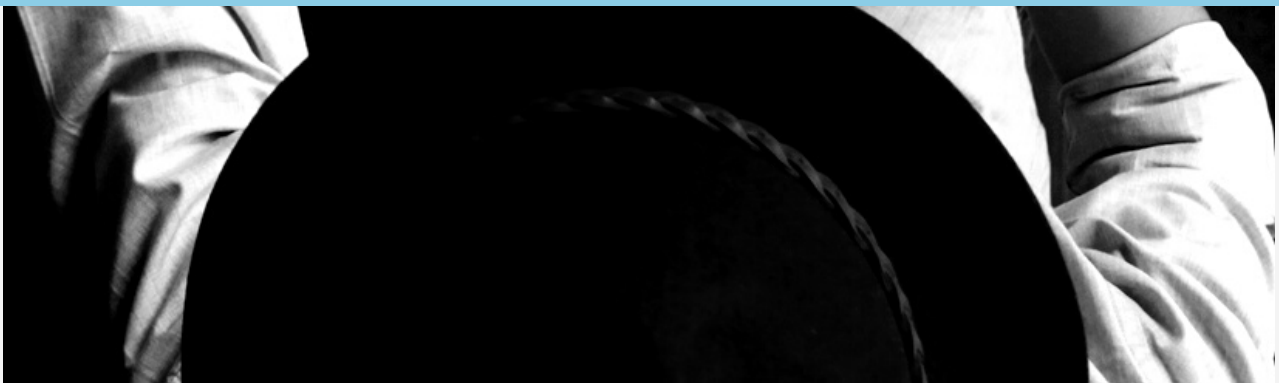




AN ARCHITECT GUIDE TO CONTENT PILLARS AND TOPIC CLUSTERS



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SEO has undergone various changes throughout the years. This includes the rise of mobile optimisation and the shift from keyword stuffing to in-depth content. Yet there's one often overlooked innovation that deserves a lot more attention: pillar pages and topic clusters.

When Google released RankBrain back in 2015, the topic cluster model was also born. For the uninitiated, RankBrain is an algorithm with an interpretation model that takes into account numerous factors – such as personalisation and the true intent behind search queries. The result: it finds the best and most relevant search results for users, ranking them accordingly.

While simply producing SEO-friendly content worked in the past, it's likely not enough on its own to hit the first page of Google. This is particularly the case when operating in a competitive field with limited search real estate available. That's why it is highly recommended to adopt a content pillar and topic cluster strategy.



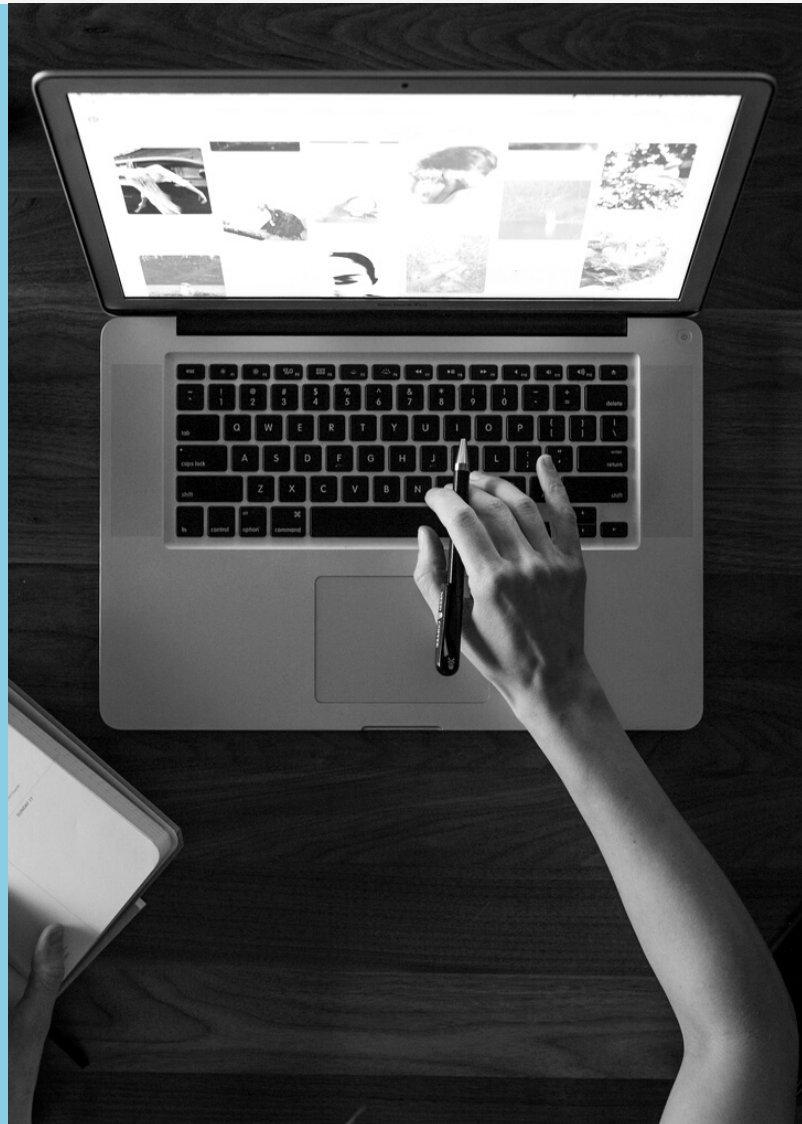
If you're unsure what this method entails, you have landed in the right place. This guide will detail what these elements are, how they function, and a whole lot more.

Let's get started!

WHAT ARE CONTENT PILLARS?

Also known as pillar pages, content pillars are effectively the foundation for the entire strategy. A content pillar serves as the mother of all resources for a specific topic, where it provides all of the answers that a user may have about the subject.

However, the content pillar doesn't go all-in with the details. It supplies a comprehensive overview of a broad topic, yet plenty of room is left to expand with more in-depth analysis. This is done with the use of a topic cluster strategy – more on that later.



CONTENT PILLARS ARE TYPICALLY UTILISED TO TARGET A SPECIFIC SEED OR SHORT-TAIL KEYWORD.

The content usually comes in at about **3,000 to 5,000 words** and is a great starting point for people that are unfamiliar about the topic in question.

WHAT IS A TOPIC CLUSTER?

Topic clusters, also known as cluster pages, are used to compliment the aforementioned content pillar. They are a group of subtopic pages that expand on points spotlighted by the content pillar, with each page going into more specific details. This means the reader doesn't have to leave your website and search for any additional information about the topic – it's all available to them within a couple of clicks.

From a content marketing point of view, a topic clusters model is helpful in numerous different ways. First of all, it presents the opportunity to target more long-tail keywords that are relevant to the subject matter. This means that, with your topic cluster content strategy, you have a greater scope of showing up in a more diverse list of search queries.

Most importantly, however, are the internal links you gain. As you have to bind together your pillar content with your topic clusters, this is naturally done with the use of hyperlinks. In the same way, external backlinks help a website to gain relevance with Google; the same applies to its internal counterpart.

It also assists Google in another way. As you essentially organise your content with this pillar-and-cluster strategy, it proves to the search kingpin a semantic relationship exists between each of your pages. Due to this, it encourages Google to further promote not just one of your pages, but all of them within the cluster – which means a more prominent search rank position across the board.

IT ENCOURAGES GOOGLE TO FURTHER PROMOTE NOT JUST ONE OF YOUR PAGES, BUT ALL OF THEM WITHIN THE CLUSTER.



CONTENT PILLARS AND TOPIC CLUSTERS: SEO BENEFITS EXPLAINED

In the same way as a content pillar itself, the previous sections have given a general overview of the SEO benefits of this content marketing strategy. However, let's take a closer look at the reasons why it works so well from a search engine optimisation point of view:

01

USERS STICK AROUND:

With an abundance of content to consume, users are typically going to spend an extended amount of time on your website. This is particularly the case if they go down the rabbit hole and browse all of the topic cluster pages. Google always rewards sites that demonstrate they can retain visitors.

02

BOUNCE RATE REDUCTION:

If your content delivers all the answers, there's no need for users to leave your website and find another source via a Google search. This helps to ensure the bounce rate for your site is lowered.

03

AN INCREASE IN BACKLINKS:

It's not just a natural increase in internal linking you gain. You also receive a healthy boost to your backlink collection. Effective, informative pillar pages – and topic clusters – are going to be shared frequently via social media and other relevant blogs.

04

MORE AND MORE KEYWORDS:

Even if you don't realise it, long-form pages are going to feature an assortment of keywords related to the topic covered. Yet it also gives you scope to incorporate a varied collection of researched short and long-tail keywords. The more cluster pages you create, the more keywords you can include.

05

EVERGREEN CONTENT:

Pillar content is not the type to only have a short shelf life. It's not based around seasonal or topical subjects. It is only evergreen content that doesn't reduce in value over time.



BUILDING PILLAR CONTENT AND TOPIC CLUSTER: A GUIDE

Now you understand what these aspects are and their benefits, it's time to focus on the next step: building your own pillar content and topic cluster. If you want to create content that ranks high in organic search results, this strategy cannot be rushed. Below is a step-by-step guide on what you need to do:



1. PICK YOUR PILLAR

As far as starting points go, few are more obvious than this step. You first need to decide on the primary topic you want to build around. This could be everything from SEO strategies to sports or video games to health advice. As long as it fits in your niche, it's a subject worth considering.

While this is fairly straightforward, there are a few aspects to keep in mind when selecting your pillar content. The last thing you want to do is settle on a topic, put in the work, and realise it's not generating any significant search volume. All examples of content pillars should be:

- **A SUBJECT YOU WANT YOUR WEBSITE TO RANK FOR WITH SEARCH ENGINES.**
- **COVERS NUMEROUS KEYWORDS THAT SUPPLY WORTHWHILE SEARCH VOLUME.**
- **BROAD ENOUGH TO COVER A WIDE VARIETY OF TOPICS AND SUBTOPICS.**

Regarding the last point, you mustn't limit your scope when selecting your pillar. You want to be able to produce a sizeable quantity of supporting content. If you fail to do so, your topic cluster is not going to deliver the desired results.



This is where research is your friend. First, analyse the search intent of your current audience. Understand the type of content they're searching for on Google. See how you can offer a solution to their search queries. Then it's a case of putting together a list of ideas. Say you run a marketing agency. This list could be populated with topics like:

- **USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE YOUR WEBSITE**
- **CREATING AN EFFECTIVE FACEBOOK BUSINESS PROFILE**
- **HOW TO CREATE EFFECTIVE VISUAL CONTENT FOR TWITTER**

It's fair to say these are cluster-like subjects. They need to be connected together with an overarching topic, one which acts as the common denominator – aka the content pillar. In this case, the pillar would be a social media marketing strategy.

2. INSPECT YOUR CURRENT CONTENT

You have decided on your content pillar. Now is a wise time to perform a content audit on your website. By doing this, you can see what existing content you have that can be used for your pillar page.

There are two main advantages of inspecting your current content. Firstly, it allows you to maximise your current content alongside the pillar page. Secondly, it saves you time when putting together your topic clusters. This time can then be spent on covering an even more diverse set of subjects for your content pillar.

3. CONDUCT KEYWORD RESEARCH

Even if content marketing pillars are a different type of SEO tactic, this doesn't mean you should neglect the oldest trick in the book: keywords.

When putting together your list of cluster page ideas, you want to come up with as many viable pages and blog posts as you can. That has already been established in this guide. Well, one way of expanding that list is with keyword research. By finding relevant long-tail keywords, this can uncover a whole host of topic ideas for you to write about.

In addition, when it comes to putting together the actual pillar and cluster pages, you want to incorporate keywords within the content. This is one of the most tried-and-tested content strategies, but that doesn't make it any less effective.

THE MORE KEYWORDS YOU HAVE WITHIN YOUR PAGES, THE MORE CHANCES YOU HAVE OF THESE PAGES SHOWING UP IN SEARCH RESULTS.



4. PRODUCE YOUR CLUSTER PAGES

Now you might have believed the actual content creation would begin with the pillar page. However, it makes more sense to craft your cluster pages first. Why? Well, pillar pages are essentially landing pages. They provide an outline for the rest of the content you produce. If you don't already have this content, you're going to struggle to put together an accurate and well-crafted pillar. It would be like trying to complete a jigsaw with some of the pieces missing.

As for putting together your cluster pages, the process is similar to when devising a standard blog post. However, there are two significant differences in that regard. The first is that you want to avoid going into any detail about subjects covered via other cluster pages. In addition, each cluster page is a chance to truly deep-dive into a topic – a generalised approach won't deliver the results you hope to achieve.

So if you want to put together topic clusters for SEO, here are a few pointers to follow:

01

IMPLEMENT YOUR KEYWORDS THE RIGHT WAY:

Along with appearing in the body of content, your main targeted keywords should also appear in the page title, subheadings, image alt text, and meta title/description.

02

LONG-FORM CONTENT:

The longer the content, the longer people are going to stick around on your website. There's also the potential to include more keywords within the content in an organic way.

03

SEARCH FOR UNIQUE INFORMATION:

The longer the content, the longer people are going to stick around on your website. There's also the potential to include more keywords within the content in an organic way.

04

THE INSERTION OF VISUALS:

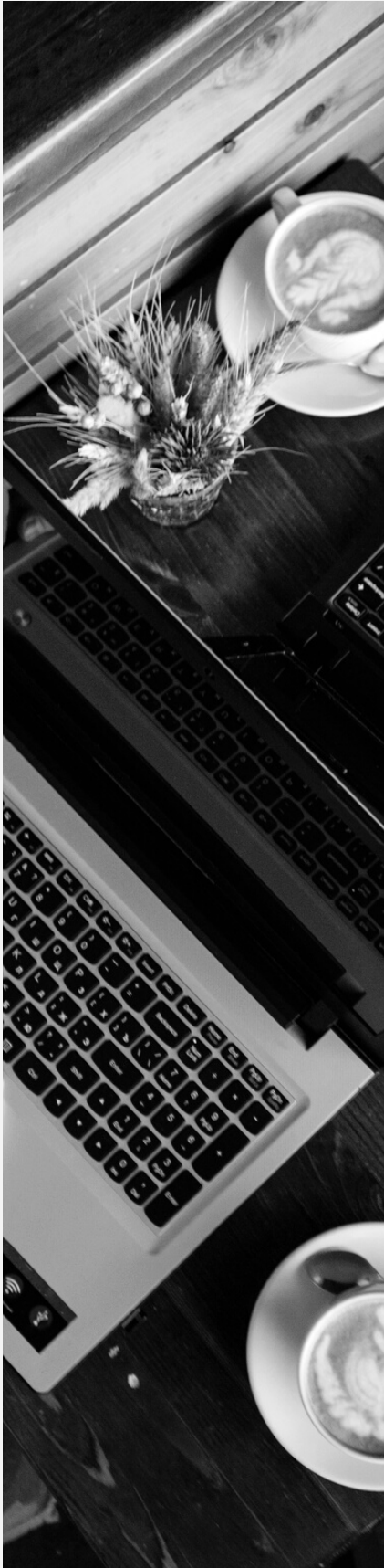
There are several different methods to break up your written content and make it more palatable for readers. This includes the use of subheadings, bullet-point lists, and highlighted text. One of the most effective, however, is with the addition of visual content like videos and images. This is even better if you can create original visual content on your own.

5. CREATE THE PILLAR PAGE

Your topic clusters are ready. The next step is to craft your pillar page. The good news is this is relatively easy – you're just joining the dots with your topic clusters.

When putting together your pillar page, there's one important aspect to keep in mind: skip going into too much detail. That's right. Unlike the topic clusters, you only want to offer a broad overview of the entire topic.

**WHEN THE CONTENT CALLS FOR
EXTRA DETAIL, YOU SIMPLY
PROVIDE A LINK TO THE RELEVANT
TOPIC CLUSTER.**



6. LINK EVERYTHING TOGETHER

The final part of the puzzle is to add internal links between the content. After all, this is the point of the entire topic cluster model.

While it may be the final step, it's also the easiest. Simply produce your content as normal, go back to each topic cluster, and link to these in the most appropriate spot of your content pillar.



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