

OPTIMIZE THE PAST

*The Secret to Doubling
Blog Traffic & Leads*



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Introduction

Nine months ago, I analyzed a report that would transform not only my personal role on the HubSpot blogging team, but also HubSpot's blogging strategy.

The results have been nothing short of eye-opening. And I'm not just talking about the findings from the report -- I'm also talking about the results we've achieved from the shift we made in our blogging strategy because of those findings.

That shift is an ongoing project we call the Historical Optimization Project, whose goal is to update old blog content and generate more traffic and leads from it in the process. Great for us, right? Hang on ... it's great for you, too. I wrote this ebook because if you're an experienced blogger who's tasked with growing and scaling the results you generate from your blog, this is something you'll really care about. Here's why ...

As a result of our ongoing historical optimization, we've been able to generate a ton more value from blog content we've published in the past:

- **We've more than doubled the number of monthly leads generated by the old posts we've optimized.**
- **We've increased the number of monthly organic search views of old posts we've optimized by an average of 106%.**

This ebook is going to cover why historical optimization is such a game-changing tactic, and how you can follow our historical optimization playbook to achieve awesome results like this, too.

Thanks for reading!

Pamela Vaughan

Manager of Optimization & Growth, HubSpot Content

CHAPTER 1:

What Is Historical Optimization?

Simply put, historical optimization means optimizing your “old” blog content so it’s fresh, up-to-date, and has the ability to generate even more traffic and conversions than it already does. By “old,” I just mean posts that already exist on your blog -- whether you wrote them last month or three years ago.

If you’re not sure whether historical optimization really has a place in your blogging strategy, let me tell you the story about how our focus on historical optimization came to be, and why we realized it was so important.

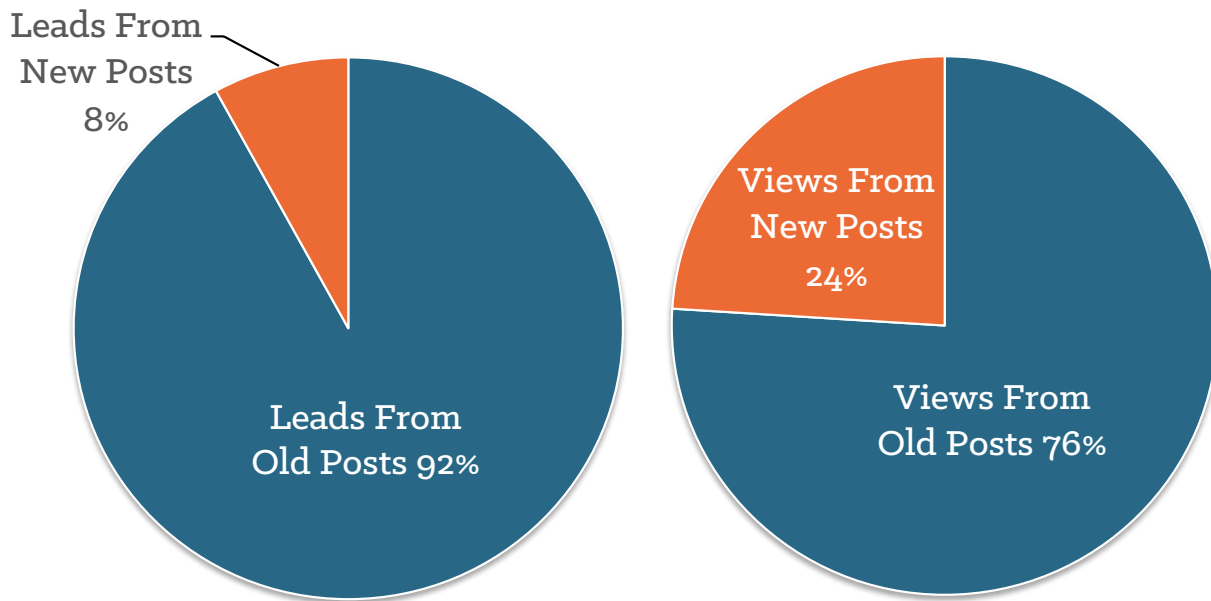
I had just returned to work from maternity leave, and I learned that HubSpot’s product team had released a new reporting tool within the [HubSpot Marketing Platform](#) called [Attribution Reports](#).

Attribution Reports enabled us to determine how many new leads each of our blog posts directly generated. This is a reporting capability I’d wanted for a long time. And since I’m responsible for the optimization and growth of HubSpot’s core blogs, I started analyzing our Attribution Reports as soon as I could, hoping to discover some actionable nugget of wisdom my team could use in one way or another.

Findings From the Last Touch Blog Leads Analysis

My Attribution Report analysis was an attempt to determine which of our blog posts were the most influential in generating leads -- which posts got the most visitors to click on a call-to-action within the post and convert on the landing page it directed them to. In other words, figure out exactly which posts our blog leads coming were from. When I came out from the other side of that analysis, this is primarily what I’d discovered:

- **76% of our monthly blog views came from “old” posts (in other words, posts published prior to that month).**
- **92% of our monthly blog leads also came from “old” posts.**



So essentially, if HubSpot’s whole blogging team went on vacation for a month, we’d still generate 76% of the traffic and 92% of the leads we would’ve otherwise generated by also publishing new content. That may sound like an oversimplification, but still ... nuts, right?

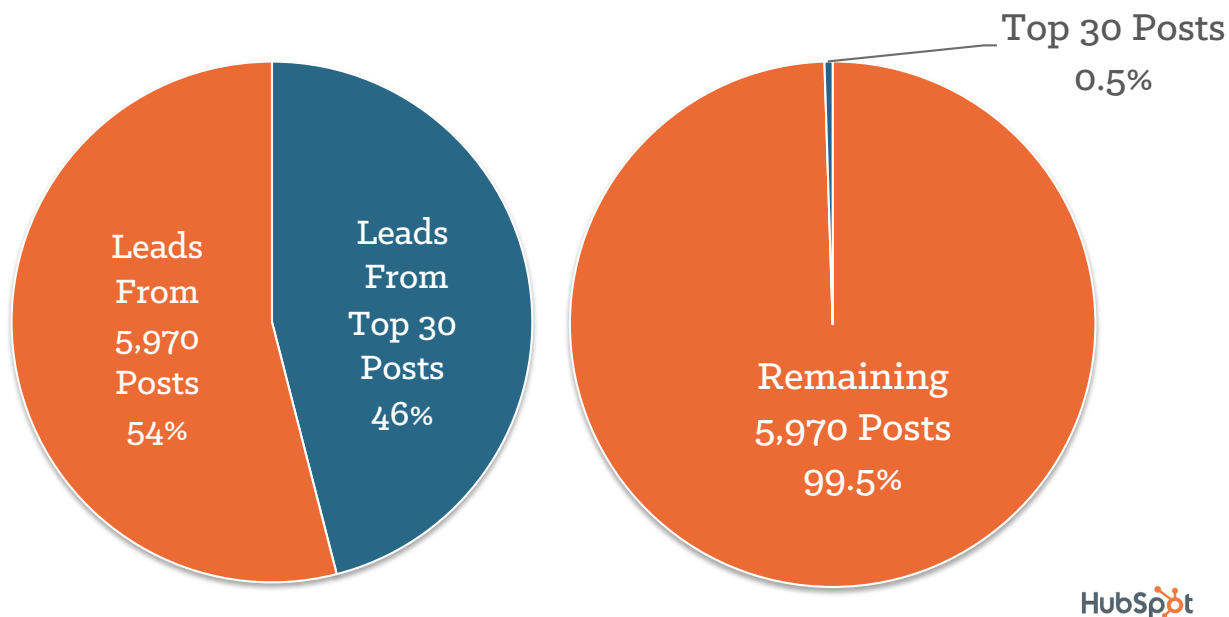
Here’s another crazy tidbit I learned ...

- **46% of our monthly blog leads came from just 30 individual blog posts.**

I’ll let that sink in a little.

Now what if I also told you **we publish about 200 new posts every month**, and by the time I conducted this analysis, that had accumulated to a whopping **6,000 total posts on our blog?**

Here's some perspective. The pie chart on the left shows the distribution of monthly leads we were generating, and the pie chart on the right shows the distribution of posts we had on our blog.



Do you agree that something wasn't quite right about this?

Our Light Bulb Moment: Optimizing the Past

What's funny is, this shouldn't have been as surprising to us as it was. In fact, it's exactly what you'd expect to happen as an inbound marketer. Getting recurring, lasting value from old content is one of the main benefits of blogging. And the traffic sources for our top lead-generating posts supported it -- these were all posts that were generating a lot of traffic from organic search month after month after month.

Once the sticker shock of all these findings wore off, we had to decide what to do with this newfound data and information. While we knew we couldn't just stop creating new content (after all, "new" eventually becomes "old"), it was clear we needed to make a change in our blogging strategy.

We came to two conclusions, which are the two main pieces of historical optimization:

1) Figure out how to get more leads from high-traffic but low-converting blog posts (AKA Historical Conversion Rate Optimization).

Being able to identify which posts are your top lead generators means you can also identify which posts are your worst lead generators. Coupled with traffic data, you can determine which posts are generating a lot of traffic but have low conversion rates -- and potentially generate a lot more leads from content you already have by improving those conversion rates.

2) Figure out how to get more traffic to high-converting posts (AKA Historical Search Engine Optimization).

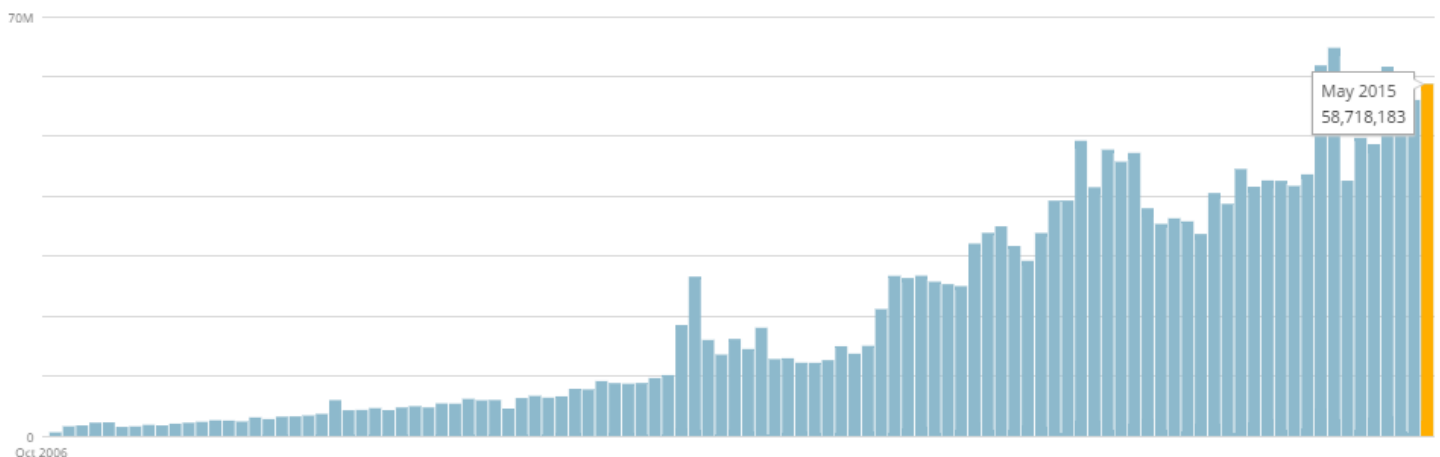
On the flip side, you can also identify which posts convert well but don't get a lot of traffic month after month. By search engine optimizing those high-converting posts, you can potentially get them to rank better and generate more traffic that you already know will convert well.

In other words, stop focusing only on brand new content, and try to get more traffic and leads out of the content you already have. **Optimize the past.**

CHAPTER 2:

Why Historical Optimization Is More Important Now Than Ever Before

These days, the internet has a content overload problem. Just take a look at [the graph](#) below, which shows the number of new blog posts published on the WordPress blogging platform each month since October 2006. **58 million in May 2015!** And that's just on WordPress -- it doesn't even take into consideration the posts published on other blogging platforms like [HubSpot's](#).



As more and more businesses have started buying into the importance of [content marketing](#), more and more businesses are creating content. And as the supply increases, so does the competition for getting that content found online.

According to Paul Hewerdine of B2B marketing agency Earnest (via [Forrester's 2014 report on building the case for content marketing](#)), the problem is that “**the supply of content is growing, but demand is static.**” In other words, the people on the receiving end of all this content are only going to consume so much. Their demand isn't growing proportionally with the supply.

“The supply of content is growing, but demand is static.”

- Paul Hewerdine, Earnest

The result, according to that same [Forrester report](#), is that **an estimated 50% of content from enterprises is going completely unused**. So for marketers who have been blogging consistently for a while and are being tasked with growing and scaling their blogs, the answer can't just be to increase content production proportionally to the growth goals they need to achieve.

This is why historical optimization becomes so important. Not only is it a way to get more out of the content you already have; but it's also a way to get a leg up on such a competitive content landscape. And last but certainly not least, it's a way to deliver even more value to the people reading your content. After all, if people are going to continue finding your older content through search engines, don't you want it to be fresh and up-to-date?

CHAPTER 3:

Who Should Do Historical Optimization?

Before I dive into the specifics of how to actually do historical optimization, here's a little disclaimer: Historical optimization isn't a tactic meant for newer blogs that have only been around for a year or two. It's a tactic best-suited for a blog that's been around for several years, has already tackled all the basic blog growth tactics, and is looking for brand new ways to grow. Here's why:

- **You need to be generating a significant amount of organic search traffic.** Because all of these approaches are mainly based on search traffic data, none of this really works unless you've been blogging long enough to have built up decent search authority and be generating a significant amount of organic search traffic.
- **You need to have built up a critical mass of blog subscribers and social media followers.** The most successful tactic we've found for boosting search traffic to older blog content is updating and republishing that content as new (more on this in chapter 5). One of the main reasons republishing old blog posts performs so well is because of the surge of traffic generated when that updated post is promoted to blog subscribers and social media followers. As a result, you'll only generate a significant return on investment if your subscriber and follower base is substantial. So if you're a newer blog, [your first and foremost optimization focus should be to build those audiences](#) and expand your reach.
- **You need to have a repository of old posts.** After all, historical optimization only makes sense if you have content worth optimizing.

Now, are you ready to learn about how you can start generating more value out of your older content? Let's dive in.

CHAPTER 4:

Historical Conversion Rate Optimization

First, a quick refresher about the mechanics of blog lead generation ...

Blog Lead Generation: A Primer

Blog Post >> Call-to-Action for Relevant Offer >> Form-Gated Landing Page for Lead Generation

1) BLOG POST

March 9, 2015 // 12:00 PM

How Reporting on Revenue Can Improve Your Relationship With Sales

Written by Rachel Sprung | @rsprung



Most marketers are concerned about building a strong relationship with their sales team. After all, the marketing team is supposed to generate leads and assist the sales team in closing deals for the company. To make all of that happen, these teams need to have a good relationship.



What are some of the other benefits you've found with reporting on your revenue?



FREE GUIDE
ACHIEVING EXPONENTIAL GROWTH WITH MARKETING ANALYTICS

Learn how to unleash the true power of your analytics to improve your marketing performance.

GET YOUR EBOOK >

2) CALL-TO-ACTION FOR RELEVANT OFFER

HubSpot

NORTH AMERICA 888 482 7768

Achieve Exponential Growth With Marketing Analytics

Learn how to generate a positive ROI & grow your business from this ebook

World-class marketers have the power to turn good campaigns into great campaigns.

What's their secret? Marketing ROI analytics.

Analytics give you the insight to report on your marketing while generating a positive return on your investment (ROI).

Download our new marketing ROI analytics ebook to **unleash the true power of your marketing metrics and start watching the revenue roll in.**

In this ebook, you'll learn:

- ✓ What you should be measuring within SEO, blogging, landing pages, social media, email marketing, lead nurturing, and referral sources
- ✓ How to use marketing analytics to improve each channel's marketing performance
- ✓ How to close the loop on your marketing with revenue reporting



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3) FORM-GATED LANDING PAGE FOR LEAD GENERATION

The Playbook: Keyword-Based Conversion Rate Optimization

When we first started doing historical optimization at HubSpot, the very first thing we tried was conversion rate optimization based on offer relevancy -- in other words, pairing the most relevant offer we had with the subject matter of the post. This is exactly how we approach call-to-action (CTA) selection for brand new posts, but the idea was that over the years as we've expanded our library of marketing offers, we may now have a more relevant and/or better performing offer than we did when we first published the blog post.

The results of this approach were hit or miss: Sometimes we'd improve the conversion rate, sometimes it'd stay about the same, and in some cases, the conversion rate would actually decrease. The reason was that this approach was purely a guessing game -- it was based on assumptions about what the visitor to that particular blog post was looking for.

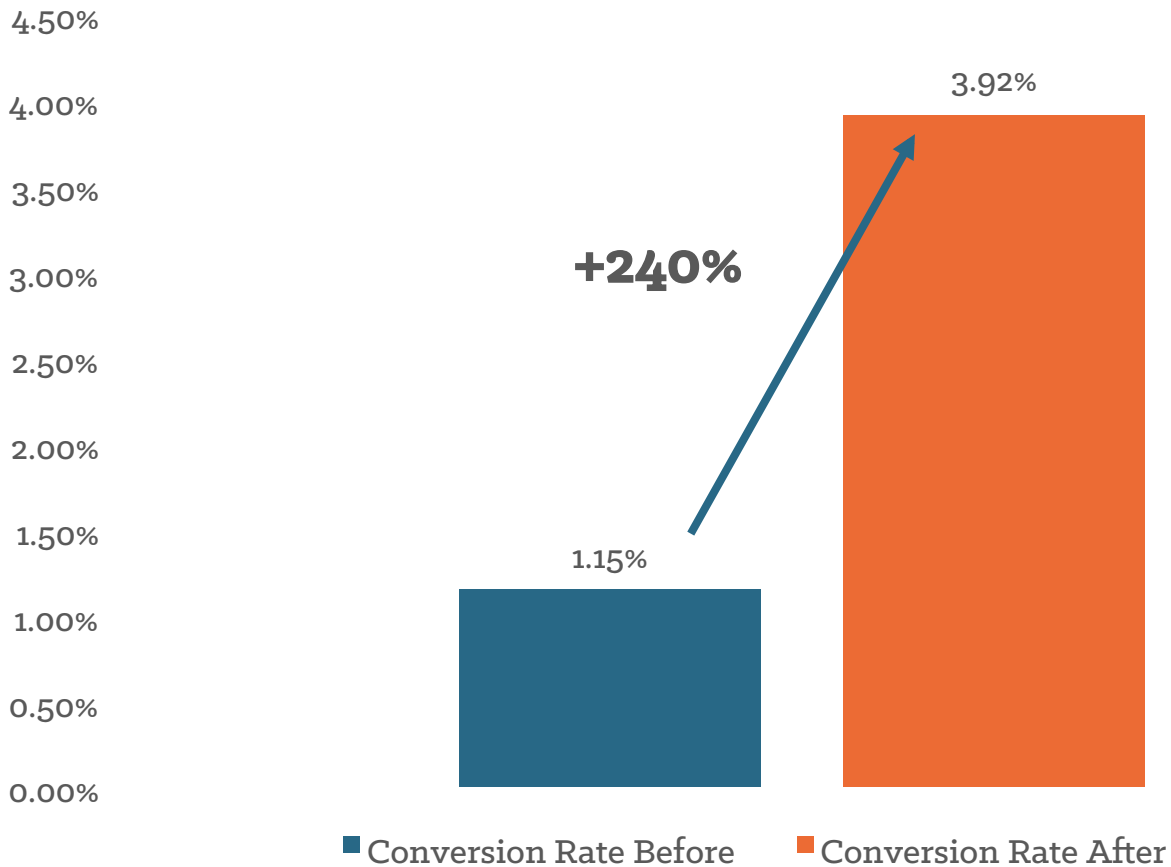
What we needed was an approach based on data, not assumptions. So then we thought, what if we focus on the specific keywords people are using to find these posts? Knowing that the primary referral source of traffic to these posts was search engines like Google, we figured we could much more accurately understand and satisfy the needs of our blog visitors by matching the offer we promoted in the post to the keywords people were using to find it.

In other words, get inside searchers' heads, and give the people what they really want.

So we tried it on one of our highest-traffic posts, which ranked highly for the keywords **“how to write a press release”** and **“press release template.”**

Jackpot.

Blog Post: “How to Write a Press Release”



Using this keyword-based conversion optimization method, **we increased the conversion rate of the post by 240%**. Then we tried it on 12 more of our top-traffic posts, and **we doubled the number of leads we generated from them**.

In fact, **of the 75 posts we've conversion optimized using this method, we've increased the conversion rate on every single one**.

Here's how we did it.

How to Conversion Rate Optimize Old Blog Post Based on Keywords

Step 1: Identify your high-traffic, “old” posts.

First, export your blog analytics (whether it be via the [Page Performance Report](#) in HubSpot or something else) for the last 30 days to compile a list of any post that has generated views in the last 30 days. Then, delete any post that was published in the last two months -- the idea is to only target “old” posts that are generating traffic from organic search, because this will give you the articles that are ranking and thus generating sustainable search traffic over time.

Now sort by views from greatest to least. Voila! Now you have a list of your top-performing old blog posts (in terms of views).

In the Historical Optimization Tracking Template included with this download, add these posts to columns A and B in the conversion optimization tracking tab.

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet titled "Historical Optimization Tracking Template.xlsx". The spreadsheet is divided into two main sections: "Using the Historical CRO (Conversion Rate Optimization) Tracking Tab" and "Using the Historical SEO (Search Engine Optimization) Tracking Tab".

Using the Historical CRO (Conversion Rate Optimization) Tracking Tab:

- How to Use This Template:** This template is divided into two tabs. The Historical CRO Tracking tab should be used to track the success of your keyword-based conversion rate optimization efforts. The Historical SEO Tracking tab should be used to track the results of your SEO efforts, including updating/republishing blog posts and on-page SEO. Below you'll find tips as well as a key to the columns included in each spreadsheet. There are comments within the cells of each spreadsheet to guide you as well.
- Using the Historical CRO (Conversion Rate Optimization) Tracking Tab:**
- CRO Tracking Key:**
- 10 Blog Post Title:** The title of the blog post you're optimizing.
- 11 Blog Post URL:** The URL of the blog post you're optimizing.
- 12 Targeted Keywords:** The one or two keywords you used in your keyword-based conversion optimization. Remember, these should be the keywords visitors are mainly using to find the post. See ebook for more details.
- 13 Date Post Was Optimized:** This is the date your optimization changes went live, so you know when to track the before/after data.
- 14 Views Before:** The number of views the post generated in a two-week time frame prior to conversion rate optimization.*
- 15 Leads Before:** The number of leads the post generated in a two-week time frame prior to conversion rate optimization.*
- 16 Conversion Rate Before:** The conversion rate (leads divided by views, converted into a percentage) of the post prior to any conversion rate optimization.* Compare this with the conversion rate after optimization to determine whether your optimization was successful. Copy/paste the formula in cell G2 of the Historical CRO Tracking tab of this spreadsheet, or use this formula: =leads/views
- 17 Views After:** The number of views the post generated in a two-week time after conversion rate optimization.*
- 18 Leads After:** The number of leads the post generated in a two-week time after conversion rate optimization.*
- 19 Conversion Rate After:** The conversion rate (leads divided by views, converted into a percentage) of the post after conversion rate optimization.* Compare this with the conversion rate before optimization to determine whether your optimization was successful. Copy/paste the formula in cell J2 of the Historical CRO Tracking tab of this spreadsheet, or use this formula: =leads/views
- 20 Percent Change in Conversion:** How much your conversion rate changed after optimization. Copy/paste the formula in cell K2 of the Historical CRO tracking tab of this spreadsheet, or use this formula: =(new_value/original_value)-1
- 21 Rate:** Add any notes that might help you understand whether optimization was successful (e.g. what you changed, what offer you were using before, etc.).
- 22 Notes:** Add any notes that might help you understand whether optimization was successful (e.g. what you changed, what offer you were using before, etc.).
- *Note:** You may need to use a longer time frame to generate statistically significant results.

Using the Historical SEO (Search Engine Optimization) Tracking Tab:

- For posts you update and republish or just search engine optimize, record the 30-day organic search views the post generated prior to updating/optimizing. Wait 30 days for the impact of your updates to take effect and normalize -- Google needs time to re-crawl your page and factor into its algorithm any additional traffic/inbound links you generated as a result of your optimization efforts. After the 30-day waiting period, wait an additional 30 more days, and record the organic search views the post generated during those 30 days to measure the impact of your efforts.**
- SEO Tracking Key:**
- 30 Blog Post Title:** The title of the blog post you're optimizing.
- 31 Blog Post URL:** The URL of the blog post you're optimizing.
- 32 Targeted Keywords | Monthly:** This is who on your team is responsible for updating the post. Ideally, this will be the original author, but sometimes, that can't be the case. Our general rule of thumb at HubSpot (with a few exceptions) is to keep the original author byline even if someone else is updating the content (given the original author's consent). This information can be disregarded if the post is only getting search engine optimized and not the full update/republishing treatment.
- 33 Owner:** The date the blog post was originally published, prior to updating/optimizing.
- 34 Original Publish Date:** The keywords you're trying to improve the post's ranking for and using in your on-page optimization. See ebook for more details.
- 35 Search Volume:** This is the date you updated/republished the post or your on-page SEO changes went live, so you know when to track the before/after data.
- 36 Date of Post Update/Optimization:** Record the number of views the post received in the 30 days prior to updating/optimizing.
- 37 Before:** 30-Day Organic Search Views
- 38 After:** After a waiting period of 30 days after updating the post, wait 30 more days, and record the organic search views the post generated during those 30 days to measure the impact of your efforts.
- 39 Percent Change in Organic Search Views:** How much your organic search views improved after optimization. Copy/paste cell I2 or use this formula: =(new_value/original_value)-1
- 40 Search Views:** Add any notes that might help you understand whether optimization was successful (e.g. what you changed, what offer you were using before, etc.).
- 41 Notes:** Add any notes that might help you understand whether optimization was successful (e.g. what you changed, what offer you were using before, etc.).

Results to Expect From Historical Optimization:

The spreadsheet also includes a status bar at the bottom showing "Normal View", "Ready", and "Sum=0".

Step 2: Identify which keywords each post is getting found for.

Your next step is to figure out which keywords people are primarily using to find each of these posts. My recommendation is to start at the top of your list (with posts generating the most traffic) and work your way down, since you'll get more bang for your buck by optimizing your highest-traffic posts first.

If the first thing you're thinking is -- *How am I supposed to identify the keywords my posts are getting found for when Google keeps encrypting them?* -- don't get discouraged. Although this is definitely not as easy as it used to be, where there's a will, there's a way.

Use a combination of [keyword research](#) and a keyword tracking tool like [HubSpot's Keywords App](#) to figure out which keywords your posts are actually ranking for. The idea is, if you can identify which keywords a post is ranking for, and you recognize they have relatively high monthly search volume (or at least search volume that, relative to the post's rank, seems to add up to the number of monthly views your post is getting from organic search) you can make a pretty educated guess about which keyword(s) your post is getting found for.

Many keyword tools will only track how you rank for keywords you've manually told it to track. This is why the keyword research phase is important. Remember that not all keyword data is encrypted yet, so here's a little trick: By drilling down into the traffic sources of your individual blog posts and looking at the unencrypted keywords the post is getting found for, you can use those keywords as a starting point for your keyword research to find other potential keywords you may be getting found for. Another great place to start is the keywords found in your blog post's on-page SEO elements: for instance, its URL, page title, and headers. Add the keywords from your keyword research to your [keyword tracking tool](#) to determine which ones your post is actually ranking and getting found for.

Finally, prioritize your keywords list. Based on the data (how high the post ranks for the keywords in your list, and what the monthly search volume is for each of those keywords), identify one or two keywords the majority of that post's organic search traffic seems to be coming from. These will become the target keywords you use in your conversion optimization.

In the Historical Optimization Tracking Template included with this download, add these keywords to column C in the conversion optimization tracking tab.

Step 3: Conversion optimize your post using those target keywords.

There are three main things we do for each post that we conversion optimize using this method, although there are definitely other things you can try:

1. Add an in-line call-to-action (CTA) near the top of the post (usually within the post's introduction).
2. Add a slide-in CTA near the middle of the post.
3. Optimize the end-of-post CTA.

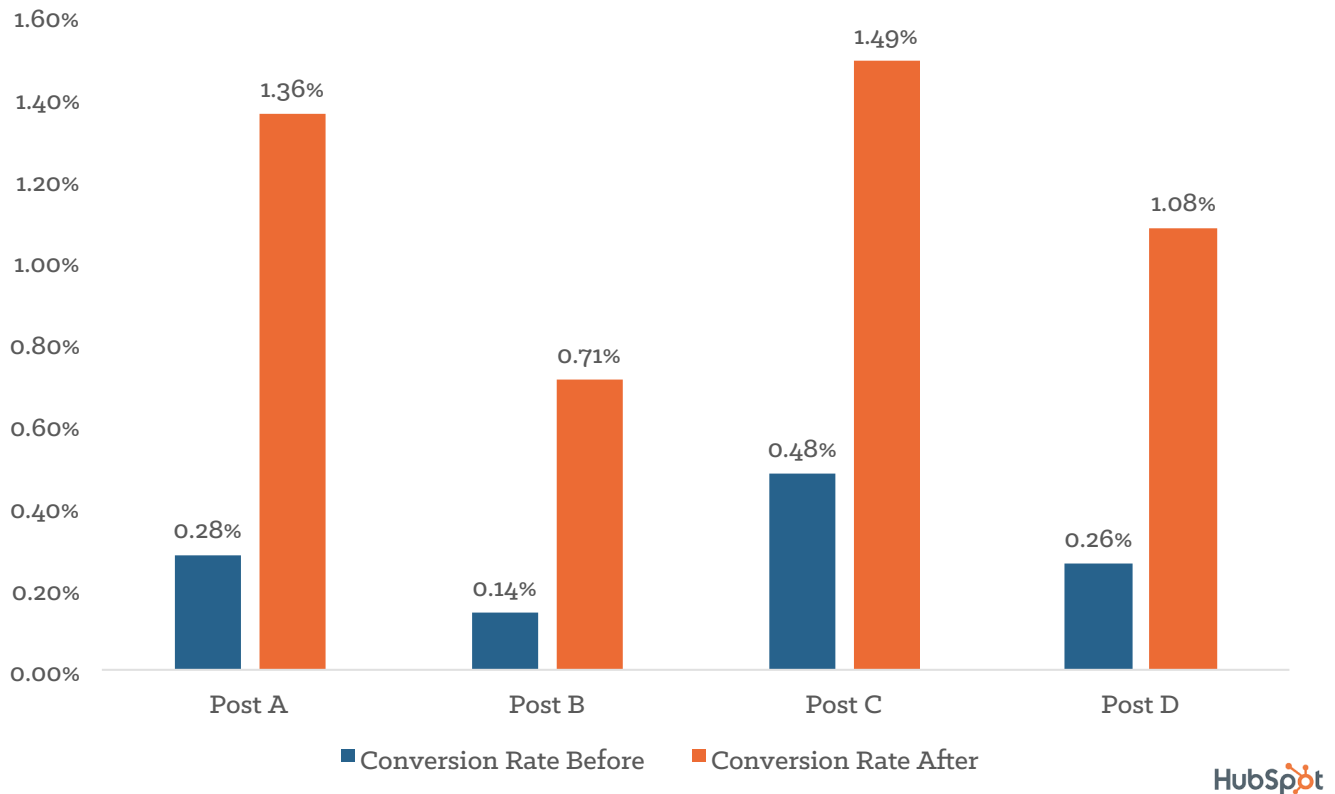
I'll show you an example of this in just a minute, but the basic idea is to incorporate the **exact keyword phrase(s)** you've identified in Step 2 into each of these CTAs.

One very important thing that can make or break this whole method is your repository of offers/landing pages. It's easy to say, "just create a CTA using that exact keyword," but if you don't have a relevant offer to point it to, things can get a little bit more complicated.

Over the years, the HubSpot content team has built up a large library of offers that can easily (and appropriately) be repositioned to incorporate different keyword variations. Understanding that not everyone has a large offers library, you may need to create new offers from scratch to satisfy your needs. Heck, we've done it in a few instances where we had no relevant offers for some of our high-traffic posts, too. If a post is generating a ton of organic search traffic month after month, the effort is probably worth your while.

The chart on the following page shows posts we created brand new offers for, and their conversion rates before and after we optimized them ...

Blog Posts Optimized With Newly Created Offers



Not too shabby, eh?

Keyword-Based Conversion Optimization: An Example

Remember that first post I mentioned **whose conversion rate we increased by 240%** using this keyword-based method? I'm going to show you exactly what we did to it.

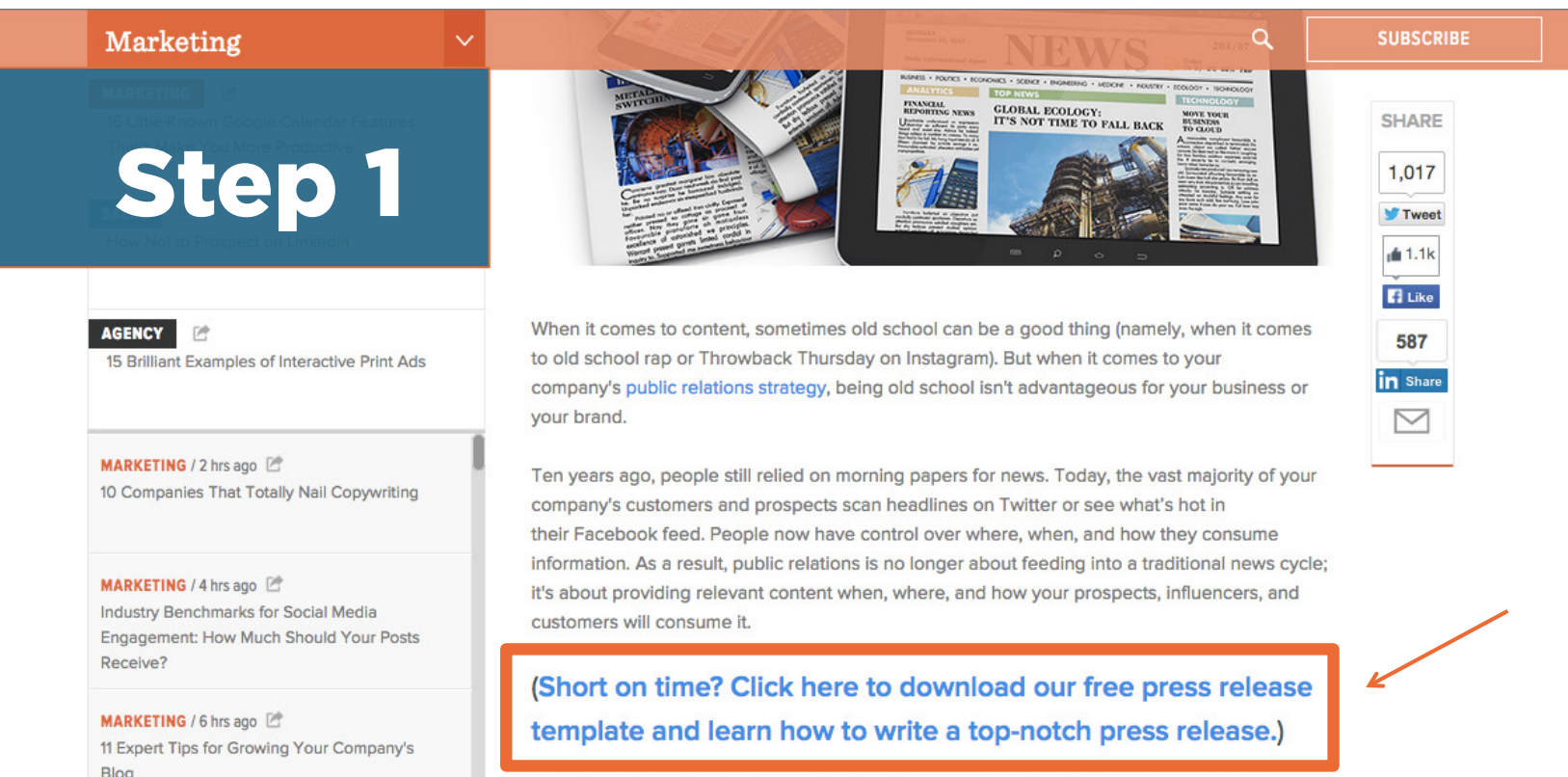
As a reminder, this post ranks highly for the keywords "how to write a press release" and "press release template." So if you put yourself in searchers' shoes, when they search for and find that post, they're hoping to learn how to write a press release, and they want a template to help them do it.

Here's the problem with how that post was conversion optimized before. It promoted our Newsworthy Guide to Public Relations. And although a press release template does come with the download of the guide, neither the CTA nor the landing page for the guide clearly positioned it that way. In other words, we were burying the lede.

So here's what we did ...

1) We added a text-based, in-line CTA within the post's introduction.

Here's how it looks in the post:



We'd actually done some previous testing on the effectiveness of these in-line CTAs, and we'd learned that they did wonders to improve the conversion rate of our blog posts. The reason it works particularly well for posts that rank in search is because you're calling attention to exactly what the searcher is looking for right at the top of the post. When you think about how someone searches -- quickly scanning the web page to determine whether it's relevant to what they were looking for -- it makes perfect sense why this works.

2) We optimized the end-of-post CTA.

We optimized our end-of-post CTA to exclusively promote our press release template rather than our guide to public relations, which it had previously been promoting. We gave the searcher exactly what they were searching for.

Old End-of-Post CTA



Optimized End-of-Post CTA



Here's how the new CTA looks in the post:

A screenshot of a blog post interface. On the left is a sidebar with a 'Marketing' header and a large 'Step 2' graphic. Below the sidebar are several article teasers. The main content area has an orange header with a search icon and a 'SUBSCRIBE' button. The main text includes a paragraph about being honest, a paragraph about PR strategy, a paragraph about inbound methods, and a paragraph about best practices. Below the text is a blue banner with a hand holding a tablet, the text 'FREE TEMPLATE | FREE PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE', and a white button with orange text 'DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE >'. An orange arrow points to this banner from the right side of the page. On the far right is a social sharing sidebar with a 'SHARE' header, a '1,017' count, and buttons for 'Tweet', 'Like', and 'Share'.

3) We optimized the slide-in CTA.

A [slide-in CTA](#) slides in from the side of the page once a visitor scrolls down to a certain, designated point. Again, we unburied the lede and optimized this to promote our press release template offer exclusively:

Old Slide-In CTA

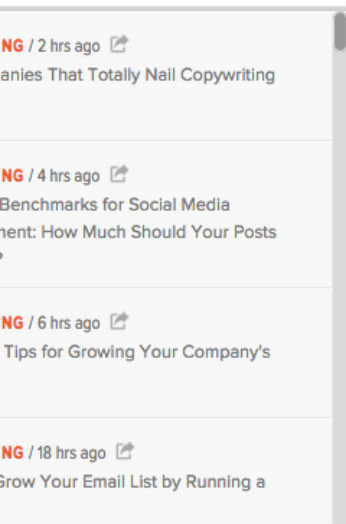


Optimized Slide-In CTA



Here's how the new slide-in CTA looks in the post:

Step 3



your headline. You only have one line to work with, which can seem scary, but consider diction carefully to make your headline captivating.

Invest in clear, understandable language, and keep your headline simple and short -- (and search engines) reward the brief, so keep your title to one line to clearly focus people's attention on your topline message.

Most importantly, make it interesting: Keep in mind that reporters get dozens, if not hundreds, of releases each day, so invest the time to write a compelling headline. It's worth the time and effort on your part.

2) Don't Play Hard to Get

For reporters, analysts, influencers, or followers to be inclined to share your announcement, you have to tell them upfront why they should care.

The first paragraph of your release should cover the who, what, why, where, and how of your new launch, update, or development. Reporters don't have a ton of time to sift through details and fluffy background information -- they just need the facts that'll help them tell your story to someone else from a position of authority.

There shouldn't be any new, crucial information covered after this section that could potentially miss.

3) Offer a Tempting Quotable

Once you've set the scene, it's time to bring your details to life with a quote that can be used for context around your announcement and help paint a picture of how you fit into the given industry, customer base, and landscape.



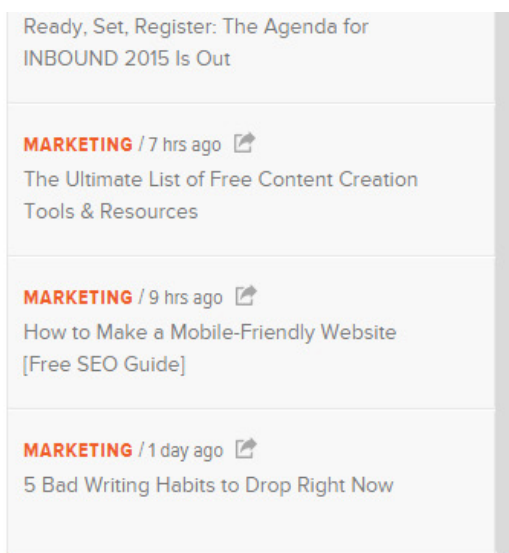
That's it! These changes resulted in a 240% increase in this post's conversion rate, which means this post is generating over 3x more leads now than it did before we conversion optimized it.

Optimizing the Post-Click Experience (AKA the Landing Page)


Before we move on to the second component of historical optimization, I want to call attention to an experiment we did to see if we could increase the number of leads we were generating even more by optimizing users' post-click experience. In other words, what if we not only optimized the blog post's calls-to-action -- but also repositioned the landing page so the keywords matched there, too? Theoretically, it would reduce some friction and make the conversion path much more seamless, right?

Using HubSpot's [Anonymous Personalization](#) feature, we decided to give it a try. Anonymous Personalization gave us a way to show a different version of the landing page to visitors who were coming from specific blog posts rather than duplicating the landing page (which as you can imagine, isn't great for SEO). This way, we could match the positioning on the landing page to the positioning used in the call-to-action on the blog post -- without completely changing the positioning on the original version of the landing page, which was being used in other types of marketing promotion.


To give you an example, here's an end-of post CTA we've optimized using the keyword-based method. The original positioning of the ebook in the CTA was [4 Essential Microsoft Excel Skills Every Marketer Should Learn](#), but we repositioned it for a post that was primarily getting found for the keyword, "how to make a graph in Excel":




Ready, Set, Register: The Agenda for INBOUND 2015 Is Out

MARKETING / 7 hrs ago 

The Ultimate List of Free Content Creation Tools & Resources

MARKETING / 9 hrs ago 

How to Make a Mobile-Friendly Website [Free SEO Guide]

MARKETING / 1 day ago 

5 Bad Writing Habits to Drop Right Now



- [How to Use Data Visualization to Win Over Your Audience \[Ebook\]](#)

Editor's Note: This post was originally published in May 2013 and been updated for accuracy and comprehensiveness.



FREE GUIDE

HOW TO MAKE A GRAPH IN EXCEL

Learn how to create a graph, organize data with pivot tables & use the VLOOKUP and IF functions in Excel.

And this is the landing page for the offer that was repositioned using Anonymous Personalization to match the positioning in the call-to-action:



HOW TO MAKE A GRAPH IN EXCEL

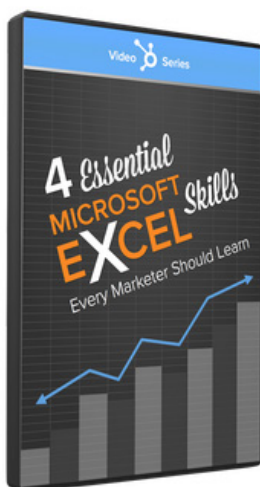
Learn how to create an Excel graph with this easy-to-follow tutorial and video.

Inbound marketing is becoming increasingly data-driven. Through data, marketers can learn how their marketing channels and tactics are performing instead of relying on intuition and “gut feelings.”

However, it can be challenging to present all of that data so it's easy to digest. Ultimately, the modern marketer needs to master the almighty spreadsheet.

That's why we've put together four videos highlighting fundamental Microsoft Excel skills that every marketer should learn. We've also included downloadable instructions and demo data so you can follow along.

In these videos, you'll learn how to:



I want these tips!

FIRST NAME *

LAST NAME *

EMAIL (PRIVACY POLICY) *

PHONE NUMBER *

WEBSITE URL *

So -- did this post-click optimization increase the conversion rate of the posts we tried it on? The answer may surprise you.

Basically, it depends. Sometimes it helped, sometimes it didn't. And even when it helped, the conversion rate increases we noticed weren't that significant. In this particular case, the conversion rate increased only very slightly -- by a tenth of a percentage point. What this seems to tell me is, if someone clicks on a call-to-action in one of our posts, they're already pretty committed to downloading the offer, regardless of the nuanced positioning on the landing page.

All that said, try it for yourself! If you're a HubSpot customer and you want to use Anonymous Personalization to achieve this, [create a tracking URL](#) with a specific campaign for your landing page and use that URL for the CTAs in your post; then create a repositioned version of your landing page using Smart Content, and segment it by Referral Source >> Other Campaigns.

CHAPTER 5:

Historical Search Engine Optimization

If you can remember, the goal of historical search engine optimization is to improve the search rankings for posts that already convert well but aren't getting a lot of traffic from search. More traffic to these high-converting posts equals more leads.

Someone once said (honestly, [no one can figure out who to give credit to](#)), “The best place to hide a dead body is page two of Google.” If you're not sure what I mean by that, take a glance at the following chart from a 2014 study conducted by [Advanced Web Ranking](#), which shows the clickthrough rates of specific organic search ranking positions:



This chart shows that on average, **results on page one of Google get 71% of the clicks**. Results on pages two and three, on the other hand, only get about 6%. Furthermore, **the first five positions on page one of Google get 68% of all clicks**.

In other words, if you want to benefit from the lion's share of search traffic for a given keyword, you need to be on page one -- and you need to be near the top. So how do you get your blog posts to the top of page one?

Is Guest Blogging a Viable Solution?

When we first started tackling historical search engine optimization at HubSpot, my boss brought up the idea of guest blogging as a possible solution. Because one of the most important SEO ranking factors is inbound links, the thought was that guest blogging on other high-authority websites could enable us to generate high-quality inbound links to the posts we wanted to rank better.

It made sense, but I was skeptical. The problem was, this solution was hardly scalable. Not only would we have to spend time creating new content to be published on other sites, but we'd also have spend time pitching said content to high-authority websites -- all for one or two inbound links back for each guest blogging spot we secured. In a nutshell, this solution was a lot more time-consuming with much less ROI than we wanted it to be, and we needed our link-building plan to be much more scalable.

Then we had a better idea -- an idea that is now the most effective tactic in our historical SEO playbook.

The Playbook: Updating & Republishing Old Blog Posts

Over the years, we'd dabbled in [updating and republishing old content](#) that had gotten stale and outdated. We targeted posts that we knew still generated a lot of traffic month after month, and the goal was primarily to keep this high-traffic content fresh and up-to-date.

Knowing that [one of Google's ranking factors rewards freshness](#), I had a hunch one of the reasons these posts continued to do well was because we kept them updated. So I took a look at our analytics to investigate. Sure enough, my hunch seemed to have some truth to it.

This graph shows how one particular blog post rank has changed over time for the keyword “how to use linkedin.” The date highlighted (3/26/2014) shows that this post ranked in the 19th position (i.e. the bottom of page 2) right before we updated it on 3/31/2014. If you look at the graph, it’s pretty clear what happened after that.

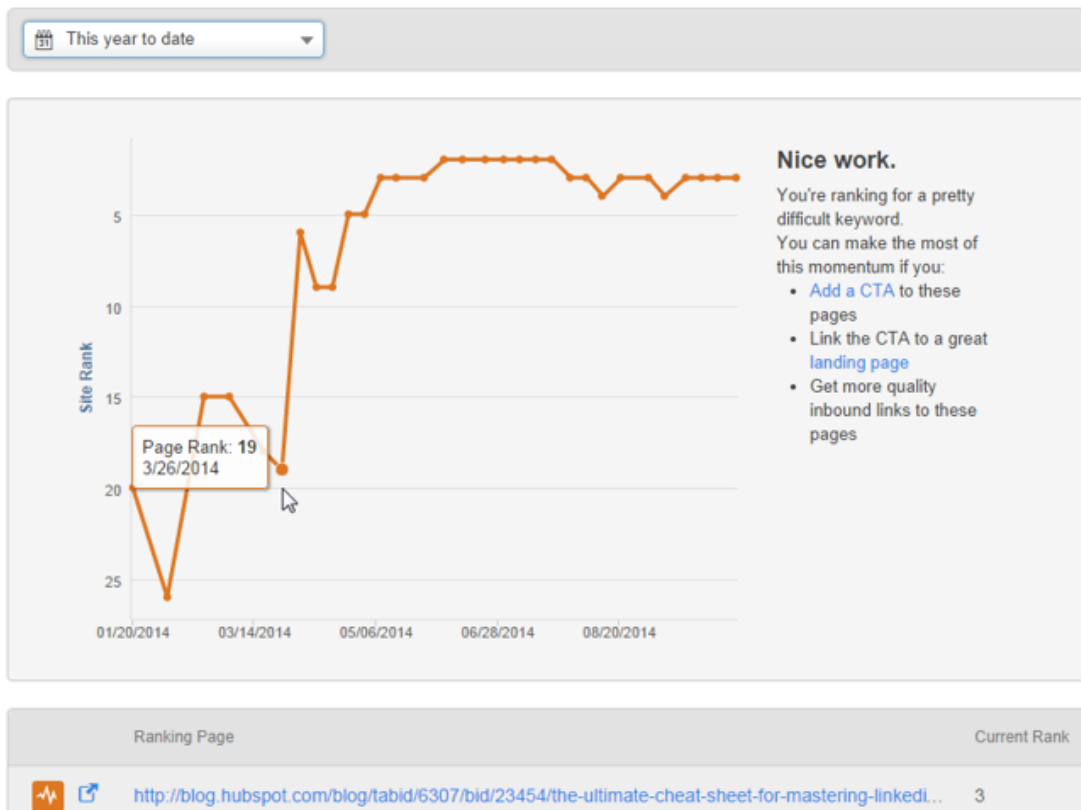
how to use linkedin

Return to all keywords



Keyword Details

Created: Oct 8 2014
Rank: 3
Visits: 46
Contacts: 0
Difficulty: 93
Monthly Searches: 2,900
Cost Per Click: \$0.56



To me, this looked really promising. What if all we had to do to improve the keyword rankings of our blog posts was update and republish them as new? This would be a much more scalable solution for us for a number of different reasons:

- We can update and republish a few posts per week.
- It supports more than one blogging team goal: historical optimization and new content creation.
- It replaces a new slot on our editorial calendar.
- It's often less work than creating a brand new post from scratch.

Not only that -- it's also great for our organic search visitors. Instead of coming across content of ours that is stale and outdated, they'd find fresh, up-to-date, more valuable content. Now that's what I like to call a win-win.

So we decided to try it with a few posts.

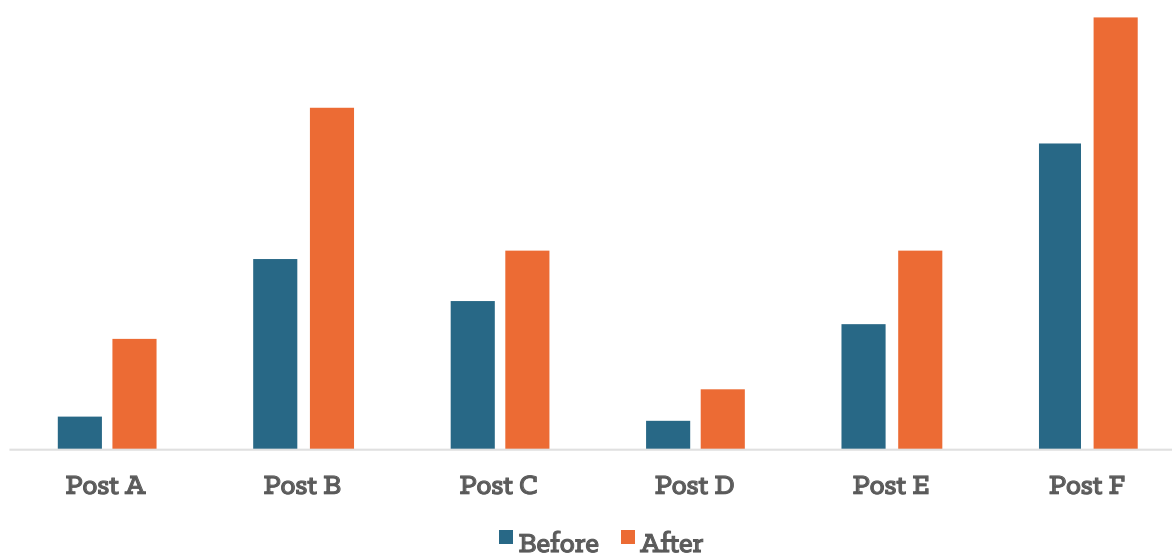
Again, jackpot.

The chart below shows a sampling of six blog posts we've updated and republished. We used views generated from organic search as our primary KPI, because if the keyword ranking(s) for these posts improved as a result of the update, it would manifest as an increase in organic search views.

The "before" bars show the number of monthly views the posts generated from organic search before the updates, and the "after" bars shows the number of monthly views the posts generated from organic search after the updates. We also waited a period of 30 days in between the "before" and "after" time frames to give Google some time to improve the ranking of the post based on the update.

In every instance, we improved the number of monthly views these posts generated from organic search. In each of these posts, we can also dig into the individual keywords they're ranking for and see how these rankings have improved as a result of the post update.

**Monthly Views From Organic Search
Before & After Post Update**



Based on this initial success, post updates are now a regular part of our blogging editorial strategy. We've incorporated about 2-3 post updates per week since we started scaling this project, and as we pointed out earlier, **we've increased the number of monthly organic search views to posts we update and republish by an average of 106%** -- not to mention the impact it's had on lead generation ...

Considering we also run the keyword-based conversion optimization playbook on all the posts we update and republish, **we've also tripled the number of monthly leads we've generated from posts we've updated and republished.**

Why Updating & Republishing Old Content Leads to Better Search Rankings

If you're curious why this approach works so well, there are a few reasons:

- **Google rewards freshness.** So do searchers. As I mentioned earlier, [in 2011 Google introduced a freshness factor into its ranking algorithm](#). It makes perfect sense -- high-quality, valuable content that's fresh and up-to-date is exactly what Google wants to surface to searchers. Simple enough, right? But I also want to share a little anecdote with you: When we were doing some usability testing of our most recent blog redesign, one of our testers mentioned that she consciously considers the publish date listed in search engine results pages (SERPs) for results she's considering clicking. She mentioned that she'll automatically disregard outdated results for fresher ones. Nod your head if you do the same thing. Case in point.
- **You're building off the existing search authority the post has already accumulated.** In other words, you're starting with a post that already has some degree of page authority, rather than starting completely from scratch.
- **New visits naturally lead to new social shares and inbound links.** By re-promoting your updated blog posts to your blog subscribers, social media followers, etc., you're generating a new surge of traffic from additional sources. This naturally leads to an increase in social shares and inbound links -- both important search ranking factors. This is also what makes it so important for you to have a substantial number of social media followers and [blog subscribers](#) -- the greater your reach, the more impactful your results will be.

Want to take advantage of this approach for yourself? Here's how to do it ...

How to Update and Republish Old Blog Posts

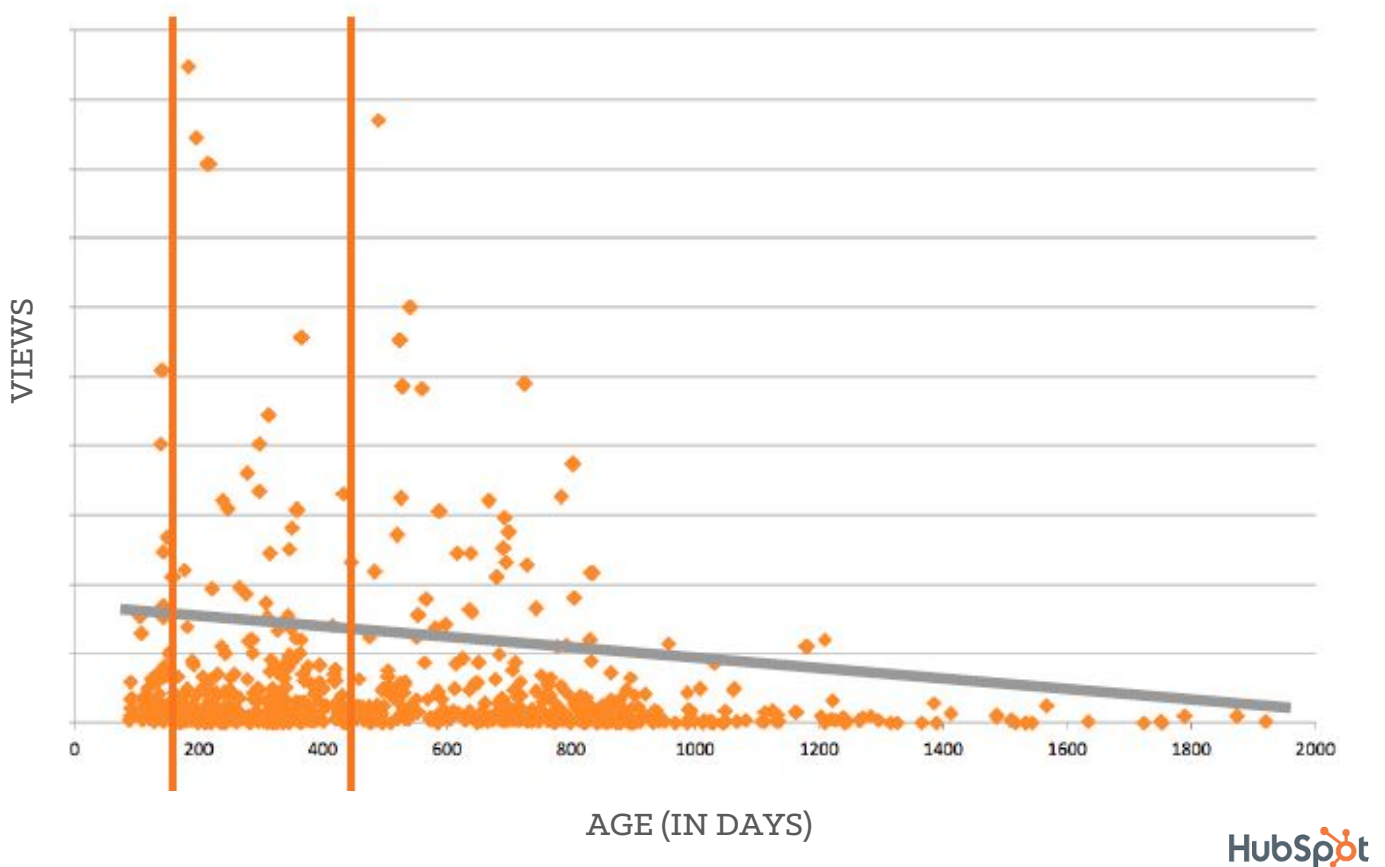
Step 1: Identify posts worth updating.

The key is to identify posts that satisfy the following criteria:

- **The content is outdated, or not as comprehensive as it could be.** Ultimately, you need to pick posts that could use some updating in one way or another. More on this in step 2 below, but this could mean the content is no longer accurate or up-to-date, or it could be improved in some way that makes it more valuable to readers -- by making it more comprehensive, including more examples, more data, etc.
- **It has “page one potential.”** In other words, this post has the potential to rank on page one for a relevant keyword. The idea is, if it currently ranks on page two or three for that keyword, the post update could push it to page one and capitalize on more of the monthly search traffic that keyword typically gets. Your page one potential will also depend on how easy it is for you to rank for competitive keywords, which is where your blog’s domain authority factors in. For example, a blog with high [domain authority](#) will have a much easier time ranking for more difficult keywords than a blog with less domain authority.
- **Its keyword opportunities have decent monthly search volume.** Not all keywords are going to give you the same results, even if you rank at the top of page one. The reason is, different keywords get differing amounts of monthly search volume. With this in mind, aim to pick posts whose page one potential for certain keywords is worth a “decent” amount of monthly search traffic. For [HubSpot’s Marketing Blog](#), I consider a keyword with at least 1,000 monthly searches to be decent, but your criteria for what “decent” is should also depend on your own blog’s benchmarks. You should also consider whether a post has the potential to rank for multiple keywords whose collective monthly search volume adds up to significant potential.
- **It has a good conversion rate (or the potential for one).** If one of your goals is to generate more leads from your historical optimization, try to target posts that already have good conversion rates. If a post doesn’t have a good conversion rate, conversion optimize it first using the keyword-based conversion optimization method we outlined in chapter 3 of this guide.

- **It's at least 6-12 months old.** When we analyzed HubSpot's own blog posts, we found that the majority of the posts that rank on page one for a specific keyword were 6-12 months old. This is a good benchmark to use when deciding how long you should wait before updating old posts. It seems like once a blog post gets older than that, it's less likely to rank on page one.

HubSpot Blog Posts Ranking on Page 1



Okay, so where do you start? First of all, you're going to need some tools. Just like with your historical conversion optimization, you'll need a combination of tools that enable you to conduct keyword research and track keyword rankings. If you're a HubSpot customer, lucky you -- the Keywords App allows you to do both of those things. If you're not a HubSpot customer, the Google AdWords Keyword Planner can help you with the keyword research component for free, but you're going to need to invest in some kind of keyword tracking tool like HubSpot's to track how your posts rank for certain keywords -- and how that rank changes over time.

Once you have the tools you need, you'll need to start analyzing your old blog content to spot your post update opportunities. I'll be frank: This is both tricky and requires some pretty manual work.

There isn't a perfect science to this, but here's how I do it: Export your blog analytics for the last 30 days, and delete any posts published in the last six months so you're only working with older posts that are still generating traffic from organic search. Then sort by post views, from greatest to least. Now scroll down to what I call your "middle of the road" posts -- posts that don't get a ton of monthly views but still get a decent amount of traffic. This is a good place to start, because these are likely posts that probably rank okay but could stand to rank even better.

In the Historical Optimization Tracking Template included with this download, add these posts to columns A and B in the SEO tracking tab.

Now the manual work starts. To determine which keywords a post already ranks for (and how well it ranks), follow step 2 of our keyword-based conversion optimization guide outlined in chapter 3 of this guide. The idea is to do some keyword research to identify the keywords your posts may already be ranking for so you can add them to your keyword tracking tool. This way you can see which ones you are in fact ranking for at what ranking position, and what the monthly search volume of those keywords is. If you find that a post is ranking low on page one, or on pages 2-3 for a keyword (or more than one keyword) that has decent monthly search volume, that post likely presents a good opportunity for updating and republishing.

If you're lucky enough to be dealing with a blog that has high domain authority, you may even be able to target more difficult keywords that you're ranking fairly low for -- or maybe not even ranking for at all yet. Whether or not your site has the domain authority to compete for high-difficulty keywords is something you can determine through some trial and error.

In the Historical Optimization Tracking Template included with this download, add your targeted keywords to column E in the SEO tracking tab.

Step 2: Update the content of the post.

When you're making edits and updates to a post, I recommend either cloning the original post or copying/pasting the content into a new draft, just to be safe.

Keep in mind that every post you update will require a different amount of work. Depending on the content, some will be so outdated that they need to be completely re-written, and some may need much less work.

You should have three goals for updating the content of a post:

- **Accuracy**
- **Freshness**
- **Comprehensiveness**

If a post is really evergreen and you already have that first goal covered, then your focus should be on the second two: How can you make this post even fresher and more comprehensive than it already is? In other words, how can you make it just generally better and more valuable to your readers?

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you're updating the content of a post:

- Is there content that's no longer accurate? For example, maybe the post is about a specific free tool, but a feature of that tool is no longer offered.
- Can you add or swap in fresher examples and screenshots?
- What about the supporting data and statistics -- are they now outdated?
- Can you add new data, quotes, examples, or entire sections that enhance the post and make it even more comprehensive and valuable to readers? (Tip: Do some keyword research to inform what you add to the post.)
- Can the quality of the writing be improved?

In general, you should aim to make enough noticeable improvements to a post that warrant republishing it as new. I'd never recommend just changing the publish date on old content so it looks fresher to Google and to searchers without making noticeable updates to the content first. Make sure you're always adding value to the content you republish.

Step 3: Conversion optimize and search engine optimize the post.

Your next step is to put all that keyword research you did to work. First, conversion optimize the post using the keyword-based method I described in chapter 3 of this guide.


Next, search engine optimize the post using the keywords you decided to target in step 1 above (*which you should've added to your Historical Optimization Tracking Template in column E of the SEO tracking tab*), following basic [on-page SEO best practices](#):

- **Include your target keyword(s) in the page title/post title -- the closer to the front, the better.** That said, don't completely sacrifice the clickability of a title for the sake of keyword optimization alone. The clickthrough rates of search engine results factor into Google's ranking algorithm, so it's important to balance keyword inclusion with [maintaining the title's clickability](#).

March 6, 2015 // 8:00 AM

How to Use Excel: 14 Simple Excel Shortcuts, Tips & Tricks

Written by Rachel Sprung | @rsprung

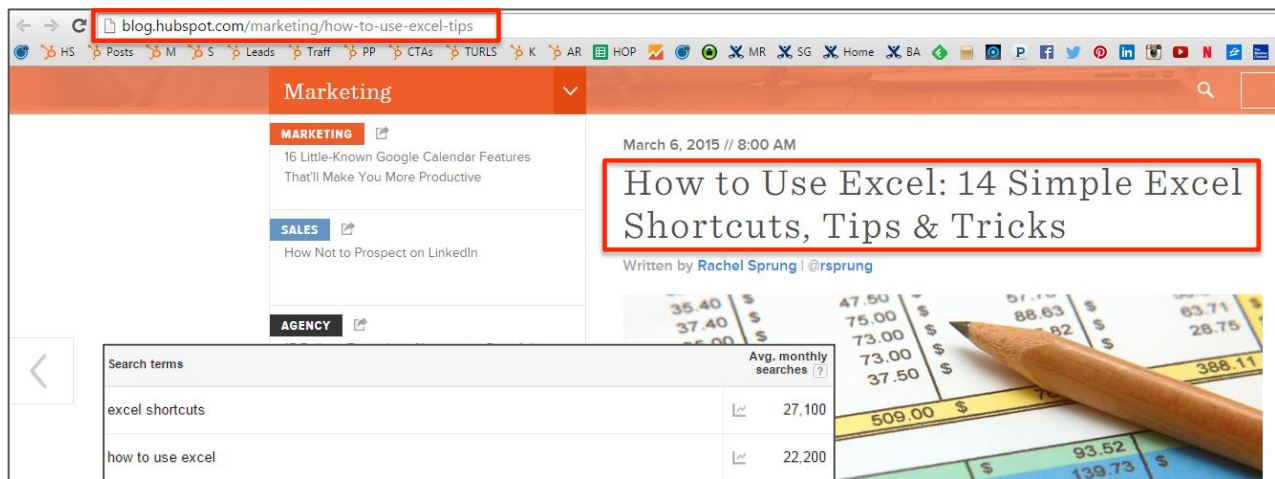


Sometimes, Excel seems too good to be true. All I have to do is enter a formula, and pretty much anything I'd ever need to do manually can be done automatically. Need to merge two sheets with similar data? Excel can do it. Need to do simple math? Excel can do it. Need to combine information in multiple cells? Excel can do it.

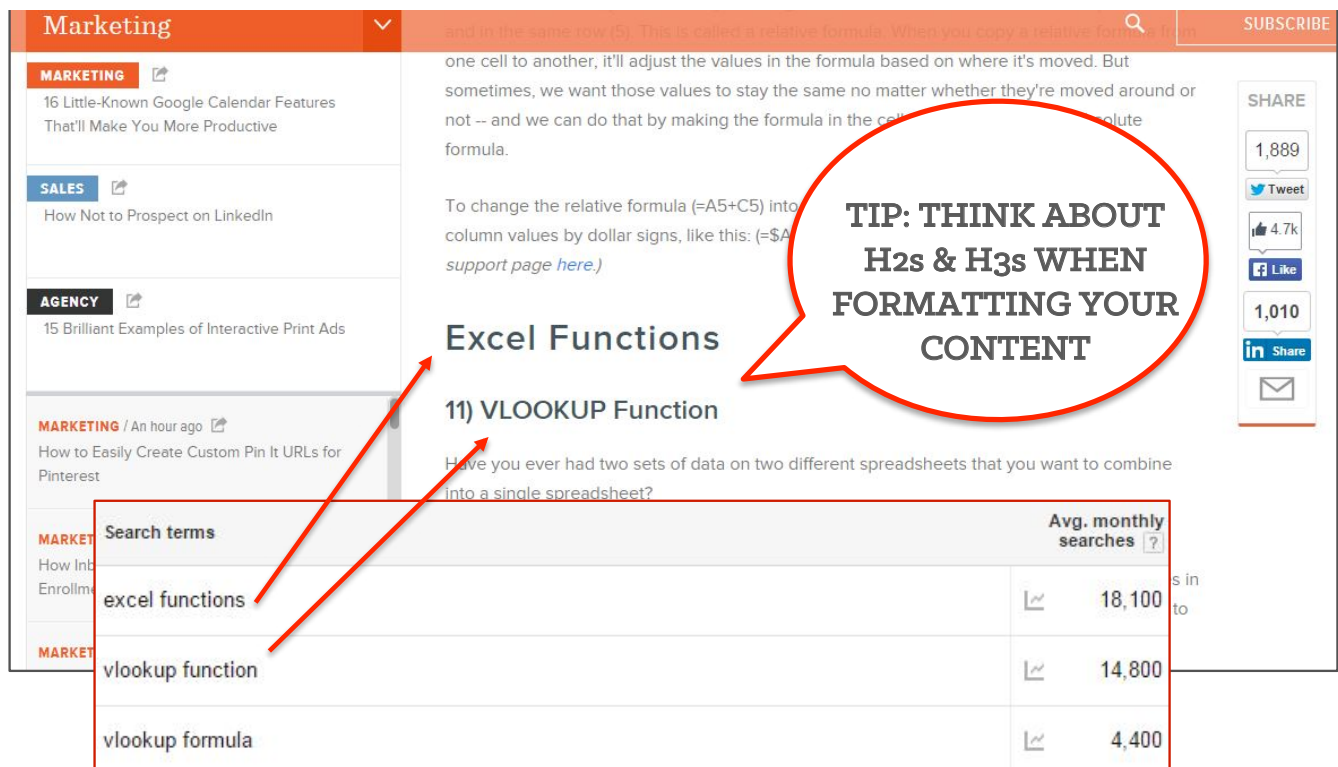
If you encounter a situation where you need to manually update your data, you're probably missing out on a formula that can do it for you. Before spending hours and hours counting cells or copying and pasting data, look for a quick fix on Excel -- you'll likely find one.

In the spirit of working more efficiently and avoiding tedious, manual work, here are a few Excel tricks to get you started with how to use Excel. (And to all the Harry Potter fans out there ... you're welcome in advance.)

how to use Excel.



- Include keyword(s) in the headers (H2s, H3s, etc.).** Formatting can be your best friend when it comes to keyword-optimizing your blog content. For example, headers can be a great place to incorporate keyword variations that may be second to the keywords you chose to target in your title. Furthermore, if you have a post with a lot of keyword opportunities (for example, you're writing a list post, and each item on your list has its own keyword opportunities), using headers can be a great way to call attention to those additional keywords.



[This post](#) is a great example of a post that has been search engine optimized to capitalize on a lot of different keyword opportunities -- both in the title and the H2 as well as in the individual list components, formatted as H3s.

- **Include keywords in the body, especially near the top of the post.** Without keyword stuffing, be sure to mention the keywords you're targeting near the top of the post -- for example, within the introductory paragraph.
- **Write a clear, concise, and compelling meta description.** While Google's ranking algorithm no longer uses keywords from within your meta description as ranking factors, clickthrough rate (CTR), as we mentioned earlier, is still a ranking factor. To improve your CTR from SERPs (search engine results pages) make sure you write clear, concise, and compelling meta descriptions that entice searchers to click on your results.

How to Use Excel: 14 Simple Excel Shortcuts, Tips & Tricks

blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-use-excel-tips ▾ HubSpot, Inc. ▾

Mar 6, 2015 - Learn 14 simple formulas, functions, shortcuts, and tips you can **use** to master **Excel**.

- **Add internal links (with keyword-based anchor text) to improve keyword rankings of other posts you're trying to boost.** Any SEO professional will tell you that internal linking is another important on-page SEO practice. It can help you in one of two ways: 1) Linking from high-authority pages to lower authority pages will help those lower authority pages rank better, and 2) linking to your higher authority pages will help them maintain their high rank.

As a marketer, it's your job to make sure you're constantly adding fresh contacts to your email marketing campaigns so you can keep your numbers moving up and to the right. (But *not* by purchasing [email lists](#) -- learn why you should never buy an email list in [this post](#).)



A Word of Caution About Optimizing the Post's URL

URL structure is another very important on-page SEO element, but keep in mind that editing the URL of an existing post does come with a few downsides. While [blogging software](#) like HubSpot's allows you to do a 301 (permanent) redirect from the old URL to a new one, keep in mind that although 301 redirects are supposed to transfer the majority of a URL's search authority, it may not transfer 100% of it.

Furthermore, keep in mind that because the share counts on [social media buttons](#) are based on shares of an exact URL, redirecting your URLs will result in any public-facing social share counts getting reset to zero, which isn't exactly a good thing for your post's [social proof](#).

You should also be aware of how redirects impact the reporting of your analytics. Will your reporting tools track data from your old URL separate from the new URL? While this is probably not a deal-breaker for deciding whether updating the post's URL is worth doing, you should definitely understand how your reporting might change as a result.

Step 4: Publish your updated post as new, and promote it.

Once your updated content is edited and ready to publish as new, copy/paste the updated content into the original post. Consider adding an editor's note to the bottom of the post like the one we typically use below. This is sensible especially if there are old comments on the post that might cause confusion to new visitors who see a current publish date but old comments:

Editor's Note: This post was originally published in [Month, Year] and has been updated for freshness, accuracy, and comprehensiveness.

When you're ready for your newly updated post to go live, change the publish date/time to be current, and update your post. Now it will appear as a brand new post at the top of your blog's listing page.

Last but certainly not least, promote your content just like you would any brand new post. Email it to your blog subscribers, promote it in social media, and leverage any other promotional channels that work for promoting your content.

A banner image for a marketing blog. It shows a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The text 'Marketing Blog' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font. Below it, in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, is the tagline 'WHERE MARKETERS GO TO GROW'.

Hi Brittany,

Here's your daily roundup of our latest and greatest marketing posts. Enjoy!

[How to Remove the Background of a Photo in Photoshop or PowerPoint](#)

By Pamela Vaughan, Tuesday, May 19, 2015 8:00 AM

In the Historical Optimization Tracking Template included with this download, add your the post republish date to column F in the SEO tracking tab.

(Notes for HubSpot customers using HubSpot's Blogging App: *Because there is currently no way to "schedule" new updates to a live page, make sure you change the publish date/time and update the post exactly at the date/time you want the changes to go live. Otherwise, if you update the post with a future date/time, the post will be unavailable for anyone who discovers it in search, etc. until that date/time rolls around.*

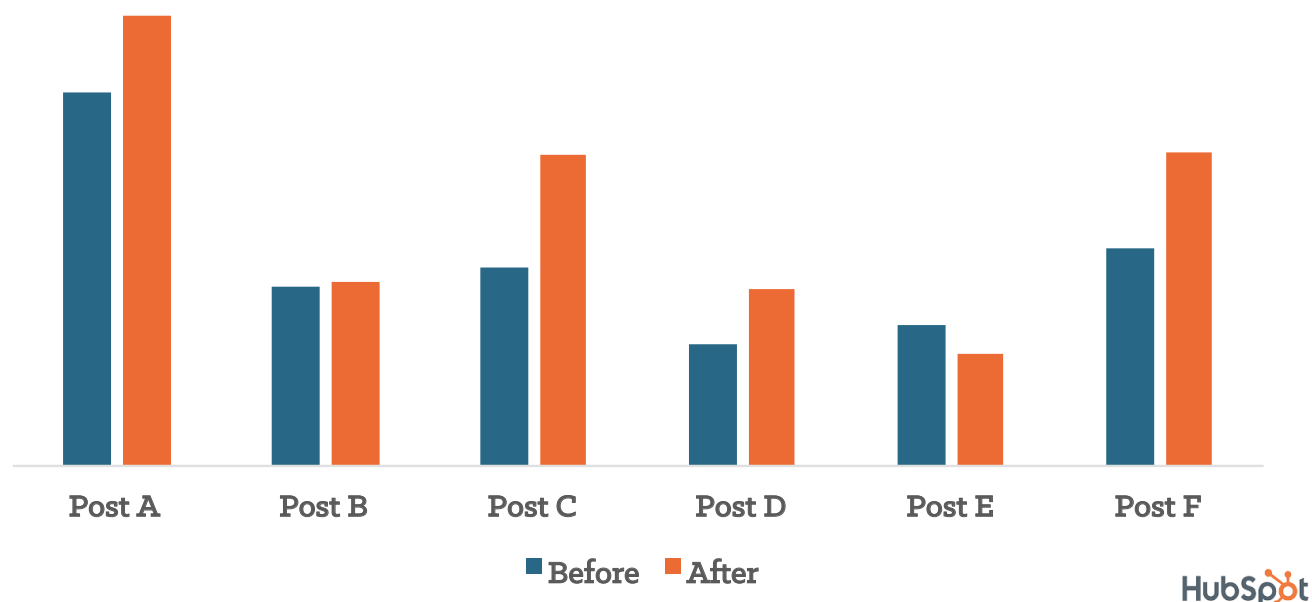
Furthermore, because HubSpot's Blog Update Emails only automatically send once for each blog post you publish, you'll want to create a manual email to promote the update to your instant blog subscribers. Daily/weekly/monthly Blog Update Emails are powered by RSS, so as long as your post has a current date/time, you don't need to create manual emails for those subscriber lists.)

Scaling Historical Search Engine Optimization With On-Page SEO

To scale your historical search engine optimization even further, consider doing some on-page SEO for some of your old posts without completely updating and republishing them as new. This is great approach for posts that are too recent to update and republish but you think have an opportunity to rank better for certain keywords.

While we've only started to scale this, as you can see from the chart below, we've noticed some nice lifts in organic search traffic from posts we've on-page optimized. What's interesting is, we didn't do any additional promotion for these. No email, no social media promo -- the only thing we did was optimize them using the on-page SEO best practices we mentioned above, and we let Google do the rest. Consider putting some social media promotion behind the posts you on-page optimize to give them some extra oomph -- but only if the content of the post is still up-to-date.

Monthly Views From Organic Search Before & After On-Page SEO



CHAPTER 6:

Tracking Your Historical Optimization Success

Historical optimization is an ongoing project -- if it proves successful for you, it should become a permanent tactic in your blogging strategy like it's become for us.

Using the Historical Optimization Tracking Template included in the download of this ebook, here's how to track whether your optimization efforts are successful:

- **For Posts You Conversion Optimize:** Calculate and record the conversion rate (leads divided by views, converted into a percentage) of each post from before you did any conversion optimization. Then calculate and record the conversion rate after your optimization. Did it go up? If it went down, revisit the post and try re-optimizing it.
- **For Posts You Update and Republish or Just Search Engine Optimize:** Record the 30-day organic search views the post generated prior to republishing/optimizing. Wait 30 days for the impact of your updates to take effect and normalize -- Google needs time to re-crawl your page and factor into its algorithm any additional traffic/inbound links you generated as a result of your optimization efforts. After the 30-day waiting period, wait an additional 30 more days, and record the organic search views the post generated during those 30 days to measure the impact of your efforts.

Results to Expect From Historical Optimization

Because results are dependent on so many different variables, it's practically impossible to come up with a benchmark for what to expect the conversion rate and/or organic search views for each post to increase by. For conversion, variables include things like the relevancy of the CTA's offer, and whether visitors are even looking for more information on top of what the blog post already provides.

For SEO, there are even more variables at play, including your website's domain authority, the post's page authority, and the keywords' existing competition in search. Keyword opportunities in and of themselves are extremely variable as well. Some blog post topics just aren't very search-friendly, meaning their opportunity for attracting search traffic is low. Some topics, on the other hand, are extremely searchable and result in a ton of high-volume keyword ranking opportunities.

Final Thought

Before I wrap this up, one final word of caution

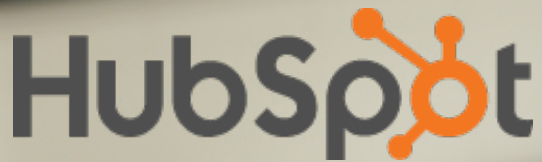
Historical optimization should be a piece of your overall blogging strategy -- not the whole strategy.

You can't completely give up on creating new blog posts in an attempt to optimize the past. Remember, the old content you're optimizing now was once brand new, and not every new post will turn into an SEO success story. So if you completely forgo new content creation, you could be shooting your future self in the foot by giving yourself fewer chances to rank for new keywords. You'd also miss out on capitalizing on new topics/trends emerging in your industry, as well as opportunities for thought leadership, among other benefits of new content.

That said, only you can decide what the right editorial balance is between updating old content and creating brand new content. As a starting point, audit your old content to determine how many post update opportunities you have. A blog that's been around for several years and has a large repository of content likely has more opportunities than a blog that's only been around for a couple of years. Another thing to consider is what your publishing frequency is today.

On the HubSpot Marketing Blog, we currently publish about 15 posts per week, and about three of those posts are updates. But if we were only publishing a few posts per week, we might want to only include one post update every couple of weeks or so.

Don't be a stranger. Let us know how your historical optimization efforts pan out, and good luck!



CREATE REMARKABLE CONTENT WITH HUBSPOT'S BLOGGING TOOL

Get access to HubSpot's blogging tool by starting a 30-day free trial.

[START YOUR FREE TRIAL](#)

