# CORNELL
CONTENT MARKETING

SEO
IN THE TIME OF AI
CHECKLIST

SEO: HOW TO SPEAK GOOGLE'S LANGUAGE

Everyone wants to rank on Google and enjoy a nice steady stream of inbound, organic traffic, right? And yet, how do you please the almighty Google gods who are in charge of where your content is placed on the SERP (that's "search engine results page")?
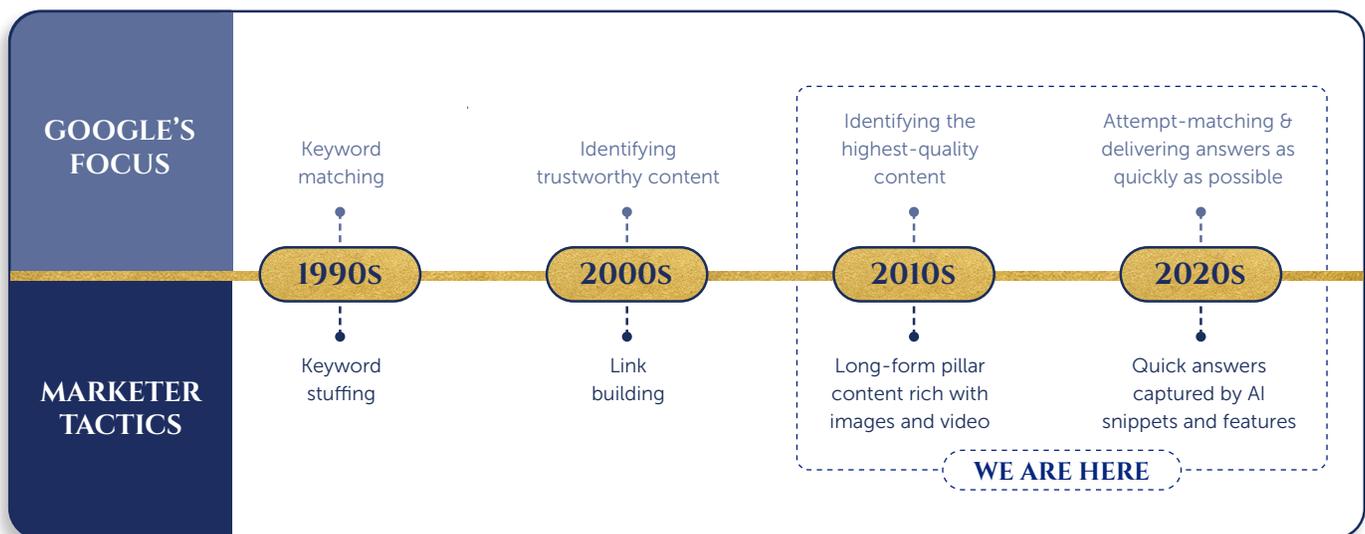
SEO!

Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to **the practice of improving the quality of your content** so that Google knows exactly what your content is about, how much value it provides, and how visible it should be when users search for specific words or phrases.

G **WHAT IS** SEO 🎤

SEO in The Time of AI Checklist →

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SEO with Intent Matching →

See More
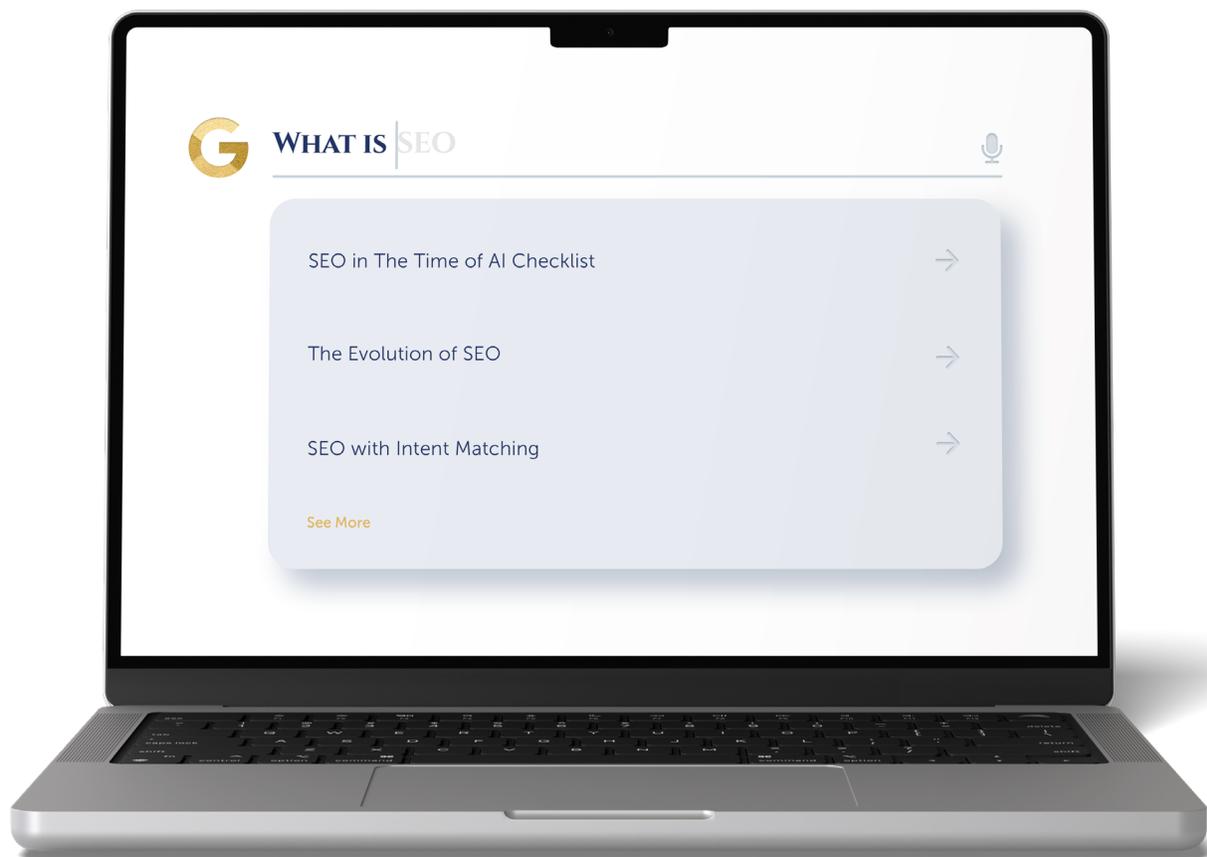
THE EVOLUTION OF SEO

The early days of SEO left us with web pages stuffed full of blatant attempts to rank for a particular keyword, so much so that such pages were virtually indigestible for humans. While it worked for a short time, Google noticed that keyword stuffing was turning off the humans it wanted to appease, so it reprioritized its algorithm and began penalizing the practice of keyword stuffing.

THE EVOLUTION OF SEO THROUGH THE AGES

	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
GOOGLE'S FOCUS	Keyword matching	Identifying trustworthy content	Identifying the highest-quality content	Attempt-matching & delivering answers as quickly as possible
MARKETER TACTICS	Keyword stuffing	Link building	Long-form pillar content rich with images and video	Quick answers captured by AI snippets and features

WE ARE HERE

Today, we see the same dedication from Google to satisfying human curiosity. Above all else, **Google's absolute top priority is to anticipate human intent and satisfy human desires for information and connection to goods and services.**

While it may be tempting to focus on satisfying Google's algorithm and AI functionality, doing so will leave you perpetually one step behind.

Instead, if your top priority is the same as Google's top priority, you will be able to zig and zag right alongside the almighty search giant and its faithful AI companion.

SEO IN THE TIME OF AI

SEO in the time of AI is all about catering to the human experience. This means that we no longer need to focus on getting a keyword onto a page as many times as possible; nor do we need to use questionable databases and link-building hacks to get as many backlinks as possible.

Instead, Google cares about matching a user's intent with what shows up on the SERP.

Cornell specializes in organic, demand generation content that gets your business in front of buyers early in their decision making process.

WIN THE SEO GAME WITH INTENT MATCHING

		SEARCH BEHAVIOR	USER INTENT	EXAMPLE SEARCH	GOOGLE'S PRIORITY	HOW TO RANK
CORNELL'S SPECIALTY	**DIFFICULT**	Typing in a simple question, looking for a quick, direct answer	**Informational:** To get an accurate answer as fast as possible	What is a sales asset?	Providing a quick answer via AI snippets and examples via featured images	Thoughtfully weave definitions of terms into your long-form content
		Typing in a complex question, looking for an in-depth answer	**Investigational:** To get a better understanding of a problem and possible solutions that will be used to guide next steps	What types of sales assets are most effective in B2B?	Providing the most robust, in-depth, and value-packed content	Focus on education, answering as many related questions as possible in one article, and giving concrete examples
	MODERATE	Typing in a noun that describes a product or service, looking for options	**Commercial:** Shopping for company names that provide a specific product or service	AI slide deck builders	Listing the top solution providers based on user ratings and traffic	Build comprehensive landing pages that address features and benefits while using language that is concise and direct
		Using words like "best," "fastest," "cheapest," "most effective," etc.	**Commercial:** Shopping for a solution to a specific problem in order to make a smart purchase	Which AI slide deck builder is the best for B2B sales assets?	Helping the user make a choice	Publish objective buyer guides and side-by-side comparisons of your solution versus your competition
	EASY	Typing in the name of a specific business	**Navigational:** Looking for the website of a specific business	Beautiful.AI	Connecting the user to that business's website, local search listing, and social profiles	Ensure the URLs of all of your online presences, including social, include your exact business name
		Using words like "near me" or including a particular city	**Local:** Shopping for a product or service geographically close to the user	Slide deck printer near me	Providing local business listings, directions, and contact information	Ensure your Google My Business listing is optimized and your website lists your physical locations

Luckily, SEO in the time of AI doesn't have to be as daunting of a task as it might seem. At Cornell, we specialize in creating high-quality content audiences crave while also ensuring that content satisfies Google and its AI-powered algorithms.

We've created a simple SEO checklist to help you maximize the inbound marketing power of every word you publish online.

YOUR ACTIONABLE AI-ERA SEO CHECKLIST

☐ **Keyword in Title:** The keyword should be in the title (H1) of the page or article.

☐ **Keyword in Introduction:** The keyword should appear in the first paragraph of your introduction.

☐ **Keyword in Subheading:** Include the keyword in at least one H2 and one H3, if you've used any H3s.

☐ **Keyword Density:** The keyword or phrase should be 4% of the total word count of the page. To find your target keyword density follow this formula:

(Total word count for the article) x .04 = number of SEO words

🔍 If your keyword is a phrase of two words or more, then count each word in the phrase toward the total.

For example: If the page is 600 words in total, the keyword should account for 24 of those words. If your keyword is 2 words (such as "energy drinks"), then it should be used 12 times throughout the entire page.

☐ **SEO Title:** The SEO title should be between 50 and 70 characters long and contain the keyword as close to the front of the title as possible.

☐ **Slug:** Website pages and blogs can have custom slugs. The "slug" is everything that comes after the domain name and a / symbol. Always include the keyword in the slug for all articles and web pages, with the exception of the home page.
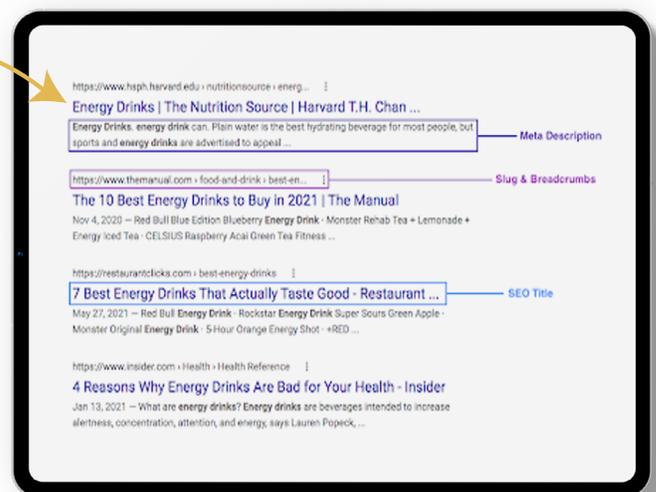
For example, in this URL:
https://www.cornellcontentmarketing.com/copywriting-content-marketing-services/,
*"www.cornellcontentmarketing.com" is the **domain name** and **"copywriting-content-marketing-services"** is the **slug**. The keyword is "content marketing services."*

☐ **Keyword Variations:** While you always want to choose a primary keyword that is high in monthly search volume (MSV) and low in keyword difficulty (KD) for your page's title, slug, introduction, and subheadings, Google understands that there are multiple words to describe the same thing or idea. Use keyword variations in your meta description and body content to match AI-driven searches and appeal to a broader array of users.

☐ **Meta Description:** Between 110 and 150 (ideally 120) characters long, the meta description is a short description of the page that appears on the Google SERP. The keyword should appear toward the beginning of the meta description.

☐ **Text length:** Website pages should be no less than 500 words. Blog articles should ideally be as long as possible without sacrificing quality. At minimum, a blog should be 600 words. The strongest SEO-value articles are 1,200–2,500 words.

☐ **Content Quality:** When Google first emerged as the dominant search tool, it wasn't focused on quality. Now, in 2025, quality is a top priority. Google's quality-discerning criteria include:

> 🐦 **EEAT:** Google and AI evaluations determine quality based on your content's ability to convey experience, expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness, or EEAT. Wherever possible, cite your sources, including your in-house experts who are providing thought leadership.

> 🐦 **Long-Tail Keywords:** Use tools like Answer the Public to brainstorm long-tail, complex searches. Then provide in-depth answers that AI can't adequately summarize.

> 🐦 **Conversational Language:** Write for an 8th-grade reading level, and use human, conversational language in your content. Making your content feel "high brow" will only exclude huge portions of readers, which will make your content less appealing to Google, which is trying to satisfy as many people as possible.

> 🐦 **FAQs:** Whenever appropriate, include an "FAQs" section at the bottom of your long-form content and website pages.

> 🐦 **Formatting:** Google loves bulleted and numbered lists, tables, and short paragraphs. Leverage diverse formatting options to capture Google's favor and make your content skimmable for readers.

> 🐦 **Subheadings & Bolding:** Ensure your content has one H1 for the title of the article, several H2s for the various sections of your content, and H3s for subtopics. Use bolded font sparingly to highlight the most valuable ideas and information on a page to cater to readers who want to skim content quickly and get the exact information they seek.

☐ **Featured Snippets:** AI-generated summaries and direct answers often provide users with information without clicking through to a website. This reduces organic traffic, especially for informational queries. However, if your content is helpful and direct, users are more likely to click through to your site from the snippet for more information. To increase your ability to appear in featured snippets:

🖋 Place the direct answer to the query you want to rank for within the first 2–3 sentences at the top of your content. Use the rest of your content to go into great detail and elaborate on the query.

🖋 Ensure your content contains clear, concise, and helpful definitions, statistics, and question-answering statements that AI can feature as quick-answer snippets.

🖋 Brainstorm and answer common questions people may ask Google or AI assistants, particularly those including the words "what," "how," "why," and "best."

🖋 Search for the keyword you want to rank for. Then look at Google's "People Also Ask" section to see related questions your content should answer.

☐ **Outbound Links:** Include links to credible and relevant sources outside of the page's domain. Make sure all outbound links open in a new tab.

☐ **Inbound Links:** Include links to other pages within the page's domain (i.e., within the same website).

☐ **Original Images:** Google is just as tired as you are of seeing the same stock images everywhere. Prioritize creating original images and graphics that turn your text-based information into helpful visuals.

☐ **Image Alt Attributes:** Because Google cannot view images or videos the way humans do, it needs text to better understand how the image relates to the content. All images should be assigned alt text that includes the page's keyword.

☐ **Mobile-Friendliness:** According to Statista, mobile search behavior accounted for 62.54% of all searches at the end of 2024. Google places huge value on mobile-friendliness, so be sure your pages load quickly, your layouts are responsive, and your images are optimized for mobile viewing.

☐ **Schema Markup:** Use Google's Structured Data Markup Helper to ensure your back-end schema markup helps Google better understand your content and list it in featured images, featured videos, and more for greater visibility.

FAQs

HOW DOES GOOGLE USE AI?

Simply put, Google uses AI to evaluate the content of a website, identify patterns in user search behavior, and match human intent with the most helpful website content.

WHAT ARE FEATURED SNIPPETS?

Featured snippets are AI-compiled quick answers to search queries that indicate the user has the desire for a fast answer. Featured snippets typically include information copied from the page of a website that Google has deemed a reliable source, plus a link to that source. As a result of AI snippets being added to the SERP, more than 60% of searches at the end of 2024 resulted in no clicks to websites — presumably because users are getting their answers from the AI-generated featured snippet.

WHAT ARE FEATURED IMAGES?

Depending on user intent behavior, some searches signal to Google that the user is looking for an image, visual representation, or product photo. The featured images section of the SERP is where Google will show images that match the user's search query.

WHAT ARE FEATURED VIDEOS?

Similar to featured images, featured videos are videos Google has deemed valuable and relevant to a user's search query. Videos are particularly relevant for searches asking for how-to and explanation information.

WHAT IS VOICE SEARCH AND HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM TRADITIONAL SEARCH?

With tools such as Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant, voice search allows users to speak a query into a device instead of typing it in. As a result, the queries that are more conversational tend to take the form of complete sentences or questions, rather than typed queries, which are typically entered as specific short phrases and may contain typos. Voice search is affecting SEO in a positive way because Google prioritizes ranking content that is more conversational and natural-sounding, which makes for a better user experience on the SERP and on the piece of content they land on.

Need help pleasing the searching humans and scrutinizing AI algorithms?

Cornell Content Marketing specializes in SEO strategy and high-quality content that gets you massive organic visibility via Google and AI search.

REACH OUT TO US TODAY TO LEARN MORE!

Book now or email rairose@cornellcontentmarketing.com