and how you can make it easier for a visitor to find what they're looking for, you're proactively protecting yourself against potential penalties from more algorithm updates.

If you're curious and want to learn more about Google's algorithm updates, then check out [Search Engine Journal's](#) article explaining the complete history of Google's algorithm updates.

Explanation of how search engines find and rank content

In order to come up with a list of results, Google needs to:
- Find your content;
- Understand what your content is about.

To do this, Google sends around web crawlers to grab information about all of the sites it could present in its search engine results page (aka SERPs). You can think of these crawlers as explorers of the internet, going out and finding all that's out there and reporting their findings back to Google. As a website, you need these crawlers to find all of the content you're producing that answers the questions your prospective buyers are asking. How can you make sure that happens? Make it really easy for the crawlers to jump from place to related place on your site. That way, they can report back to Google exactly how your site is structured and what it's all about.

You can also think of links as bridges connecting like-themed topics. You need to give these crawlers the maps to know where to go next plus the physical ability to get there (i.e., the hyperlinks out to other pages on your site).

If the crawler reaches a dead end or a place without a link to a related resource, it's never going to find that related resource. And similarly, if the related resources aren't directly linked from a page on your website, your website visitors probably won't find them, either.

The main point: Crawlers operate like humans looking for something. Make it hard for crawlers to move from place to place on your site, and you're also making it hard for humans to find what they're looking for.

Keeping this in mind can help you design a successful long-term inbound content strategy.

A successful inbound content strategy focuses on using content to attract, engage, and delight relevant website visitors by telling a story that educates and inspires them to make a transformation — while putting their interests and needs above your bottom line. The focus of an inbound content strategy is on the word "transform." Yes, it's important to create helpful education, but that alone is not enough. To really help your audience transform, you need to help them *apply* what they're learning to make the experience a meaningful one. When done correctly, this builds trust. If someone trusts you, they're more likely to do business with you when they're ready to make a purchasing decision.

Pilot Experiment

Earlier I explained that I've been collaborating with HubSpot's User Group program for the past several years to host a series of content strategy workshops around the country. I used this as an opportunity to fulfill one of my life's dreams — become a remote worker who lives and works from the road.

Since 2017, I've traveled over 70,000 miles in my 22' Airstream Bambi Sport, working full time from the road.


This dream became a reality in 2016 with our Ford F250 Super Duty work truck George. And as you can see, he's utilitarian. This image here is when Ariele and I first moved out of our Boston apartment. Our initial downsizing goal: If it didn't fit in George, it wasn't coming with us.

I'm someone who loves stretching value, so we decided to convert George into a storage unit which also doubled as a camper. Our intention with George was to use him as our workhorse to tow our home-on-wheels behind him. Being that our living space was limited, less than 200 square feet, it was important that we make use of everything, including George. Converting George's truck bed into a camper would give us about an extra 30–50 square feet of functional living space.

I know we're not the first ones interested in living this lifestyle, and we wanted to do our part by helping other like-minded individuals. We did this by creating a step-by-step guide showing how we converted a truck into a functional living space.
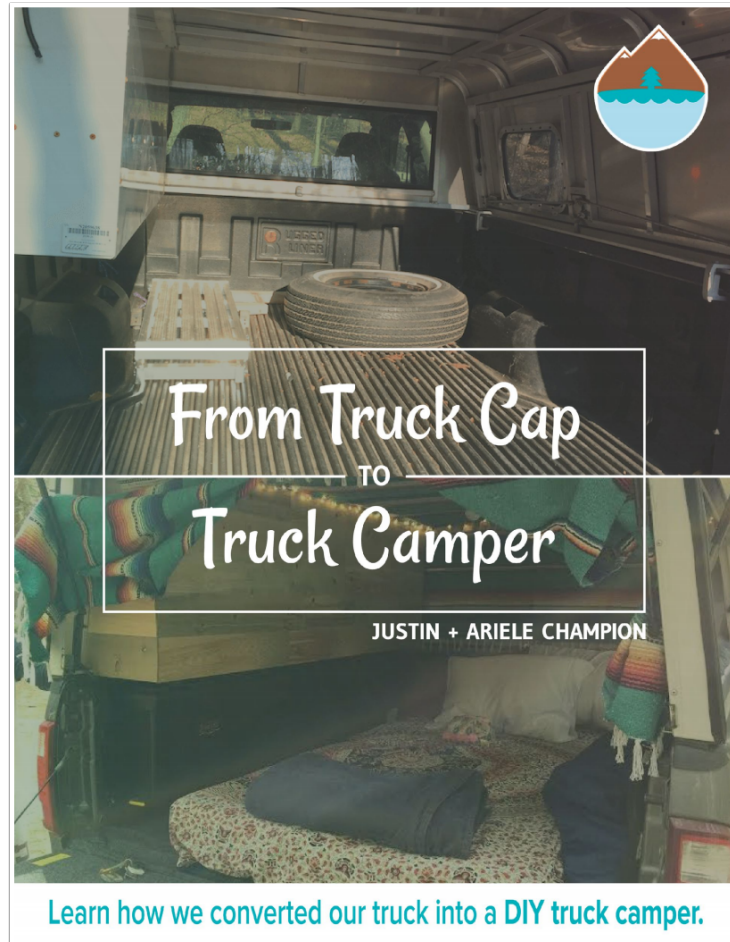
The guide we created is 78-pages long and full of advice and tips about how to convert a truck into a camper, even if you're not exactly a handy person. Space shouldn't be an issue either — I converted George incognito on the city streets of Boston, Massachusetts. If you're quiet and stay out of sight, most won't notice there's a person hanging out inside the back of a truck parked on a busy street.

It took me about two months to complete the conversion. Now, keep in mind, I had a full-time job at HubSpot at the timet. In order to make the comprehensive guide a reality, I needed to find a way to create it with minimal bandwidth.

Experiment 1

Instead of creating the guide all at once, I pieced it together by creating a blog calendar of related content. Breaking down a large project and focusing on the smaller steps makes the process more manageable and less overwhelming.

Here's how I did it.

First, I identified a topic I wanted to write about — truck camper. Now that's a pretty broad topic, one that could be hard to rank for on search engines, so I expanded it and brought more context: I was intending to teach a do-it-yourself (DIY) project. Adding that to the broad topic gave me "DIY truck camper," which also happens to have adequate search volume to justify the selection — over 1,500 monthly searches.

Next, I made a list of projects I'd need to complete and could write in-depth blog posts about, such as "weatherizing your truck cap."

Over the course of eight weeks, I focused my time and energy on creating meaningful, in-depth blog posts. I then repurposed these into a YouTube video series and embedded each at the top of the corresponding blog post to greet visitors with an engaging piece of content.

Some of these [blog posts and videos performed really well](). For example, the "how to weatherize your truck cap" blog post ranks at the first position in Google's organic search. The video, which has been viewed over 50,000 times, is featured in the video search results and as the featured snippet above the #1 organic Google listing.

Once I wrote and published all of this content, I used it to create the ultimate, comprehensive DIYers guide. To let people know about it, I created a landing page where people could access the guide and inserted a hyperlink at the end of each blog post to direct people to it.

After a few months, there was an initial lift in traffic, but I knew we could do better, especially with the time and effort we put into the content. We knew we had something valuable to offer our potential audience; we just needed to find a way to get the content out there in a more user-friendly way.

Experiment 2

In an effort to boost performance, I deconstructed the guide into a comprehensive educational website page — over 5,000 words — with a short video at the top of the page to greet visitors and let them know what they're about to learn.

Additionally, I offered the guide as a supplemental packaged resource. This way, people coming to the page could view the content without providing their email address first — streamlining their experience. At the end of the guide, I inserted a practical checklist with all of the materials needed to complete the truck camper conversion. I could've used information like this during my own build, which is why I added it to provide more practical value.

Again, we saw an increase in traffic, but I wanted to become the go-to source for people looking to convert their truck into a functional living space.

Experiment 3

I looked for every opportunity to build authority for the page via inbound links. An inbound link is a link coming from another site to your own. Inbound links help increase domain authority, which is a prediction of how well your website will rank on search engines. The higher your domain authority, the more credible your content will appear to search engines; if search engines think your content is credible, then it's likely you'll see an increase in rankings.

The Result

That's how I solved for the human experience — creating value before trying to extract it. But what about search engines? Did this experiment increase awareness of our content and attract more people to this page?

In less than 12 months, organic traffic coming to the page increased by more than 1,800%. As of January 2020, this page surpassed 3,900 organic visitors (and it keeps going up). Here's a visual timeline that communicates the impact of all of our experiments conducted over time (source: HubSpot Analytics).

On top of that, we claim the first position on Google for the exact high-traffic term we intended to rank for — "DIY truck camper." Also, we have placements above the first position in Google's image and video search.

Our video, which has over 40,000 views, is featured in the video search results, and we have an image from the page featured in the image search results — both above the #1 organic Google listing.

We were excited about the results — and curious. We asked ourselves, "What other value did we get out of this experiment?"

We found we also rank for a list of other terms — terms we didn't specifically optimize the page for. In fact, this page ranks for more than 1,100 different keywords — of which, 163 rank on the first page of Google (source: Moz Keyword Explorer).

1,182 Ranking Keywords				Export CSV	Add to... ▼
☐ Keyword		● www.wil... ⬍	Difficulty ⬍	Monthly Volume ⬍	
☐ diy truck camper		#1 /diy-truck-ca... ⓘ	33	2.9k-4.3k	
☐ truck camper diy		#1 /diy-truck-ca... ⓘ	36	201-500	
☐ diy truck topper camper		#1 /diy-truck-ca... ⓘ	43	101-200	
☐ pickup camper conversion		#1 /diy-truck-ca... ⓘ	39	11-50	
☐ how to make your truck a camper		#1 /diy-truck-ca... ⓘ	38	11-50	
☐ truck camper conversion plans		#1 /diy-truck-ca... ⓘ	38	11-50	

This is important because search engines like Google are much smarter nowadays. If the content you create provides value and matches the intent of a searcher's query, then it's possible you'll rank for other related terms. The average first-page ranking will also rank well for about 1,000 other relevant keywords.

Introduction to the Topic Cluster Framework

You may be asking yourself: "How do I create content that solves for my visitors and also gets visibility on the first page of Google?"

Think of your long-term inbound content strategy as a series of pillars stabilizing the foundation for your business. This will give you the groundwork to stand out and compete online.

What is a content pillar?

A content pillar, also known as a power page, pillar page, or various other similar names, is a website page that provides a comprehensive overview of a topic with a cluster of related content linked. **Pages like these are seen as the north star resources on your website.** Often, the intent with these pages is to get them ranking on Google for a high-traffic topic your ideal audience cares about or wants to learn about. These pages are usually associated with a relevant offer, whether it be a downloadable resource or an offering from your business.

A content pillar is the most important aspect of the topic cluster methodology.

What is the topic cluster methodology?

The topic cluster methodology was first detailed by [HubSpot Research in 2017](#). **At its very essence, it's a way to organize a site's content pages using a clear, deliberate site architecture.** Topic clusters rearrange the architecture into clusters of related content linked to a central content pillar. Each content pillar should provide a comprehensive overview of the topic you're writing about. By linking all of your site's content within that topic to a content pillar (and vice versa, when it makes sense and provides value), search engines like Google can easily scan your content and understand there is a semantic relationship between the content of the cluster's pages. The cluster setup also signals to search engines a real breadth and depth in the content, giving the content pillar more authority on the topic. Algorithms like [Google's RankBrain](#) reward this orderly linking with higher search placement.

What I love most about the topic cluster approach is that, when done correctly, it helps a business create content that will continue to perform even after a search engine algorithm update. That's why it's important to solve for the human experience first.

Prioritizing your visitors instead of chasing trends will set you and your business up for long-term success.

For visual learners, let's see what this looks like in action.

Topic cluster architecture

To start, you need a topic, something broad enough to explore on a deeper level.

For example, "encryption key" is a broad topic or head term to be explained and delved into at a deeper level.

Next, bring context to your broad topic, making it more specific.

The broad topic you choose will ultimately guide the direction of your content pillar. To guide effectively, it's important to bring more context to your broad topic with additional keywords to solve for searcher intent, like "encryption key management." This keyword is more specific, yet broad enough to, again, be dug into and explained at a deeper level.

I like to call this a "contextual topic," also known as a "core topic".
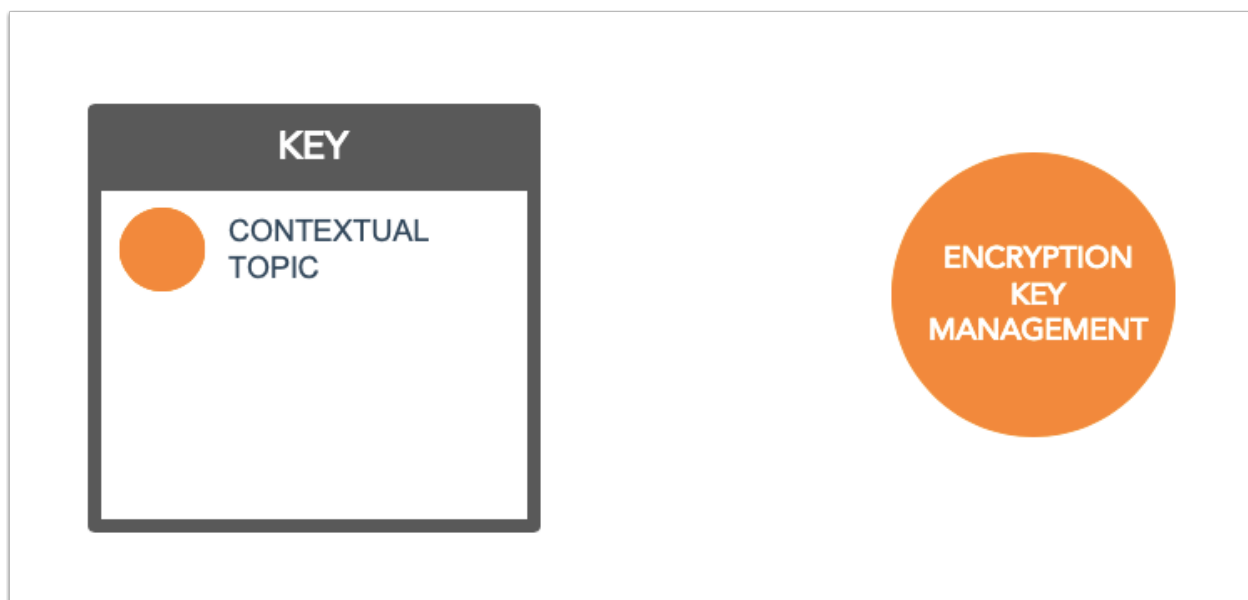
Contextual topics focus your time and energy on a specific keyword with monthly search volume intent. Your goal is to rank on search engines for this term.

Next, you'll want to identify a series of subtopic content assets — like-themed content that supports your topic choice.

A subtopic content asset is split into three different categories:
1. Relevant website content, like a blog post;
2. Other forms of media published on different channels, like a video hosted on YouTube;
3. And a relevant piece of content hosted on a third-party site, like a guest blog post published on someone else's website.

Tip: Your subtopic content assets are meant to provide lasting awareness and/or increase the authority of your content pillar. For example, while social media updates can be considered a critical promotional channel for your business, they're not considered a subtopic content asset because they don't offer long-term value. Consider what promotional activities your business currently does that could be considered a subtopic content asset.
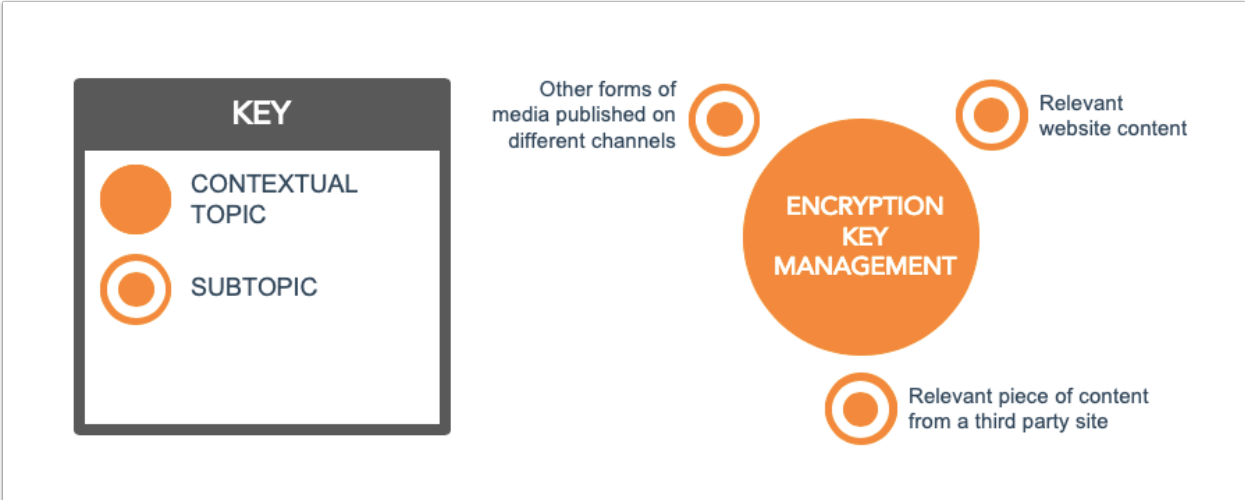
Lastly, and most importantly to form your topic cluster, include a link in all of your subtopic content assets to your content pillar.

From an SEO perspective, the links pointing to the content pillar will help boost the page's authority. A website page with links pointing to it will rank higher than a

website page without links. It also helps the human experience because including links in relevant content assets will help guide your audience to your north star website pages.
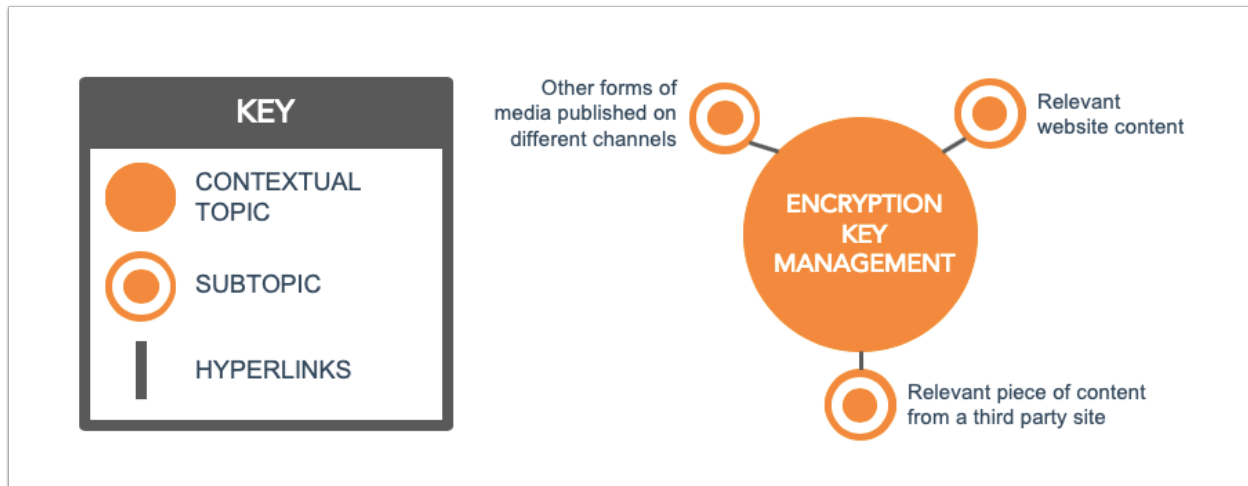
Tip: Make it a best practice to always include a link to your content pillar in all of your subtopic content assets. Do this even if they're not necessarily helpful from an SEO perspective, like a link in the description of a YouTube video. Solve for the human first. Adding a link in the description of a YouTube video shows the viewer a relevant next step they can take to continue consuming your content. However, a link like this won't pass SEO authority through to the page.

If you have one subtopic content asset relevant to multiple content pillars, do your best to link to them all naturally. However, keep the user's experience in mind. **The goal should always be intentionality when you're sending someone somewhere.** Offering too many links without context could lead to overwhelm, and overwhelm can lead to no action at all.

Now, let's say you don't know what encryption key management is. If you wanted to learn more about it, you'd probably go to Google and type it in as a search query. This is what you'd see at the top of the search engine result page.

At the top of the result page is the featured snippet. A featured snippet is Google's attempt at trying to answer the context of your search query without you having to click through to a page to learn more.

Google constantly switches up what the featured snippet looks like. If Google serves you one, it could be in the form of a list, a definition, a video, an image, and so on. Google may even show you multiple featured snippet types, like this example featuring a definition and multiple images.

Beneath the featured snippet, you'll see the coveted number one search result listing, which in this case is [The Definitive Guide to Encryption Key Management Fundamentals](#) from a company called Townsend Security, a full-service data security provider. Townsend also claims the first two image-featured snippets.

Tip: Your goal with organic search should be more than just securing the #1 organic search listing — you want to dominate the search results and claim as much real estate on the page as possible. That could be:
- *Securing the featured snippet,*
- *Showing up in video and/or image search results,*
- *Having a page from your website claim a listing,*
- *Having a webpage you authored on a third-party site claim several listings,*
- *And so on.*

The more organic search engine real estate you claim, the more chances you're giving yourself to make a connection with your audience.

Again, let's say you performed this search query and your intention is to learn more about encryption key management, so you click Townsend's search result listing. You'd be taken to this comprehensive educational website page — over 4,000 words — where you can easily navigate the page's content. Take note of Townsend's design. When a visitor lands on the page, they're greeted with:
- A definition, clearly communicating what they will be learning;
- An anchor-linked table of contents, making it easy for them to navigate the page;
- A short video offering a brief synopsis of what they will be learning in a more engaging way to help keep them on the page;
- And a content offer — a repackaging of the on-page content into a downloadable PDF. This makes it easy for visitors to easily take the content with them if they choose to do so (and if they do, the visitor converts into a lead for the business).

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ENCRYPTION KEY MANAGEMENT FUNDAMENTALS

WHAT IS ENCRYPTION KEY MANAGEMENT?

Encryption key management is administering the full lifecycle of cryptographic keys. This includes: generating, using, storing, archiving, and deleting of keys. Protection of the encryption keys includes limiting access to the keys physically, logically, and through user/role access.

Tip: When it makes sense and provides value, consider including a short video near the top of your website pages. Video solves for the visitor as it creates a more engaging experience for them to learn. Using video also solves for SEO because people watching video on your website can reduce your page's bounce rate. Your website's bounce rate is the percentage of people who land on a page on your website, then leave quickly. The longer people stay on your page, the better — this signals to Google your page satisfied their search query.

Tip: Creating a more in-depth content experience can lead to a first-page ranking. [Backlinko looked into 1 million search results](#) to see what factors go into first-page rankings. Here's Backlinko's Brian Dean's breakdown:

> *"Based on SERP data from SEMRush, we found that longer content tends to rank higher in Google's search results. The average Google first page result contains 1,890 words."*

By providing an educational, inspiring, and user-friendly experience, our example, Townsend, is solving for humans. But what about search engines? Did Townsend get more traffic out of this experiment?

In just over three years of Townsend tracking and publishing this experience, below is a list of notable page performance. The page:

- currently ranks on the first page of Google's organic search for more than 1,000 keywords, of which over 100 keywords rank in the top three positions (source: Moz Keyword Explorer);

1,070 Ranking Keywords ⬇ Export CSV   ✚ Add to... ▼

	Keyword	● info.tow...	Difficulty	Monthly Volume
☐	key management encryption	#1 /definitive-gui...	39	11-50
☐	key management basics	#1 /definitive-gui...	31	0-10
☐	encryption key storage	#1 /definitive-gui...	37	0-10
☐	encryption key lifecycle	#1 /definitive-gui...	36	0-10
☐	key server user procedures cryptogrophy	#1 /definitive-gui...	36	0-10

- accounts for more than 20% of Townsend's total organic traffic each month;
- accounts for more than 20% of all of Townsend's new contacts since it was released;
- influenced more than 20% of all of Townsend's sales opportunities (year sampled: 2019);
- and achieved a 53% conversion rate on its download landing page.

All of this with just one topic cluster, one content pillar, and a supplemental downloadable content offer.

Additionally, Townsend has built so much authority for their content pillar over the past three years, they're ranking third on Google for their broad topic "encryption key."
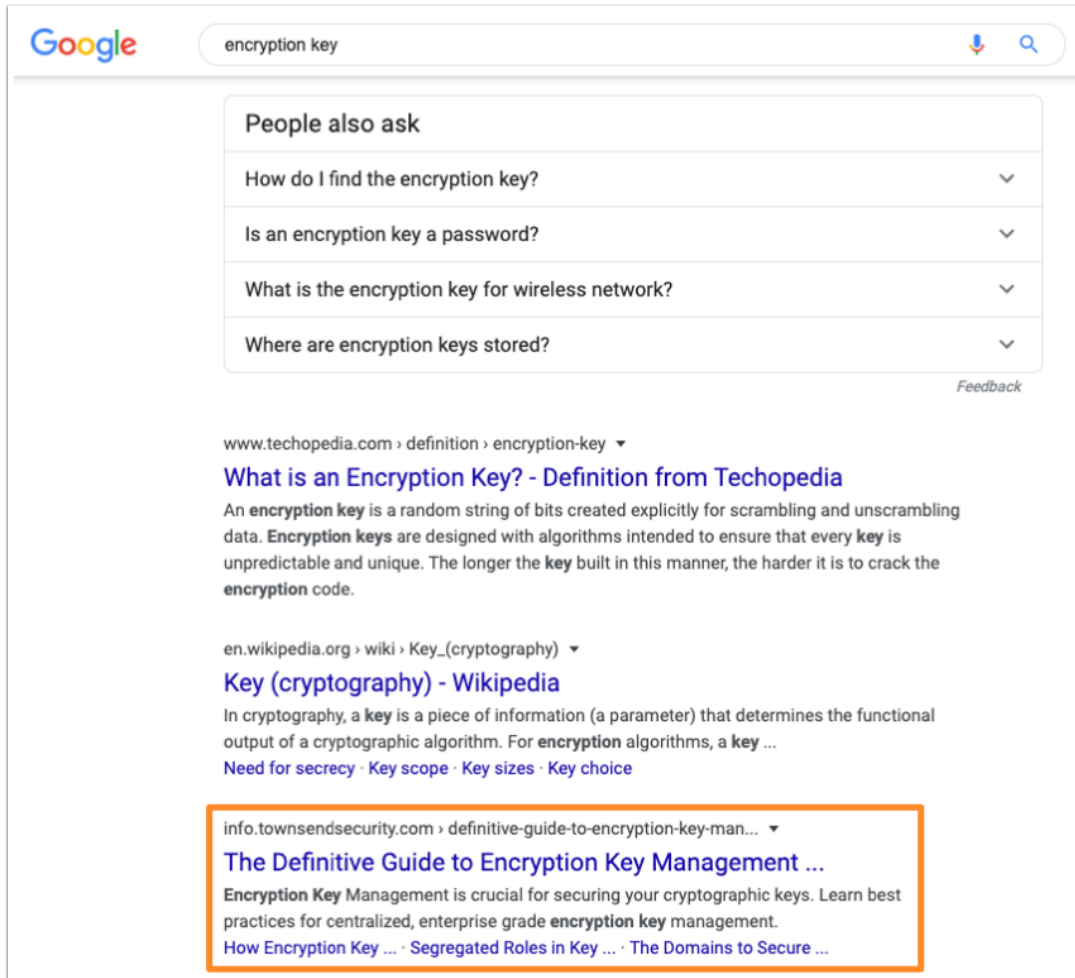
Not a surprise, since Townsend constantly limproves and optimizes their content pillars to keep them performing at a high level. Remember, if Google deems your content as a relevant, authoritative resource, then your average first-page ranking probably also ranks well for a thousand other relevant keywords — even more broad ones with higher monthly search volume.

What I love most about Townsend's story is the impact one experiment made on their inbound content strategy efforts, especially since Townsend has been creating content consistently since 2011. A shift in perspective for Townsend's approach to inbound marketing completely transformed its business.

Do you have a topic cluster for your business that you'd like to share?
If so, click here.

Types of Content Pillars with Examples

This is not the only way to go about creating and structuring content from an SEO perspective. But I have found these recommended template structures create immense value right away while keeping long-term growth plans in mind.

The 10x content pillar

10x is a concept used to describe the "best,"i.e., something that's 10 times better than anything else. The format of the 10x content pillar is a deep dive into a contextual topic. The structure of the content is similar to that of an ungated guide or ebook.

The goal of this content pillar type is to keep people on a given page as long as you can.

One effective way to get the most out of all this content — and use it to convert website visitors into leads — is to offer a supplemental resource. Add practical exercises or advice, like a worksheet or template. This way, you can provide the visitor with a comprehensive resource to help them apply what they're learning to their specific situation.

For example, this 10x content pillar from inbound growth agency SmartBug Media provides a comprehensive overview of [how to create a buyer persona](). The page teaches you:
- what a buyer persona is,
- why they're important,
- how to build one,
- how to use one,
- and how to continue developing one.

Notice how SmartBug's pillar page is structured with "why," "how," and "what" keywords related to buyer personas. That's because those are secondary keywords that:
- match the intent of someone looking to learn more about creating a buyer persona.
- have enough monthly search volume to warrant that section being included on the page.
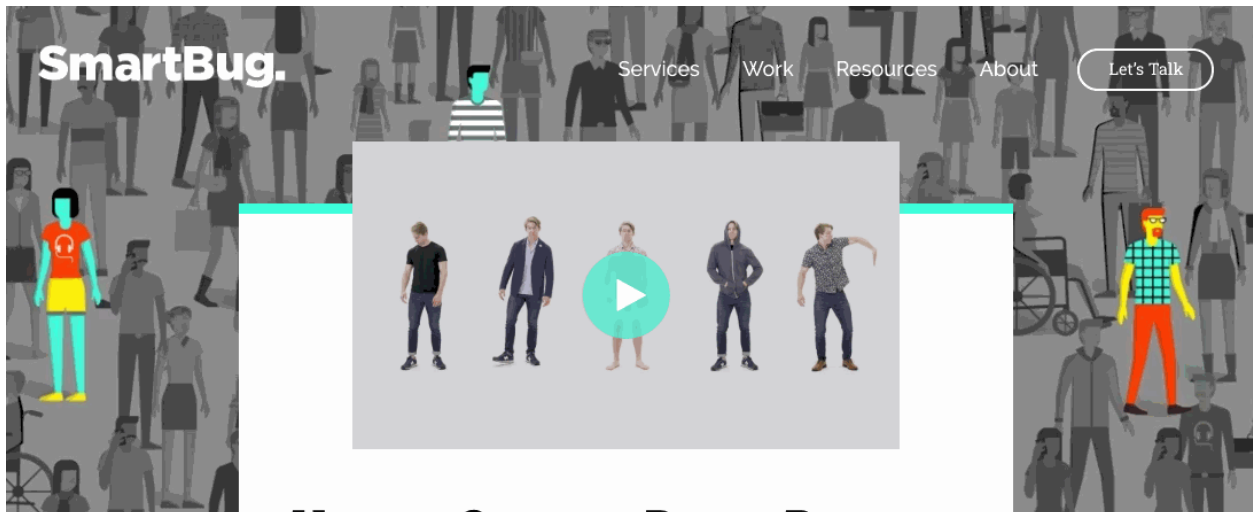
Tip: When outlining and structuring sections for 10x content pillars in the awareness stage of the buyer's journey, try starting with questions related to the topic you're writing about. Form questions using "why," "how," and/or "what." I bet you'll find there's search volume intent to support including them in your content.

What I love most about this example is how SmartBug took the time to add more value to their downloadable offer. Sure, they could've just repackaged the on-page content into a PDF, a best practice for websites trying to convert visitors into leads. However, SmartBug went the extra mile and added a practical component to its offer to help the reader *apply* what they're learning to their business. Taking the time to add more value to your content offers will set you apart from your competition and build trust with your audience — turning them into interested fans (and valuable leads) of your brand.

For just over 18 months, SmartBug published results from this experience. Below is a list of notable page performance. This page:

- currently ranks on the first page of Google's organic search for more than 800 keywords, of which over 40 keywords rank in the top 3 positions (source: Moz Keyword Explorer);

841 Ranking Keywords   ⬇ Export CSV   ⊕ Add to... ▾

☐ Keyword	● www.sm... ↕	Difficulty i ↕	Monthly i ↕ Volume
☐ attract and convert more buyers by using marketing personas	#1 /inbound-mar... i	23	0-10
☐ how to use persona-based inbound marketing	#1 /inbound-mar... i	29	0-10
☐ the ultimate guide to inbound marketing personas	#1 /inbound-mar... i	31	0-10
☐ what is an inbound persona	#1 /inbound-mar... i	33	0-10
☐ inbound personas	#1 /inbound-mar... i	36	0-10

- generated over 5,300 net new contacts (i.e. leads);
- And attributed over $100,000 in revenue.

Tip: Google gives you 50–60 characters before a title tag is cut off. Keeping this character limit in mind, do your best to create a human-friendly title tag that explains what the page is about and clusters together a series of keywords with monthly search volume intent. And remember, the words don't have to be in exact order for a search engine to understand what you're trying to communicate. For example, here's a breakdown of SmartBug's title tag for it's 10x content pillar:
- *Title tag: How to Create a Buyer Persona in 5 Steps [+Free Templates]*
  - *Broad topic: Buyer persona (40,500 MSV)*
  - *Contextual topic: How to create a buyer persona (480 MSV)*
  - *Additional context: Buyer persona template (5,400 MSV)*

When doing this, make sure that the title tag aligns with the page's content, otherwise don't expect the results you're looking for.

All of this value with just one topic cluster, one content pillar, and a supplemental downloadable content offer.

The resource content pillar

The resource content pillar is a bookmarkable reference page, most effective when compiling like-themed branded content. Businesses who create these pages generally already have a lot of content in their possession to support a broad topic.

Because of this, you can create and optimize a resource content pillar for a broad topic or a contextual topic.

Tip: Make it a best practice to create structure between the intent of your 10x and resource content pillars. For example, a broad topic is to a resource content pillar as being specific about that topic is to a 10x content pillar. Working within this frame of mind will make it easier to get into a rhythm of creating content that will grow and puzzle together over time.

This content pillar type serves as a resource hub connecting a series of like-themed content. Yes, this page can have a lot of content on it like a 10x content pillar, but the intent is different.

When creating pages like this, your linking strategy is important to consider. Tell a story supporting the topic by organizing your content assets in a user-friendly way. This makes it easier for people to find and binge your content.

Here are three effective ways to consider using resource content pillars.

1. A resource content pillar made up primarily of blog posts

If your business blogs regularly, then it's likely you have a lot of blog posts supporting a broad topic in your possession. For example, personal hygiene company Colgate has published over 2,000 blog posts related to "gum disease."
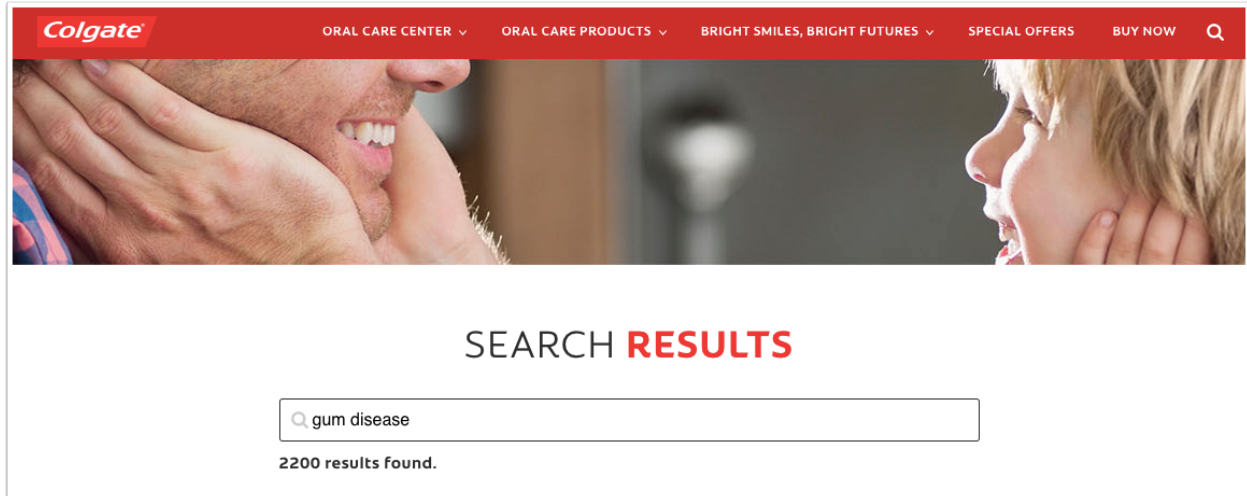
That's a lot of content to sift through, which is why Colgate created a resource content pillar for the primary broad topic "gum disease." Colgate did this by featuring a compilation of 50+ blog posts in support of like-themed high-traffic topics matching the intent of what people might be looking for when researching gum disease, like:

- Gum disease signs and symptoms
- Gum disease cause
- Gum disease diagnosis
- Gum disease prevention
- Gum disease treatment

Each section offers 1–2 paragraphs of context to educate readers about the term. However, the real value of the page is a list of links to blog posts in each section. For example, if you're looking to prevent gum disease, then it could be helpful to check out this blog post on "How to Fight Gingivitis in Three Easy Steps."

GUM DISEASE

| Definition | Signs & Symptoms | Cause | Diagnosis | Prevention | Treatment | Related Conditions |
| Complications | Other Info About Gum Disease | Featured Products |

Definition

Gum disease is an inflammation of the gum line that can progress to affect the bone that surrounds and supports your teeth. The three stages of gum disease — from least to most severe — are gingivitis, periodontitis and advanced periodontitis.

- **Parent Primer: What Is Gum Disease and How Can It Affect Your Child?**
- **What Is Periodontal Disease?**
- **Periodontal Disease**
- **Periodontal Disease: Causes and Prevention**
- **What is Periodontitis?**
- **Gingivitis: Overview And Prevention**

And for those looking for a solution to prevent gum disease, Colgate offers some relevant products at the end of the page.

The simple way to help prevent gum disease

Gum disease is caused when bacteria (plaque) are not removed by daily brushing and flossing, luckily it's preventable. Try one of our toothpastes designed to reduce plaque regrowth and help prevent the occurrence of gum disease.

Colgate Total® 12hr Pro-shield® Mouthwash

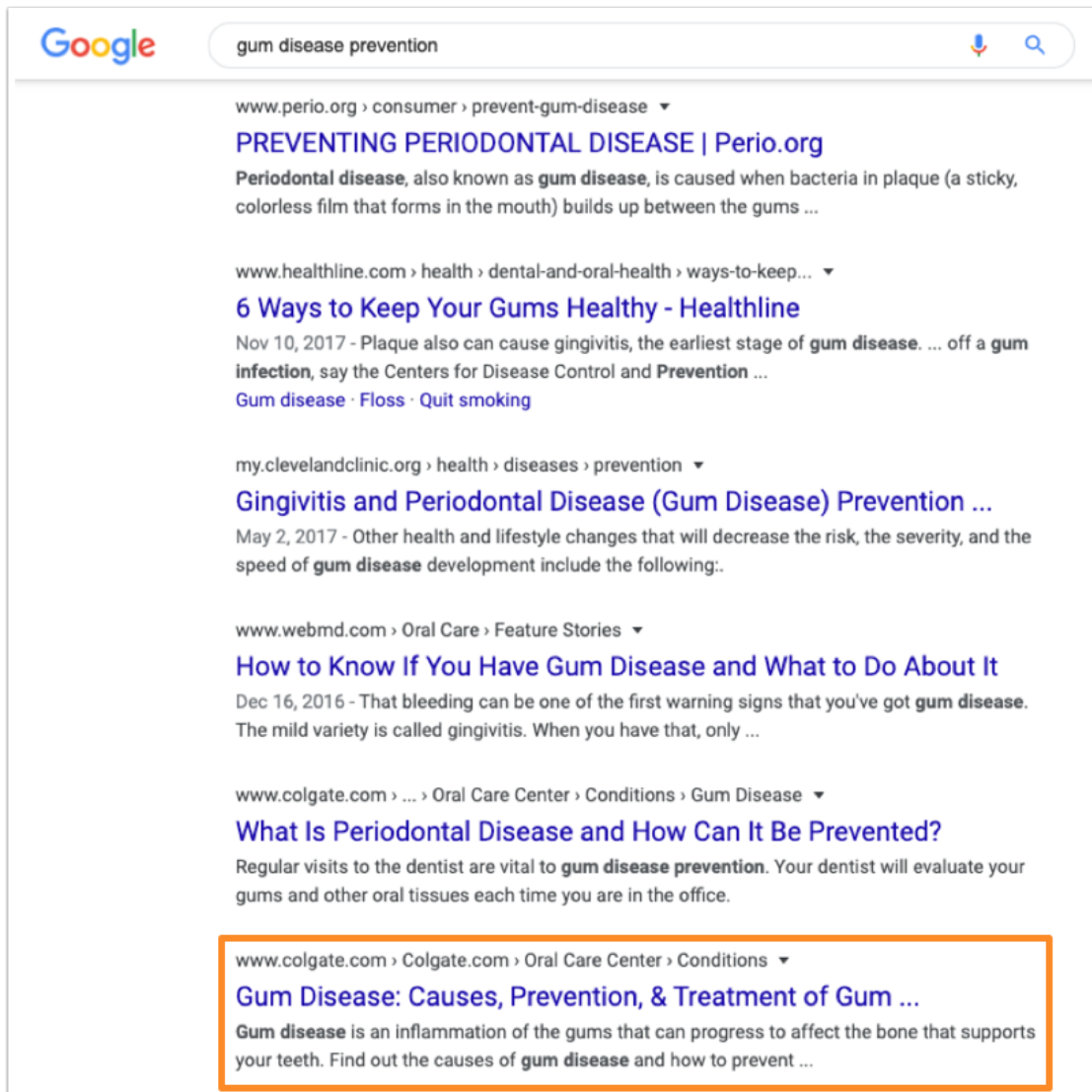Colgate® Total® Mouthwash For Gum Health™

Colgate Total^SF Fresh Mint Stripe™ Gel Tootpaste

Or View All Products

This page is less than 1,100 words with a clean design splitting up each contextual topic, making it easy for readers to sift through the content. Search engines find this helpful, which is why several of the contextual topics rank on the first page of Google's organic search. Notice how this page ranks at the sixth position for "gum disease prevention."

Google   gum disease prevention

www.perio.org › consumer › prevent-gum-disease ▾
PREVENTING PERIODONTAL DISEASE | Perio.org
Periodontal disease, also known as **gum disease**, is caused when bacteria in plaque (a sticky, colorless film that forms in the mouth) builds up between the gums ...

www.healthline.com › health › dental-and-oral-health › ways-to-keep... ▾
6 Ways to Keep Your Gums Healthy - Healthline
Nov 10, 2017 - Plaque also can cause gingivitis, the earliest stage of **gum disease**. ... off a **gum infection**, say the Centers for Disease Control and **Prevention** ...
Gum disease · Floss · Quit smoking

my.clevelandclinic.org › health › diseases › prevention ▾
Gingivitis and Periodontal Disease (Gum Disease) Prevention ...
May 2, 2017 - Other health and lifestyle changes that will decrease the risk, the severity, and the speed of **gum disease** development include the following:.

www.webmd.com › Oral Care › Feature Stories ▾
How to Know If You Have Gum Disease and What to Do About It
Dec 16, 2016 - That bleeding can be one of the first warning signs that you've got **gum disease**. The mild variety is called gingivitis. When you have that, only ...

www.colgate.com › ... › Oral Care Center › Conditions › Gum Disease ▾
What Is Periodontal Disease and How Can It Be Prevented?
Regular visits to the dentist are vital to **gum disease prevention**. Your dentist will evaluate your gums and other oral tissues each time you are in the office.

www.colgate.com › Colgate.com › Oral Care Center › Conditions ▾
Gum Disease: Causes, Prevention, & Treatment of Gum ...
Gum disease is an inflammation of the gums that can progress to affect the bone that supports your teeth. Find out the causes of **gum disease** and how to prevent ...

Google deems this page a highly authoritative resource. This is why it ranks near the top of the second page of Google for the page's broad topic "gum disease," a query with over 100,000 monthly searches (source: using Keywords Everywhere).
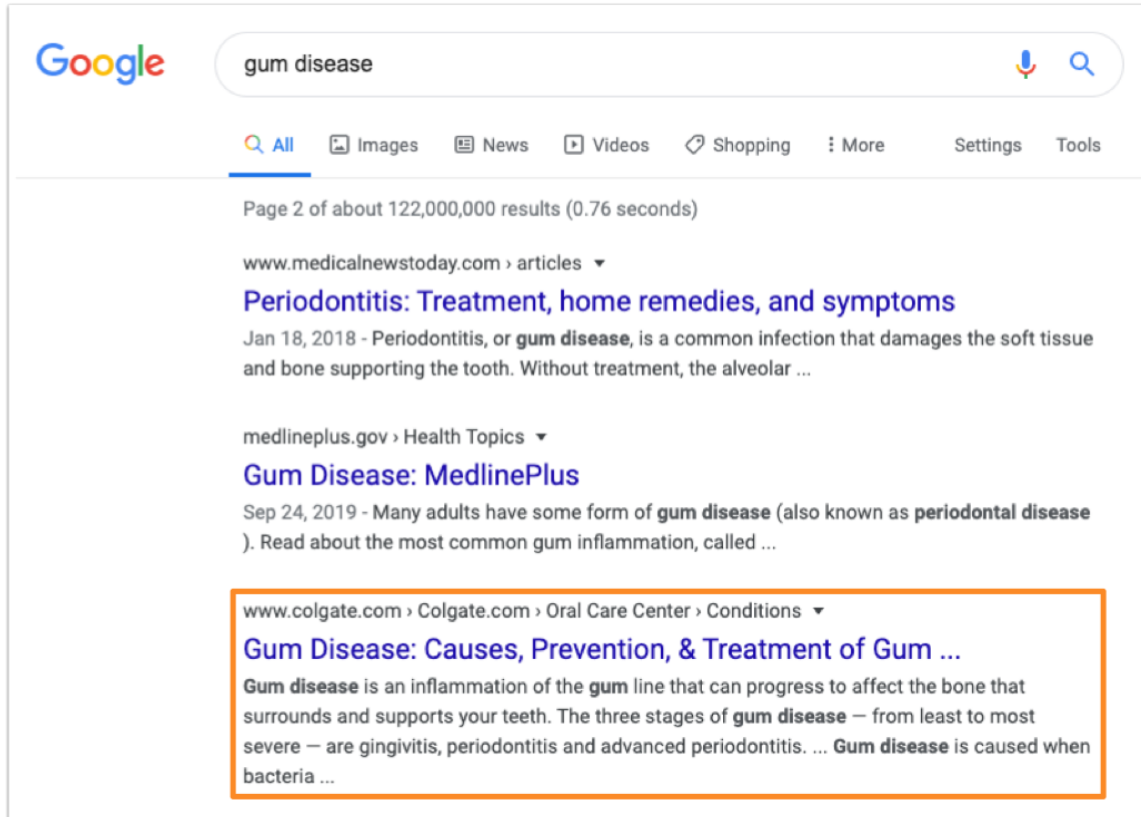
2. A resource content pillar made up of your brand's owned media assets

If you've been doing inbound marketing for a while, then it's likely you have content offers, videos, infographics, and more (including blog posts) supporting a broad topic.

That's a lot of experiences you can provide your audience. But actually finding those assets can be a challenge for your visitors. Create a page to make it easy for people to see the resources you have to offer.

For example, marketing agency Campaign Creators built a resource content pillar providing a comprehensive overview of "conversion rate optimization." Sections include:
- What is CRO
- Website CRO
- Ecommerce conversion rate optimization
- Top conversion rate tools
- Conversion rate optimization services

Each section offers:
- An introduction
- A hub of links to related owned media, including relevant blog posts, relevant content offers, and videos
- A supplemental diagram or visual
- A list of definitions

Tip: Consider investing in templates for your content pillars. Using templates will create a consistent learning experience for your audience while also making it easier for you to create quality content at a quicker (and less expensive) rate.

Campaign Creators' content pillar and topic cluster strategy have worked well for them. After implementing it, they experienced exponential growth in organic traffic, then converted that traffic into leads (source: HubSpot Analytics).
- Within 6 months, they tripled their organic traffic;
- Within a year, their organic traffic increased by over 500%;
- And within 18 months, they surpassed 10,000 monthly organic visitors. In the same time period, leads from organic increased by 2,300%.
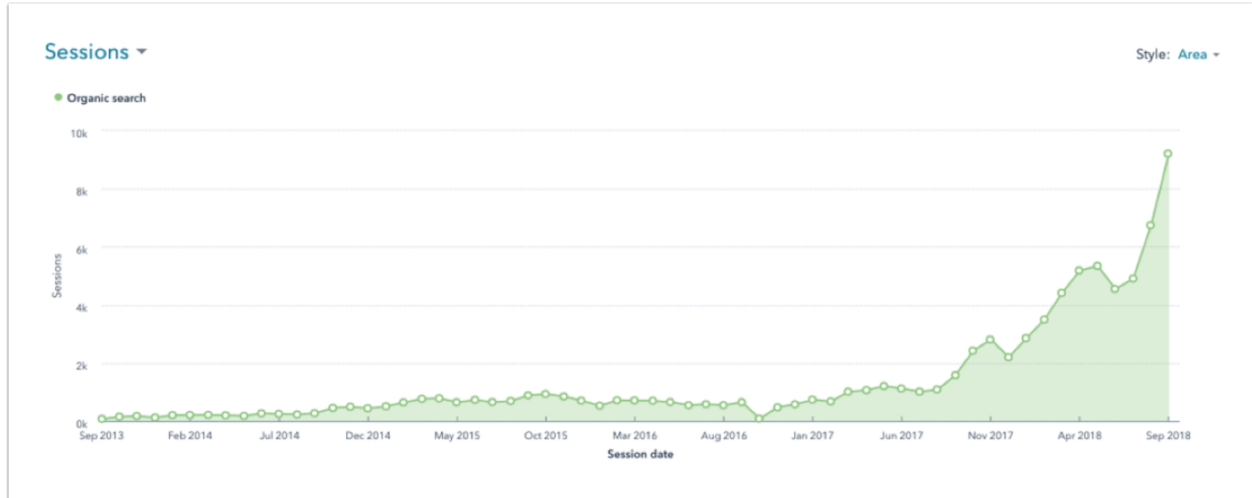
Before moving on, it's important to note content pillars can be used effectively for each stage of the buyer's journey: awareness, consideration, and decision. We've primarily reviewed awareness-stage content pillars thus far, so let's review content effectively used for the consideration and decision stages.

Let's take a look at how marketing agency Vital uses the topic cluster approach to organize their consideration- and decision-stage content.

A multi-faceted inbound agency, Vital offers a plethora of services for their customers. To help communicate this in a clean, well-crafted way, Vital created a resource content pillar that groups their service programs together with a link to more details about each service offering.

Let's say you want to learn more about Vital's "digital marketing strategy" service offering. By clicking the provided link, you're taken to a 10x content pillar-type page that explains their service offering. Their explanation is based on the top questions potential customers have, including:

- How does it work?
- What are the tactics?
- How is the program structured?
- Do you report on results?
- How much does it cost?
- Who will I work with?

Vital even links to a full list of FAQs for their digital marketing program in case the visitor has more questions. It's a nice touch for a more efficient and meaningful process if a visitor is ready to work with the sales team.

Tip: Ask your sales team about questions they're asked during the sales process. This is really the best way to understand the types of content you should be creating for this use case.

To help increase social proof, Vital offers multiple case studies from customers they've worked with at the bottom of the page. This shows the impact their services have had for their customers.

One more example, and this time let's make it about creating a topic cluster to support customers using your product or service.

Your audience may have questions about how to use and get the most out of the product or service they've just purchased. Try creating a topic cluster to support just that.

If you use HubSpot to manage and grow your business, you can see HubSpot offers resource content pillars for each of their products to educate their users on how to effectively build and use their tools, step-by-step.

For example, HubSpot offers a resource content pillar for their workflow product if you want to help nurture your leads using automation. HubSpot calls this a marketing automation path.

The page offers step-by-step articles for the various ways someone might consider setting up a workflow.

If you want to learn how to set your enrollment triggers, the page offers a subtopic content asset to address that.

This approach makes it easy to find content on your site or via a search engine. If you type that query into Google, it's a featured snippet at the top of the page.
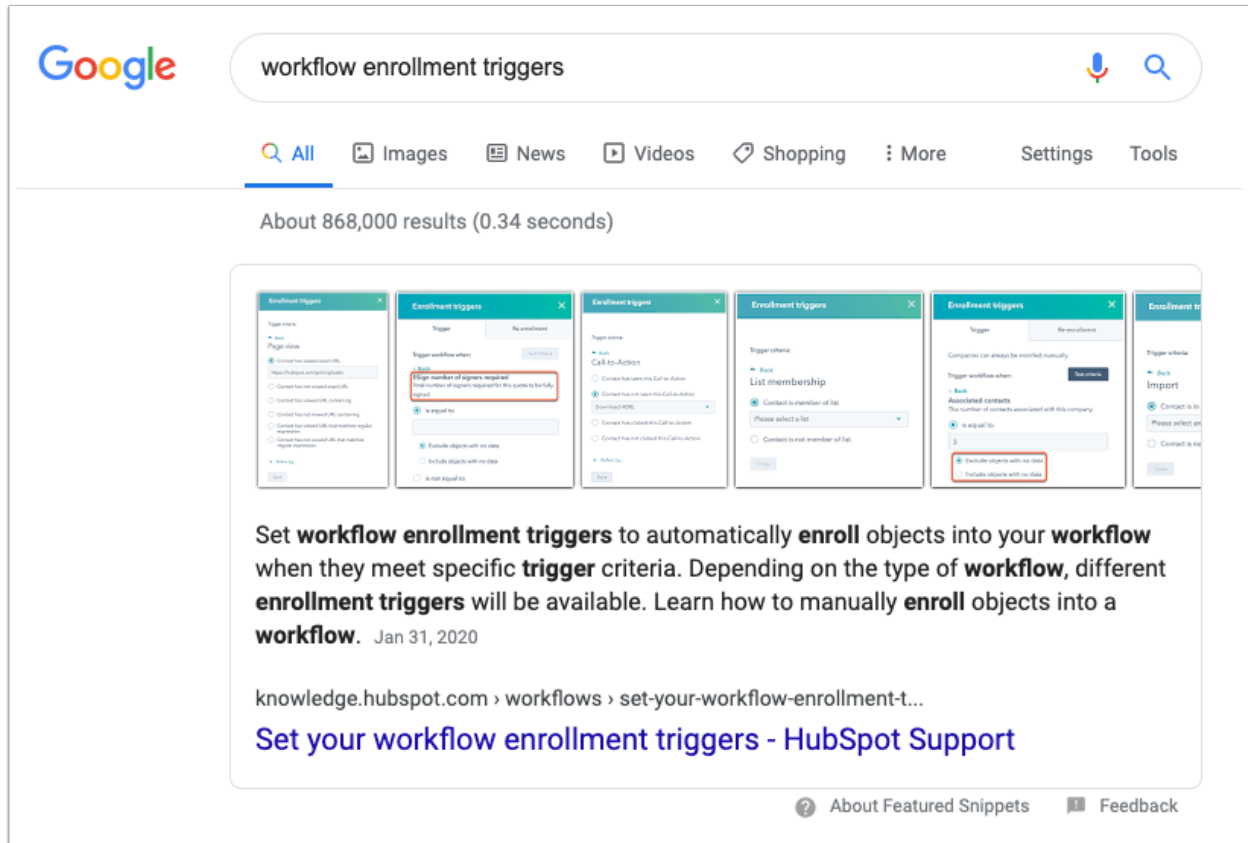
3. A resource content pillar connected to a series of like-themed 10x content pillars

This experience is something I like to call the broad topic cluster. Here's a breakdown of the content architecture:
- A broad topic takes the shape of a resource content pillar and connects to a series of like-themed contextual 10x content pillars to form a broad topic cluster.
- Each of those 10x content pillars connect to a series of like-themed subtopic content assets to form a contextual topic cluster.

What I love most about this structure is how deliberate and well-thought out it is. Each contextual topic cluster is made up of a series of subtopic content assets used to promote and increase authority for the 10x content pillar. And because all of the 10x

content pillars connect to each other and the resource content pillar, all pages benefit in the growth of awareness and increase in authority.

It looks something like this:
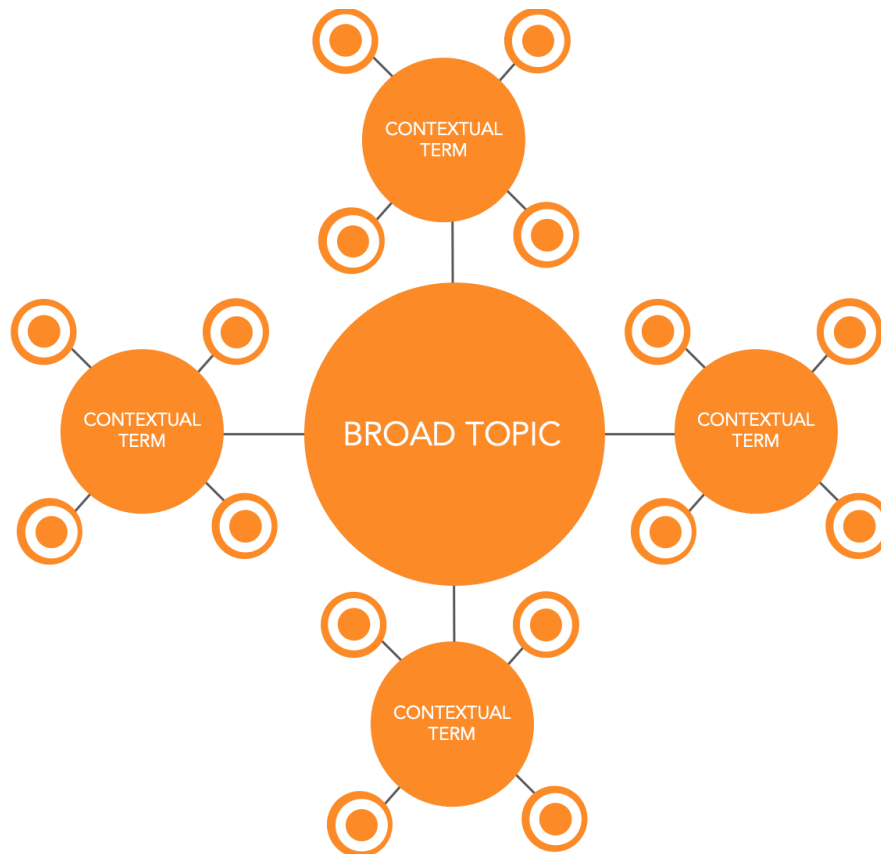
But how do you connect a broad topic cluster together?

Connect a resource content pillar to the series of like-themed 10x content pillars via a table of contents with links to each page, linking all of the pages together. A table of contents creates a user-friendly experience for the visitor while passing authority through to each page.

Let's see what this looks like in action.

Email outreach company Mailshake created a masterclass for their business' key broad topic "cold email." The cold email masterclass offers a resource content pillar that's essentially the main hub for their training series. It's a valuable, bookmarkable page to reference again and again.
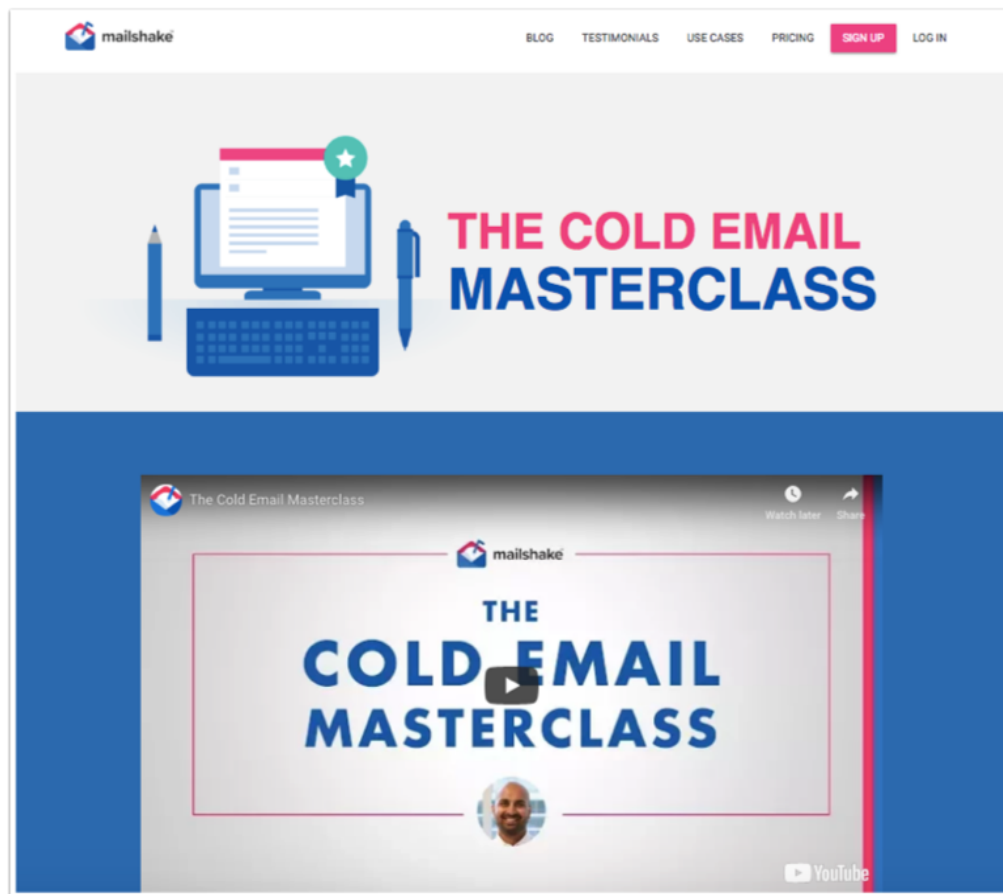
The masterclass is made up of a series of practical lessons — one 10x content pillar for each lesson — including:

- How to write a good email,
- Expediting the sales outreach process,
- Creating personalized emails,
- Editing emails prior to sending,
- Writing follow-up emails,
- And analyzing emails for further optimization.

Tip: While it may be helpful (and make sense) to include your broad topic in each contextual topic, it's not necessary. Notice how Mailshake's contextual topics don't specifically list "cold email" in their titles. That's okay because they're semantically related, which your audience (and search engines) will understand.

At the bottom of each page in the cluster, there's a table of contents with links to content included in the masterclass. This connection communicates to the visitor how

to best binge their training series. At the same time, this connection also communicates to search engines the breadth and quality of Mailshake's content supporting "cold email," lifting search engine rankings.

To hold interested readers accountable through their transformations to becoming a cold email expert, Mailshake offers an eight-part email series with practical templates to help their audience apply what they're learning to their businesses. Additionally, Mailshake provides visitors with an ebook, a packaged, expanded compilation of all eight lessons. This way, readers can consume the content all in one place without having to refer back to Mailshake's site.

In six months, this broad topic cluster was visited over 28,000 times and converted 20% of this traffic by offering a helpful, educational experience. That's over 5,600 people

giving their email addresses in an effort to transform into a cold email expert. After all, knowing how to do effective cold email outreach is a primary tactic for a successful inbound link builder.

Tip: Consider using marketing automation as a way to engage your new contact (a.k.a., lead) to progress in their journey toward making a well-informed, confident decision. **The more you know about your buyer persona and their journey, the better experience you can provide.**

Additionally, Mailshake's resource content pillar ranks on the first page of Google's organic search for the broad topic "cold email," which has over 6,600 monthly searches (source: using Keywords Everywhere).

Google   cold email

hbr.org › 2016/09 › a-guide-to-cold-emailing ▾

A Guide to Cold Emailing - Harvard Business Review

Sep 20, 2016 - **Cold emailing** is harder than most communication for two reasons. You have no relationship with your audience yet, and you lack non-verbal ...

www.nutshell.com › blog › best-cold-emails-ever ▾

The One Cold Email That Actually Gets Everything Right ...

A **cold email** is a sales **email** sent to a potential buyer who the seller has no prior relationship with. Sales reps gather **email** addresses through online research, and target businesses and prospects that fit their ideal customer profile.

www.yesware.com › blog › cold-email ▾

10 Cold Email Formulas and The Science Behind Why They ...

Proven **cold email** techniques to write emails fast, with formulas that stop people in their tracks and compel them to read (and reply to) your **cold email**.

www.leadfuze.com › cold-email-outreach ▾

Cold Email: A Complete Guide to Mastering Email Outreach ...

This is hot! **Cold email** is not SPAM, but read this to make sure you are not breaking laws and are getting responses to your email outreach.

blog.close.com › 5-cold-email-templates-that-will-generate-warm-lead... ▾

5 cold email templates that will generate warm leads for your ...

There are 3.8 billion email users in the world. Pretty much any person that you want to get in touch with, you can do so via **cold email**. In our recent blog post ...

mailshake.com › masterclass ▾

The Cold Email Masterclass by Mailshake

Whether you use **cold email** to find sales leads, connect with influencers, build your personal brand, find mentors, or grow your network, there's no ...

Conclusion

The digital age has produced an information revolution, forever changing the habits of the human race. People don't just want answers to problems they're trying to solve — they want them *now*.

To keep up with the demand for answers — i.e., [millions of search requests per minute](#) — search engines are constantly evolving algorithms to surface valuable content. In this case, valuable = quality information structured in a way search engines can understand. Remember, web crawlers operate like searching humans. Make it hard for crawlers to move from place to place on your site, and you're also making it hard for humans to find what they're looking for.

In order for a business to survive and thrive in today's competitive marketplace, it needs an inbound content strategy that scales in awareness and value over time. We've reviewed the topic cluster framework as a powerful solution to attracting, engaging, and delighting your audience. To learn how to put it into action, [read this content pillar](#).

[Have some additional questions regarding the topic cluster framework? If so, ask them here.](#)