

Grow With Less

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# The Overwhelmed Business Owner's Guide to SEO

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# INTRODUCTION

What do you do when you spent hours writing awesome articles only to realize **your mom and your best friend Dave are the only people reading them?**

That's the question I asked myself 7 years ago after writing dozens of articles for French Together (a blog which now attracts 300,000 monthly visitors.)

I followed 10,000 words guides showing me how to optimize my site for traffic, sent hundreds of outreach emails, wrote guest posts and installed fancy WordPress plugins.

Unfortunately, nothing seemed to work and I was getting a few visitors per day at most.

That's when I realized that **SEO isn't about trying to game Google, it's about creating quality content people search for and making sure Google knows the content is the best on the topic.**

This guide will show you how to develop a simple SEO strategy that will help you attract readers, please search engines and earn backlinks without having to beg for them or try dozens of revolutionary new tools.

Benjamin Houy

Founder of [Grow With Less](#)

# On-page SEO or how to make search engines love your site

On-page SEO (also called on-site SEO) has a reputation for being complicated, technical and something you should pay someone to handle for you.

Luckily, smart people already took care of the most complicated aspects and there are really only 2 things you need to do:

1. Make sure your website works well.
2. Choose the right topics and keywords.

Before talking about keyword-research, let's discover the 4 steps you must follow to make sure you have a SEO website.

## #1 Choose a good hosting provider

Your hosting provider is like your car.

You may still reach your destination with an old broken one but it will take longer and you may have to make a detour along the way.

This detour could be your website being down for a few hours.

It could be visitors waiting for your article to load.

Or it could be your website being gone because your hosting provider got hacked and failed to properly back it up.

That's why choosing a trustworthy hosting provider is essential. Your hosting provider will have a huge influence on how fast your website loads and on how likely you are to get hacked.

There are lots of recommended hosting companies on the web so I will keep it simple. **Avoid BlueHost at all cost and choose a quality hosting provider like Siteground, Kinsta or Lightning Base.**

Oh and there are no affiliate links in this guide, so I have nothing to gain from you using these 2 hosts or any other tool I mention.

## #2 Avoid the scary “not secure” warning

How do you think your visitors would react if they visited a website and saw a “not secure” warning from their browser?

They would probably leave, thinking the site got hacked or that it’s unsafe.

Yet, that’s exactly what millions of visitors who visit websites that don’t have a SSL certificate [now see in Safari and Google Chrome](#).

So make sure your website has a valid SSL certificate.

## #3 Embrace the magic of WordPress plugins

There are lots of WordPress plugins that promise to help you rank on Google but only a few I actually recommend.

The first one is [Yoast SEO](#) because it will do most of the heavy lifting for you in term of on-page SEO. Simply install it and go through the configuration wizard and you will have taken care of what matters most in term of on-site SEO.

The second one is [Imagify](#), a plugin that will optimize your images and make them smaller. This will help your website load a lot faster (especially if you have a lot of images.) You can also use [ShortPixel](#)

If you install an image-optimization plugin for the first time, I recommend using the bulk-optimization feature to optimize all the images on your site. You may have to pay a small fee if you have lots of images but this will make your website considerably faster and save you money because your website will use less resources.

You will also reduce the [environmental impact of your website](#).

# Keyword-research (or how to choose keywords you can actually rank for)

Keyword-research is one of the most important aspects of SEO but also one of the most misunderstood.

The goal of keyword-research isn't simply to pick a keyword lots of people search, use it and wait for the traffic to roll in, it's to identify keywords for which you could realistically rank.

That's where lots of bloggers go wrong. They choose the keyword with the highest monthly search volume and consider it a job well-done.

**Unfortunately, the fact lots of people search a keyword in Google doesn't guarantee you traffic. In fact, you will often have a much easier time getting traffic from a smaller keyword.**

When doing keyword-research, you need to find a keyword that offers you:

- A decent amount of searches.
- A realistic chance of ranking.

**“Best health insurance” is a great keyword for a powerful insurance company but a terrible one for a small broker few people know because the amount of searches doesn't matter if you can't rank in the top 5 of Google results and people don't see don't see your article.**

Here are a few questions to ask yourself when choosing a keyword:

- Is this a keyword people search?
- Will people who searched this keyword benefit from my article?
- What kind of websites rank for the top 5 results? Are these huge brands or smaller websites like mine? In other words, can I realistically rank for this keyword?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no”, you need another keyword.

This is frustrating at first because the smaller your website is, the less choice you have in term of keywords while a huge brand could rank for almost any keyword.

Luckily, there are (almost) always smaller keywords you can rank for. These are what I call niche keywords.

Why niche? Because **just like the niche you choose for your business, the general rule is that the more niche the keyword, the easier it will be to rank for.** The process of choosing a keyword is the same as the process of choosing a niche. You need to niche down enough to be able to answer “yes” to the 3 questions you discovered above.

If you are a small business offering yoga classes in New York, you are unlikely to rank for “yoga classes New York” so what do you do?

You niche down.

Yoga classes Brooklyn => ashtanga yoga classes Brooklyn => ashtanga yoga classes for kids Brooklyn.

The more niche your keywords are, the more likely you are to be able to rank.

Just make sure you don't end up targeting keywords nobody searches for.

# The keyword-research checklist

## #1 Think of a few potential keywords your articles could rank for

An article about French movies could have “French movies” as a main theme/keyword repeated throughout the article but also incorporate smaller keywords that may only appear once or twice (individual movie names.)

## #2 Don't be afraid of keyword-research tools

Keyword-research tools are the most useful tools you can use as part of a minimalist SEO strategy.

I personally use [Ahrefs](#) and consider it the best option if you can afford it but you could also use free tools like [Google Adword Keyword Planner](#) and [WordTracker](#) to get started.

Once you have found a keyword-research tool you like, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this a keyword people search?
- Will people who searched this keyword benefit from my article?
- What kind of websites rank for the top 5 results? Are these huge brands or smaller websites like mine? In other words, can I realistically rank for this keyword?

## #3 Make sure your article mentions the keywords

Don't force it, it should be natural. In fact, you will find that most articles will naturally mention one main keyword/theme several times and then a few smaller keywords.

The main keyword is the one you should try to place in your url (example: frenchtogether.com/french-movies) and in the article headline while smaller keywords can be put in the subtitles and paragraphs throughout the article.

A few other things you should do before publishing an article:

- Make sure all your images have an alt tag that describes them. To create one, ask yourself: what should a blind person hearing the image described hear?
- Make sure you fill the SEO title and meta-description field (if you have installed Yoast SEO, this will be under your article when you edit it in WordPress.)



# Backlinks (or how to show Google your site deserves to be number one)

When you publish a new article, search engine bots that visit your site ask themselves 2 main questions:

- What's the topic of this article? What terms should it rank for? (hence the importance of keyword-research.)
- Is this a trustworthy site? Will Google users be happy to find this page when they search?

**There are thousands of factors Google takes into account to assess the trustworthiness of your site but studies have consistently shown backlinks to have the most impact.**

A backlink is generally considered a good backlink if:

- It comes from a trustworthy site.
- It's relevant. A backlink from a small blog in your niche could be worth more than a backlink from a huge site in an unrelated niche.
- It looks natural (someone added it because it brings value to readers, not just to help your site rank higher).

Now the question is: how do you get good backlinks? Why do some people seem to pick up great backlinks naturally while others struggle to even get one good backlink per month?

The answer is depressingly simple:

**The higher you rank in Google, the more frequently your website will get mentioned in new articles and the more easily you will gain backlinks. This is called the vicious circle of SEO.**

Don't worry though! This doesn't mean you can't get backlinks if you don't rank high. You will just need to work harder to get your backlinks.

This is the same as with jobs. The more experience you have, the easier it is to get a job. The less experience you have, the harder you need to work to find a job.

# 4 Proven strategies you can use to get backlinks

Here are various strategies you can use to earn backlinks. They all work but you may find that one works better for you than the others.

To avoid overwhelm, I recommend picking one, trying it for one month and seeing how it goes.

## #1 Guest posts

You probably already know this strategy. It requires lots of work but posting guest posts on quality websites in your niche is a great way of getting backlinks.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself before contacting a website to see if you could publish a guest post:

- Is this a trustworthy website?
- Do you have something genuinely useful to contribute to the website?
- Are the links dofollow or nofollow? A nofollow link doesn't necessarily mean you shouldn't publish a guest post but it means the link is likely to be way less valuable.

## #2 The little-known strategy to get featured in newspapers

A great (and little-known) way to get backlinks is to use [#journorequest](#), a Twitter hashtag journalists use to look for sources for their upcoming articles.

Unlike with popular services like HARO, there is little competition for most tweets so you are likely to get featured if your answer is helpful.

This is my favorite technique by far because it works extremely well provided you are in a niche journalists frequently talk about.

## #3 Look for interview opportunities

Lots of websites like to interview experts and will be happy to interview you if you contact them.

A good way to find such opportunities is to type “name of someone well-known in your niche + interview” in Google.

For example, if you type “Benjamin Houy” interview in Google, you will find a few websites that interviewed me. If you are in the language learning niche and have something interesting to share, some of these websites will happily interview you too.

You will usually have better luck if the person interviewed is well-known in your niche while not being a global superstar either because websites that interview superstar generally don't interview less well-known people.

## #4 Look for resource pages in your niche

This will work best if your site already contains lots of articles.

If you type “your keyword + resource” (“copywriting resources” for example) in Google, you will find lots of websites listing useful resources.

If you have created a useful resource and reach out, you are likely to get mentioned. I usually get a backlink from 5-10% of people I contact when i do that.

There are [lots of other techniques](#) I could list but many of them require the use of paid tools like Ahrefs so I recommend that you start with the 5 techniques mentioned above first.

Using them won't bring you instant results but you will gain quality backlinks if you dedicate a little bit of time to them every day.

And remember, **the most backlinks you will have, the higher you will rank and the less amount of work you will need to do.**

SEO is wonderful but also overwhelming so I recommend you not to try to do too much at once.

Start by making sure you have applied all the on-page SEO fundamentals described in the first part of this guide.

Then, follow the keyword-research checklist when the time comes to write your next article.

Finally, choose 1 backlink strategy and try it for a month.

And remember, SEO is a long-term strategy. You won't see results right away so keep going and trust the process.

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