Sizzle

An E-commerce Revolution
Advanced E-commerce SEO

Driving e-commerce by leveraging data to create incentives, benefits, and social proof through natural language processing and function-driven content.

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All About the Author

What I hope you will take away from this book is that the strategies and techniques work. The strategies are confirmed white-hat best practices. The strategies are **advanced** and they build upon each other in a synergistic way while producing compounding results. The sites that implement these strategies are winning.

Now it is your turn – if you **do the work**.

For the past 22 years I have had my head buried in books and monitors while coding, reading, writing, listening, optimizing, and working with almost every type of business from small local businesses, government institutions, large nonprofit organizations and associations, to massive e-commerce sites, including an $80B publicly traded company with 6 e-commerce sites on multiple platforms.

I say this because it is essential information for SEOs. We are a skeptical bunch. If there was ever a civilian version of stolen valor, it would apply to SEO.

I'm a father, business owner, marketer, outdoorsman, and an avid reader and consumer of information.

I served three years in the U.S. Army's Elite Infantry Unit, The Old Guard (**Ceremonial Unit and Escort to the President of the United States)**. I can turn on my "attention-to-detail" when needed.

I love SEO because it requires such a diverse set of skills.

SEO requires you to be a part-time reader, part-time researcher, part-time writer, part-time usability engineer and information architect, a bit of coding here and there, part-time private investigator, presenter, martyr, and sometimes on a good day or a good year, part-time savior.

The first 15 years of my SEO career, I wore many hats and became certified in web technologies not common for someone in SEO. You will hardly find an SEO with an MS SQL Server Admin certification, project management professional (PMP) certification from the Project Management Institute, or even a Scrum Master certification, let alone all three.

The week I spent with NNGroup, the foremost usability company in the World, I learned high-level usability from Bruce Tognazzini (Apple's first usability engineer and chief usability engineer for WebMD) and Jakob Nielsen, (pretty much the founder of website usability and owner of more than 1,000 patents). These were some of my favorite courses. It was an expensive program, but I paid the $5,000 out of my own pocket and it was worth every dime.

I read all their books and became a fan boy of Jakob Nielsen's site. When I saw him for the first time, I felt embarrassed that I acted like I was meeting Michael Jordan. I read all the web accessibility books I could get my hands on including both of Steven Krug's "Don't Make Me Think" series on making websites easy to use and accessible. I spent 2 months reading and studying the famous Polar Bear book on Information Architecture, now in its 4th edition.

As a result, my clients had businesses that grew, my employers had sites that set PRs while I continued to create innovative strategies based on best practices and testing, testing, and more testing.

E-commerce

I rewarded the first large e-commerce company that gave me a job by increasing their organic search revenue by more than $120M over five years. The evidence is still visible on SEMRUSH. I saved their site from a devastating and unknown (to them) algorithmic penalty. Then after they recovered, Google targeted them and issued a devastating manual penalty that cost them over $7M in 3 months. I fixed that too.

In 2015 and 2016, I began adding incentives and benefits to ad copy (Title Tags and Meta Descriptions) and tracked the progress weekly. After 9 months of success, I convinced the owner to systematize this method in a way that allowed the pages to rise in the rankings, improve CTR, increase conversions, and raise revenue **without manually writing the content**. They previously used "spinners" to create terrible content. I changed the methodology by including the strategies and techniques in this book and called them smart spinners. That site now leads the industry.

We leveraged database information to create algorithms and functions of our own. We launched them within 2 months and continued tweaking those algorithms until the content was useful, specific, and unique. We created content that compelled searchers to click on their listings.

This was the birth of **function-driven content**.

Blessed with a great e-commerce system that allowed me to customize 200,000 pages in less than two days, the organic search skyrocketed within a month, but the paid campaigns flourished immediately.

This company broke their organic search revenue record four years in a row making them over $120M more than was previously possible.

These techniques became so apparently effective and easy, I decided to write them down. Then I rewrote them again, and again, and again with the intention of simplifying them for presentations to marketers, executives, programmers, usability professionals and writers.

It turned into a book. Who knew?

To Alina,

Thank you for coming to work with me on Saturdays. Thank you for having a smile and always being in good cheer while we spent hours at the bookstore. Thank you for always being helpful, encouraging, and listening while I practiced my presentations.

Thank you for your great metaphors about brevity. "Daddy, you're trying to serve them a sandwich but it has too much bread. Less bread and more sandwich."

I Love You! . ❤️❤️😘❤️❤️

The State of Digital Marketing

I worked with a Fortune 500 company that earned $80 billion per year with 3,000+ brick and mortar locations, but still struggled to rank well on Google and other search engines for **non-branded phrases**. Their digital marketing strategies were dependent on paid media. The staff was "**addicted to paid**" yet ignored organic search for more than 20 years. Many companies forego best practices and as a result, are forced to "feed the meter" of SEM. Be Better.

Optimization takes will, commitment, insight, ingenuity, strategy, resources, discipline, and motivation. You can't do it all yourself; you need others to help optimize your site. SEOs need programmers and writers, designers, database engineers, user experience professionals, and helpful customers that provide actionable feedback. That's what makes it fun. You are my people; the caffeine addicts that stay up late reading and coding and designing and writing and adjusting pixels to ensure everything is perfect. People who love what they do inspire me. I wrote this for you, honestly. Digital marketing needs more of you.

Unfortunately, in a world of ever-changing technology, marketing managers, marketing directors, and especially **CMOs, are completely void of technical knowledge**. They often skipped ahead, fresh out of MBA school, and began managing teams without actually getting **in the weeds** enough to implement a successful campaign. Optimizing a single page or doing simple markup is out of the question – and worse, they have no interest in learning.

The greatest danger is these marketing executives do not even know the questions to ask, let alone if answers by agencies are truthful, accurate, or up to date. SEOs need to find ways to implement winning strategies in the face of luddites. When eyes glaze over, it takes a special person to create excitement and possibility when the MBAs and powerful C-suite executives become impatient or bored listening to real-world optimization strategies and tactics.

This is one of the reasons marketing executives rely on digital marketing agencies. Executives lack the knowledge to make sound decisions or create strategies themselves. Agencies serve as a protective layer against bad decisions by marketing leadership – that is, **Plausible Deniability.**

"They're the experts, I went along with their advice." ~Every V.P. of Marketing Ever

If you are a digital marketing manager, director, or higher, you need to **up your game**. There are enough MBAs with little to no technical experience jamming the ranks, making bad decisions, and playing it safe already. Digital marketing requires life-long learners. If you are a business owner, president, or CEO; **find people that earned their way to the top**, that spent the 10,000 hours in the struggle. They know more, I promise that.

This book **identifies the current paradigm** that is limiting e-commerce companies from ranking well and producing a record-breaking year. This book explains and demonstrates **proven strategies that produce results** within weeks, not months or years.

The strategies in this book will revolutionize your site, **but only if they are implemented**. The new paradigm is so obvious, I believe when people become aware of it, they will improve their site immediately. If not, they will wait until they MUST implement it. You have the opportunity to get there first in your industry. Being first is a major advantage in market share, traffic, ad revenue, and organic search revenue. The alternative is to play catch-up, which means your site will never be first.

So, let's get to work, start a revolution within your industry, and dominate your online competition. ~ Lou Storiale

What It Takes to Write Good Content

The most difficult aspect of digital marketing is writing useful, comprehensive content that produces results.

A writing job at a medium-sized e-commerce company should be a great entry-level position for English majors graduating from any college or university. However, a new graduate with a four-year English degree, is ill-prepared with paltry skills in writing website content that is unique, updatable, specific, and useful.

If writing quality content on the web or starting a blog was so easy and profitable, why isn't there an in-rush of 30-year-old millionaire writers?

Here is a news report you have never heard:

> "Another batch of English majors sold their writing blog for $50M last week. The writing conglomerate of IU graduates, class of 2020, struck gold! Five long-time friends got together for a drink after graduation, and they decided to form a company. Three years later, they became millionaires - all before the age of 30."

Writing content on the web requires a combination of **creativity** and **brevity**.

Good content is **comprehensive** yet has **no fluff**.

Ad copy must **entice a person to click** on that listing, include important keywords, branding, incentives, benefits, geographical location, target audience, and activities, without being longer than 60 characters for Title Tags and about 150 characters for Meta Descriptions.

A product description that convinces someone to purchase an item from YOUR website has to **paint a picture in the visitor's mind using bullet points**.

A masterpiece article is one that ranks on the first page **for numerous keyword phrases**, gets thousands of shares, and earns hundreds of backlinks from relevant high-authority websites. Creating a page that can be visually scanned for utilitarian purposes is crucial for success. This type of writing takes years to perfect.

It takes 3 seconds for a person to decide if a website is worth their time before they bounce back to the search engine result pages. Most of that analysis is the scannability of the page content, not design. People look for congruent content and it must be readily apparent using boldface keywords, bullet points, and decorated links to determine if the page is worth their time.

This writing style takes knowledge, skill, experience, and commitment.

Writing for e-commerce sites is even more stringent. Every e-commerce site is given the same **manufacturer's description** for each product they sell. Sadly, companies rely on this content almost exclusively to sell those products. For years Google said there was no problem with this type of content. Recently, that has changed. No longer is the same content acceptable on dozens of sites.

Despite Google's new stance on manufacturers' descriptions, it **has never and will never differentiate** your site from your online competition's. Writing unique, specific, updatable content is a requirement to effectively compete.

There is a new way to write content that produces results without having to write new content for each page. This new method will differentiate your site from the competition, and it will adhere to Google's best practices without much writing at all.

Writing Takes Longer Than You Think

I was asked to help a company with their new e-commerce site not long ago. While managing the website redesign and migration, we needed useful, specific, and updatable content to fill 100 pages for a new section of the site.

The client needed to produce the content, but they did not have the resources available at that time. This predicament cripples many website development projects.

Companies may not want to pay someone else to write the content, but they must still invest resources to edit that content themselves. Companies are responsible for the accuracy of the content, so an editing and approval process is required when outsourcing content writing no matter who writes it. You can easily see how this process quickly becomes convoluted and often needs a project manager to help keep it moving forward.

After several weeks, the client finally agreed to write the content themselves and assigned one of their in-house experts, Janet, for the job at-hand. Janet had an MBA with more than 20 years of experience. Janet was excited to take on the task.

She agreed to write 100 articles and estimated a duration of one hour per article, which was fairly accurate. Little research was required to draft these articles since the article topics were all within her area of expertise.

Janet estimated one article per hour for eight hours per day. She estimated that the entire writing portion of the project would be submitted within about 12 business days.

Janet thought she could write eight articles per day since several of the articles would only take 45 minutes. She was confident because she knew the subject matter so well.

I expressed my concern.

"Janet, over the years, I have noticed that things just always seem to get in the way when there is an aggressive schedule like this."

"What kinds of things?"

"For example, mandatory or impromptu meetings, unexpected telephone calls, the flu, fender benders, doctor appointments, flat tires, traffic, sick children, bathroom breaks, water cooler conversations, getting coffee, smoke breaks, transition time between tasks, checking social media and emails, pandemics, just to name a few. All of these things get in the way of true productivity."

"Janet, if we take a 5.5-hour estimate instead of 8 hours and recalculate your writing time, the delivery date is more like 18 working days versus the 12 in your original estimate."

Janet also remembered that she would be out of town for two days.

"Also, I'll be out of the office on Friday and next Monday."

We recalculated the number of productive hours, multiplied by the actual days Janet would be available to write and solidified a real-world deadline. This recalculation brought the original number from 12 business days to almost 21.

I noted that the new estimate took the delivery date from 2+ weeks to the middle of the 4th week. If Janet wanted to hit her original delivery date, she would have to work overtime and weekends.

"I really don't want to write on my days off or over the weekend."

"I don't want you to have to write on the weekend either," I said. "Good writing always takes longer than expected. How about if we change the due date and give you a bit more breathing room?"

Janet checked her schedule, and we aligned on the new date. Janet sounded relieved.

This demonstrates how easily missed deadlines occur. Few people write content for the web. It takes longer than you think.

Writing website content SEEMS easy, but in fact, it is the most difficult part of website development. Writing, fact-checking, editing, and approvals always take longer than a person thinks.

Also, consider the boredom of writing the same type of content day after day. The mind needs a break once in a while. We are human, after all.

Every fiction and non-fiction writer I have researched estimates the average time they actually write is about four hours per day. This includes Steven King, George R.R. Martin, Maya Angelou and most Hollywood Script writers.

"Easy reading is damn hard writing," said Maya Angelou in a 2013 interview with the Daily Beast.

Rand Fishkin, in his infamous 10X content presentation while at Moz stated,

"Google Panda (an algorithm Google used to measure page content quality for over 10 years) is coming for your site; it's going to knock you out of the rankings. It's going to penalize you, like your content is thin and largely useless."

(https://moz.com/blog/why-good-unique-content-needs-to-die-whiteboard-friday)

The Panda Algorithm has been updated, replaced, and recategorized under the Core Algorithm. Google says Panda has not been used in its original format for quite some time, but a more **stringent version**, with some artificial intelligence and a few other algorithm updates have made Panda obsolete.

This means, the algorithms have become **even more stringent.**

However, manually writing useful content that generates revenue is still arduous, time-consuming, and takes a lot of resources. Luckily, **function-driven content** cuts this time by 90% or more.

For many people, writing is fun and exciting, but writing under a deadline can sometimes be overwhelming.

Many people underestimate the required writing time because they are good at their job and succeed often. Writing seems easy. However, optimism and competence usually precede a missed deadline.

Pro Tip: When writing responsibilities are added to staff members' workload, the writing rarely gets completed on time. Few people consistently write acceptable content on time unless they are hired exclusively **as a writer.** Adding writing duties to a staff member's responsibilities often adds stress and can delay project delivery or decreases their normal productivity.

A designated, full-time writer should be considered whenever possible.

Non-writers usually:

- Do not get their assignments done
- Do not get their assignments done on time; or
- Do not get their assignments done with top quality

This book is about creating unique, specific, useful, and updatable content on e-commerce sites **without having to write (much)** and not outsourcing it or using AI content either.

Imagine writing an excellent page description for a product or a category page and using that template for 1,000 similar pages, all with unique content that produces results. It is possible and it will save you hundreds of hours. In this book, I will teach you how to write content that is useful and scalable, without writing… much.

This is where **function-driven content** comes into play. When using function-driven content on e-commerce sites, thousands of pages can be added or edited in less than a day. I'll explain functions in a bit, but rest assured they will save you time and produce some of the best content on the internet.

You will be able to implement the same strategies and produce record-breaking organic search revenue, as well. That's my promise to you.

Optimization Inflation

The more algorithms and the more stringent the requirements to rank in the top spots on search engines, the more resources are required to compete online. Business owners are beginning to realize the **antiquated 2.0 paradigm** no longer produces revenue for organic search.

The larger the list of optimization requirements, the more companies will opt-out of investing in effective long-term SEO strategies.

We are in the middle of an **optimization inflation crisis,** and it is causing owners of small and medium-sized businesses to reconsider using SEO as a marketing strategy.

Back to Baseline

1. Easy SEO and low hanging fruit do not create dramatic results.

2. If sites in an industry and geo-location only implement easy SEO strategies, those sites are all back to baseline. Those easy tasks and strategies become **table stakes** to compete in that industry and geographical location. No competitive advantage is created.

3. As **major players** begin to implement more, better, and different strategies, their competition will eventually do the same. Soon, the medium-level tasks and strategies, once implemented, become table stakes again.

4. This continues until new sites cannot compete with the big players without millions of dollars of development costs. New companies must begin with paid listings, social paid, email marketing, and good-old-fashioned public relations. This is how SEO dies.

The best way to compete with the big players is staring most e-commerce site owners in the face.

Optimize your money pages using **function-driven content** for immediate and profitable results. The competition will be left scratching their heads, but still chasing the next low-hanging fruit outlined in some blog post by a fake SEO guru. Every two years, the cycle begins again.

Major changes began with SSL (https://) requirements, then site speed, then mobile indexing, then a new algorithm just for reviews, then site speed again changed. This does not include the normal semi-annual algorithm updates or the small daily changes and testing.

Keeping up with all of these changes, just to remain at baseline, may not seem worth it for many small e-commerce business owners.

Small business owners cannot afford to update their site any longer.

Companies opening new businesses today are competing with businesses that were established in the last century. Competing for top spots on search engines can be futile against well-established companies, especially during the holidays.

New companies may decide to invest in paid digital and traditional marketing, leaving their site's optimization anemic at best.

A $20,000 SEO investment has led small business owners to come face-to-face with the law of diminishing returns. When it takes $30,000-$50,000 for a small business to build a custom website with useful content listed among the top 2 pages, they may likely decide to spend that money elsewhere. That is what we are seeing in the industry at all levels, not just in small businesses.

Optimization inflation requires much greater resources to create first page Google results just to compete, let alone place in the top 3 spots for hundreds or thousands of phrases.

Optimization inflation is causing the motivation and commitment to fully invest in a comprehensive strategy to wane. New business owners are mistakenly interpreting optimization inflation as the futility of SEO and choosing traditional marketing strategies instead.

In reality, with a little innovation using function-driven content, they can beat their competition easily.

Function-driven content allows business owners to **leap-frog to the top spots on Google** with smart content placed exactly where it belongs - on their money pages. This will be a **game changer** for companies that have the drive and desire to **dominate their online competition**.

Indirect Content Marketing Is Dead

The current paradigm in search engine optimization and content marketing is crippling the industry, your revenue, and company profits.

Once you review two or three popular e-commerce sites after reading this book, you'll see the current paradigm and how it limits those sites' organic revenue and visibility. The problem and answer to optimizing an e-commerce site is plain to see once the paradigm is defined. So, let's define it.

What is E-Commerce 2.0?

E-commerce 2.0 is the strategy of creating ancillary content for the sole purpose of INDIRECTLY boosting a site's reputation, visibility, ranking, and linkability.

Marketers are hopeful that a traffic boost will **cascade to a boost in sales or registrations.** Marketers use ancillary content as the beginning of a content funnel that they hope will lead to revenue, but now rarely succeeds.

When marketing professionals discussed website content from 2005-2016, their first recommendation was to "start a blog." That idea spawned "E-Commerce 2.0." The idea was to create content to drive traffic and a portion of those visitors would purchase services or products.

Since Google's **Page Rank algorithm** was known to help popular websites in the rankings, short-sighted marketers recommended blogs as a way to gain links from other sites. This increase, it was thought, would help the money pages rank better as well.

The strategy was as follows:

1. Write content
2. People will link to your content
3. More links = higher ranking
4. The entire site ranks higher including product pages
5. More organic search revenue

Or

People will find your great content and make a purchase after reading the blog posts, using your online tool, or seeing a detailed review of the product.

This was the beginning of E-Commerce 2.0, unfortunately it does not work well and never did.

A blog, it was thought, would help make the site popular and INDIRECTLY help win more customers.

Over time, it became obvious that only the highest amount of effort with daily posts would drive traffic to a site or gain enough attention to get backlinks.

Small business owners **did not have time** for that type of consistent effort, so they tried to outsource that effort and that did not work either.

The expense of content marketing limits many companies in their outsourcing needs. Content marketers are not subject matter experts. Content writers rarely write content specific or detailed enough to truly benefit educated customers or searchers ready to buy.

Those companies just did not have subject matter experts that could write information detailed or specific enough to make it useful. This is the biggest issue with artificially created content – too generalized to be helpful.

To make a popular blog today, it would take thousands of hours of effort. Unless massive resources are poured into the process, blogs will not likely help with organic search - especially e-commerce sites. Blogs have become just another example of the 2.0 paradigm - indirect content marketing.

Famous last words from most business owners:

"Oh, I can write a blog article every week. I love to write. Plus, who can write about this better than me? No problem!"

8 weeks later, they are still struggling to finish their first or second post. A year later, the blog section has less than 5 total posts and the results on the bottom line are zero.

One of my small business clients decided to write his own photography blog post every week. Upon the launch of his site, he included a single blog post about Thanksgiving and procrastination. 18 months later, even during the COVID-19 social distancing (and limited business), his blog section still listed the same single blog post about Thanksgiving and procrastination.

If there was such a thing as a digital cemetery, it would be filled with millions of unread blog posts and articles written by hopeful entrepreneurs led astray by less-than-stellar digital

marketers stuck in the 2.0 mindset. The truth about e-commerce is that it takes a hell of a lot more than blogging to drive traffic. Luckily, recommending a blog is seen as antiquated.

My first recommendation to digital marketers and e-commerce owners is to create useful content on your pages meant to convert searchers to buyers.

Most marketing professionals, in the spirit of optimization inflation, still recommend creating content to ***indirectly*** benefit their website ranking. This content includes:

- How-to content
- Definition lists
- Weekly blog posts
- Monthly sweepstake giveaways
- Articles
- Studies/Whitepapers
- Reviews
- Product comparisons
- Recipes (on food or nutrition sites)
- Videos (e.g., unboxing, product demonstrations)
- Bulletin Boards
- Online Interactive Tools

Oh, and don't forget the truly innovative companies, they will develop an app. It is all part of the same paradigm. This type of indirect content creation is what I call **E-Commerce 2.0.**

Almost none of these strategies produce the desired result.

Indirect writing is a loss-leader in the e-commerce world. Companies spend resources producing material that does not generate revenue, but rather indirectly establishes the company as a reputable source of information in hopes that it will help bring about revenue by gaining loyal visitors (indirectly).

There is a better way.

Small business owners and digital marketers don't realize the best opportunity to help their site gain visibility, clicks, visits, revenue, and loyalty is to create comprehensive content **on the page that produces results – their e-commerce pages.**

This book will show you a better way to add content that does not require thousands or even hundreds of hours of manual writing for e-commerce sites.

This book will show how to make your site profitable far beyond doubling your organic search revenue. Best of all, your site may beat the billion-dollar big-box stores for ranking, visibility, click-through rate, conversion rates, and revenue.

This book will teach you how to include which incentives and benefits visitors need and want. Those incentives and benefits will automatically update, keeping your content fresh and actionable. Searchers will choose your listing on the SERPs, and they will purchase from your site.

Dig in. Spend a day learning how easy this method is to implement and maintain; not to mention all the time you'll be saving by not writing or updating that content manually.

E-commerce Content Does Not Exist

The strategies in this book can be applied to every type of site. However, this book exclusively concentrates on e-commerce websites because most of the content needed to write excellent Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags, and Captions with internal linking and text decoration is already stored in a database.

Even though e-commerce websites have valuable and useful information available, that information is seldom used to gain more customers, rank higher, create higher visibility, and create more organic search revenue.

Great content often dies sitting in a database, under-appreciated, and under-utilized while marketers meet daily to discuss what new 2.0 content might generate interest and revenue. The answer is usually staring them in the face.

When you finish reading this book, you will be able to create an immediate improvement in visibility, rank, click-through rate, and organic search revenue, but you will also recognize where your competition has neglected their site and beat them in the rankings. You will have the knowledge and strategy to improve any e-commerce site with a sound strategy that outperforms online competitors.

Eliminate manual writing of new and unique content for every page on your site by using function-driven content. Unique, specific, updatable, and useful content is already available, you just need to know how to access it and how to curate it properly.

Function-driven content creates results that are direct, immediate, and measurable. Function-driven content allows content to exist on the money pages with triple-digit percentage improvements.

Get Ready for E-commerce 3.0

During a consultation with a client that desperately needed an unbiased audit of their site, I was asked if I could also review their content marketing strategy and identify content gaps.

John, owner of a medium-sized outdoor gear store, scheduled a time for us to discuss his e-commerce website. In preparation for our initial meeting, I spent 4 hours reviewing the site, social media, history of the site via some of my 3rd party tools, and of course several profiles of his employees.

I arrived at his office about 20 minutes early and after a brief tour, we sat down to discuss the site.

"For the last 2 years we have engaged in a campaign to demonstrate our site and company as a thought-leader in the industry. We hoped that this would lead to a boost in branded organic traffic, people thinking of our company first when looking for information, expert advice, and the like. As an expression of that, our organic search revenue would also increase."

"Lou, can you take a look at our content strategy as well?"

It was clear to me that they fell into the trap of a 2.0 mentality. They spent 2 years creating excellent informational and support content regarding the products, product categories, and the industry as a whole. Gauging from the tone of John's voice, they didn't get the return on investment they had hoped for.

I accepted the additional hours of research to review their content marketing strategy, compare their content with their main competitors, and report back.

During my six weeks of site review, I also researched John, the owner. He had an impressive background with experience at several sporting goods stores, including Sportmart. John began working there in high school and college. He also worked at Dick's Sporting Goods and REI as a buyer, and then in the marketing department for Under Armour and Patagonia.

During John's time at REI, he met Tim, an excellent programmer with a passion for the outdoors industry. Tim coached his son's baseball team every year and was a half-marathon runner. After some time working together, they agreed to begin an online store which eventually grew big enough to allow them to quit their full-time jobs.

John has a more technical background than most owners but could never program or design a site. Tim, because of his technical expertise, holds a 25% stake in the company.

John did the responsible thing that most entrepreneurs ignore, he waited to run his business full time until he was sure the new business could match his salary. This tells me that John is a moderate risk-taker that needs to be convinced a strategy will work before acting on it. Once he is convinced, though, he is 100% committed.

I was happy about this. Since John is a pragmatist with a lot of industry knowledge and a bit of technical background, when he sees the possibility of a proven technique, he will likely run with it.

Six weeks later, after I completed my research and audit, it was noticeably clear that John had used all of his experience to create the best website he could. In short, I was impressed, but I knew I could help John take his company to the next level - perhaps to the top. I drove to his office, settled in, and we began with a formal review of his strategies and the state of his site.

"John, I reviewed the entire site. There is a lot of information here. It may take a few sessions to get through it all. I also included the content strategy you requested, but I noticed something was missing."

John seemed curious and moved forward in his chair as if to get a sneak peak of my reported findings.

"I would be curious to know what we missed. We did an exhaustive search of our competitors, subject topics, and articles requested by our customers. It cost us about 20% of our marketing budget. What did we miss?"

"John, your content marketing strategy beats your competition for informational content and your content ranks well. The site has gained a substantial number of backlinks from reputable sites that are congruent with the subject matter, and I have to say, the content is comprehensive. Some of your articles are just downright impressive."

"However, I am curious why you created this strategy in the first place."

A bit bewildered, John reiterated that they wanted to be known as thought leaders in the industry. Reputation was important to him.

"Our goal is to be the best in our industry and to have potential customers think of us first when they want to know about any outdoor gear."

"Thought leader?" I said.

John became impatient. "Yes, if we produce the most and the best information about running shoes, for example, potential customers will think of us the next time they want to buy shoes. The same goes for skiing equipment, football gear, apparel, golf, and the other 850ish product types that we carry."

I waited patiently for just a few seconds, absorbing John's every word. When he was finished, I asked a poignant question that I have asked a dozen other entrepreneurs.

"If a person were to think of your organization first, why wouldn't they just visit your site instead of searching on Google?" I waited a few seconds and continued.

"Were you hoping to gain revenue from your content marketing strategy or are you JUST committed to gaining brand awareness?"

"Well, yes, we want to generate revenue as well. Isn't that the purpose of all marketing strategies, after all?"

I understood his thought process but wanted to see if he knew the difference between brand awareness and return on investment from proper search engine optimization. Even savvy marketing professionals juxtapose SEO with other forms of marketing.

"John, the product detail pages and product list pages on your site do not perform well, right now. You created a 2-year campaign to create content that explains the intricacies of many products you sell. This is all great content, but it doesn't help produce the revenue you had hoped."

"Typically, the product pages and list pages are the ones that lead to the highest conversions, as you know."

Business owners and marketing professionals do not typically make 2-year strategy decisions on a whim, and I did not want to offend John in the least bit. His team worked hard, and they did make excellent content. My goal was to begin a conversation about the most effective way to create revenue through the number one digital channel, organic search.

"Would it be rude of me to ask why your "money pages" were not given priority in your marketing strategy?"

I continued.

"Indirect content is great, but it does not produce the highest revenue. It helps establish a company as trustworthy and credible if the site visitors actually read the content. However,

when people are searching to buy products, they are searching for e-commerce pages, not informational pages."

John and I discussed the difference between informational page content and e-commerce content for another 20 minutes. I showed John the research I had conducted that included the resources spent on all the informational content and additional revenue generated from this strategy. He asked very good questions and together we saw the increase in brand-related searching, which increased about 17% over two years. The informational content increased by 700%. This increase led to an average ranking improvement, and visibility increase of about 40%.

There was progress, it just did not translate into a monetary return. Conversion rates actually decreased, as expected.

John knew the ROI was lower than expected, but he assured me that in the long term, the work was worth it. I was happy that he didn't take offense to my question, but it is a question that more marketing executives need to answer.

"Why aren't your money pages being prioritized?"

During lunch we continued our conversation about search behavior, keywords used by searchers, and most importantly, triggers that Google uses to determine if a person is searching for **informational content** or **product-related pages**.

"About 80% of searches are non-branded keywords, John. When a person is looking for a product, they may use keywords like "men's running shoes," "women's running shoes," or even "men's running shoes for half-marathons" to find products or a list of products specific for their gender and activity. That type of query does not often trigger the type of informational content that has been produced by your company over the last two years."

John was interested in the information I was providing, but he already knew this from previous research on Google Analytics, Search Console, and third-party tools like AHREFS, SEMRUSH, and even Google's paid ad tools.

I continued, "Not only that, but people are now using **specifications** in their queries, like size, color, and material as well. People use trigger words in their queries like:

- Review
- Compare
- How-to
- Versus (vs.)

The content strategy implemented over the last two years created traffic for informational content mostly."

We did not discuss adding internal linking to that informational content to help with link equity distribution, but they added internal links to some content.

For the first time, I saw an inquisitive look on John's face. He was starting to understand the relationship between the content strategy they had implemented and content that generates additional revenue.

The total investment in the content marketing strategy was about $450,000, but the content created only an additional $120,000 in revenue.

"John, the site has great content and the goal of becoming the best thought leader (online at least) in the industry is a common one. However, the content has failed to meet the expected return on investment."

"Even if the revenue trend continues, it would take several years to recover the cost of the content strategy and that is if your competition does not decide to implement a similar strategy to slowly chip away at your new organic rankings."

"John, are you opposed to learning about a content strategy that will directly increase your online revenue? One that does not require much writing at all?"

John leaned in and before our catered lunch had arrived, we began a partnership.

John realized that **indirect content marketing (E-Commerce 2.0) is the old way of creating content for generating revenue.**

Providing free content for branding and promotional reasons is fine, but too many marketing professionals rely on the trickle-down approach and soon realize, it doesn't pay much.

One of the failures of E-Commerce 2.0 is the lack of reliable and trackable return on investment (ROI). Most companies will not proceed with proper content development because the benefits are often **difficult to measure**.

The intangibility of E-Commerce 2.0 strategies drives analysts and stakeholders bonkers. Even when ROI can be tracked and recorded thoroughly, the results are often flat.

The E-Commerce 2.0 strategy is like a stone cutter working with a hammer and chisel. Perhaps a hundred well-placed strategic impacts will eventually break the boulder in two pieces, but there are faster and more accurate ways using technology to accomplish the same goal.

It might take 10,000 pages of content to break that boulder of return on investment but writing 10,000 pages of content takes years.

E-commerce 3.0 breaks that boulder into two pieces with just a few strikes and can be measured within weeks, not years.

REI is the Leader of Indirect Content (and it costs them million$)

A company that thrives at E-Commerce 2.0 content strategy is REI, the outdoor gear store. REI has some of the best 2.0 content out there. REI is a leader when it comes to creating useful content for their customers. REI celebrates outdoor activities, they have fabulous educational content, and they teach useful skills in multiple formats.

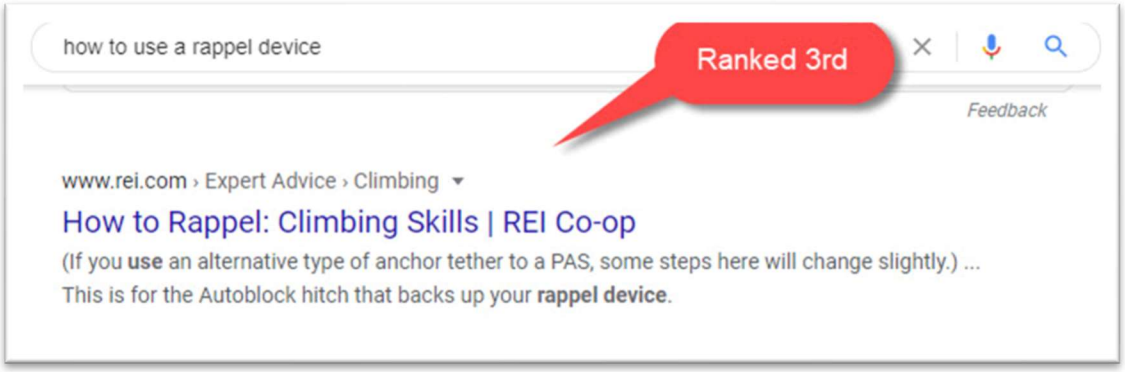
However, it costs REI millions of dollars to create this content. Most companies do not have a content budget to meet or beat REI. REI is also losing hundreds of millions of dollars by sticking with their 2.0 strategy instead of using functions to generate useful, specific, updatable content on their product and list pages. A medium-sized company that does, can beat them in the search engine result pages (SERPs).

Creating 2.0 content must be baked into the marketing plan using best practices and committed subject matter experts, writers, videographers, and editors; all hired or contracted to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

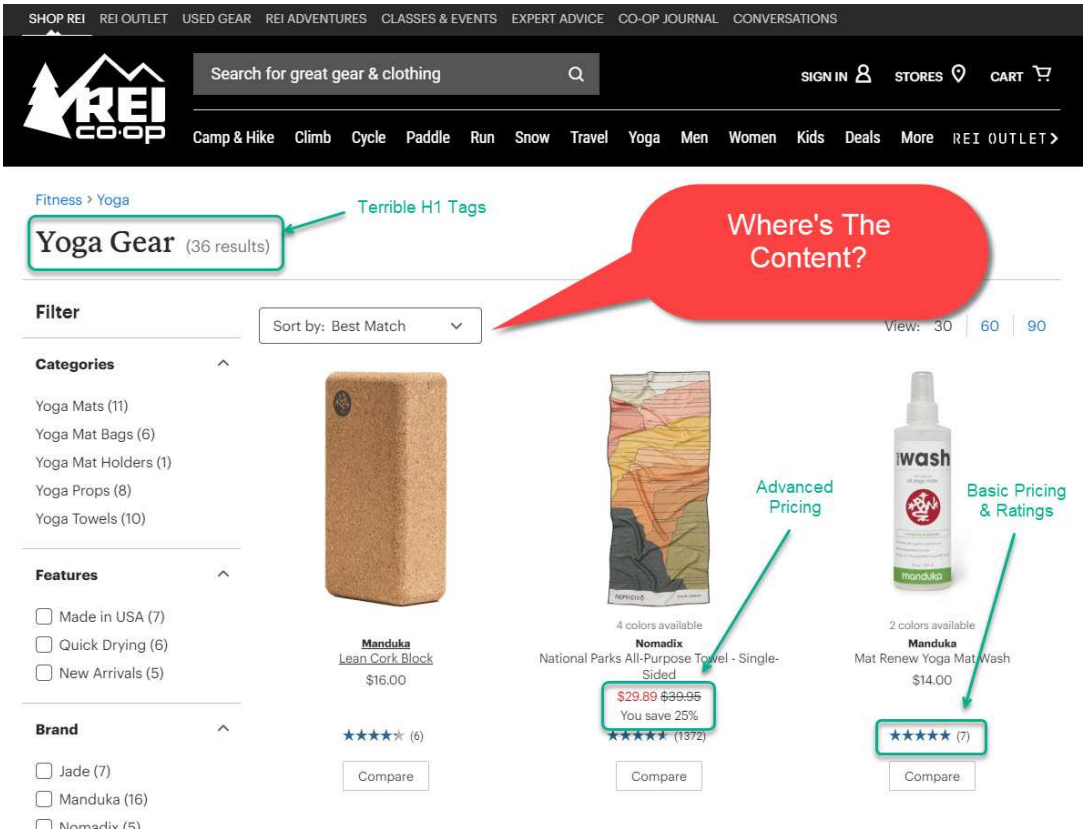
Expecting a 400% return on investment with 2.0 strategies is futile.

Search almost any outdoor activity with "How To" in the query and REI probably has both written and video content about the subject.

E-commerce 2.0 strategy can work to a small extent, but only with a huge investment of time and money. Function-driven content can take those sites to the next level and smaller e-commerce companies can skip years of content development while saving hundreds of thousands of dollars achieving unprecedented results in weeks and months.



Even the best of the best e-commerce stores are missing the valuable content that matters most for increasing visibility, improving rank, gaining new users, increasing total traffic, and improving e-commerce revenue.



Function-driven content works with very little money and almost no writing. Best of all, you can begin tracking results within weeks after implementation and depending on the site, ROI is greater than 10X.

Large Budgets Not Required

I remember searching for information on hiking boots several years ago. I found a page with a video embedded on an REI content page. There was not much text on the page, but the video was second-to-none.

The video was movie-quality, with a professional cameraman inside a helicopter rising to meet several hikers high on a mountain top, attempting to reach its peak. The hikers clearly traveled all day up the winding trail and the backdrop was beautiful. High above the clouds, the hikers could see endless mountains, a distant river, and paid no attention to the helicopter. Clearly staged.

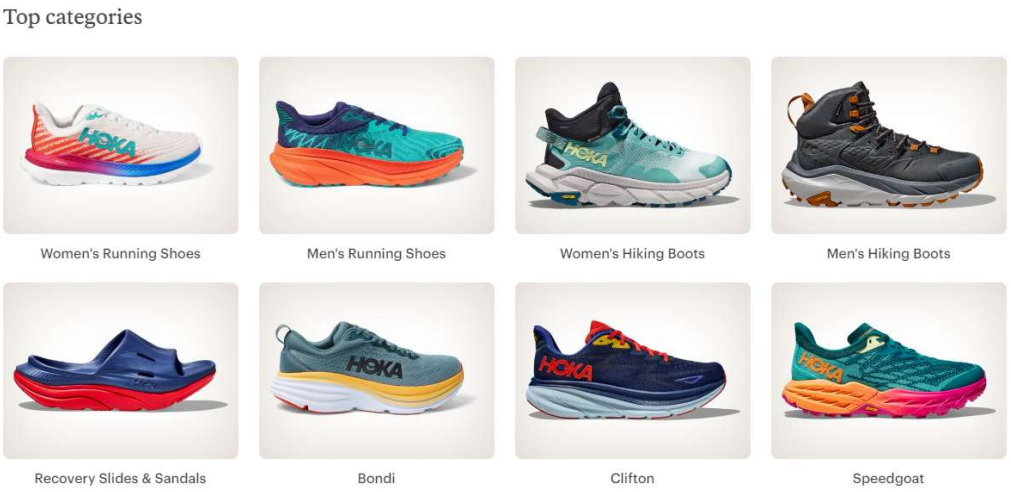
REI never showed the hiking boots in the video and never gave a review. This was excellent marketing by way of eliciting emotion, but the one thing that was missing was actual information about the product.

How much do you think it cost to make that video?

Most companies are not going to rent a helicopter, stage a hike, or even buy a drone to take aerial photographs of people climbing the side of a mountain to simply demonstrate how well a pair of boots perform. It is unclear if the hikers were even wearing boots.

This type of content is not in the cards for 99% of e-commerce sites and certainly almost never for a start-up.

REI does have excellent page templates, including the Brand + Category page.



Today, REI chooses to show **product categories** from each of the Brands on their Brand pages, which is excellent. They also link to the Brand + Category Page, instead of just the category page, which is a huge win.

You can see here that the Women's Running Shoes (Top Right) leads to the perfect URL.
https://www.rei.com/b/hoka/c/womens-running-shoes
(brand (b) = hoka, category (c) = women's running shoes)

This is something that did not seem possible only 4 years ago, but as you can see, the best of the best e-commerce companies are beginning to see the benefit of expanding their site build-out by adding page templates and populating them with lists of products.

However, they do not have TEXT or internal links with text or incentives, benefits, or social proof - YET on category pages or subcategory pages. As a result, they are missing the added context that People and Google need to make the site even more prolific.

REI still has much potential by improving their e-commerce pages by adding more than a million words on the site by using function-driven content at the top of the page with internal linking and text decoration.

The typical site for most companies:

- A small selection of category list pages with no descriptive text on the page
- A grid of thumbnail photos
- Product name
- Plain ol' pricing strategy

There is a better way.

After a big lunch and a lot of coffee, I returned to my office with a full belly and plenty of caffeine flowing through my veins. After checking email, I opened the PowerPoint deck with the audit and realized I forgot to ask John about the manufacturers' descriptions listed on each of the product pages.

John's site was structured like a typical product page, including a large product image, short product name, price, and a selection of colors for each of the products (multi-variant product page).

Most of the product descriptions were boiler plate manufacturers' descriptions with little unique information that would differentiate the page from their online competitors.

Manufacturers' Descriptions (MD)

Google did not consider **manufacturers' descriptions** as duplicate content, until recently. During Q&A portions of Google's YouTube training videos, SEO trainers including Matt Cutts, John Mueller, and Gary Illyes have reported that manufacturers' descriptions do not qualify as duplicate content. I suspect it would be because billion-dollar companies would suffer.

In April 2023, they announced that sites solely using this content should enhance it with custom content using the EEAT method (Experience, Expertise, Authority, and Trust).

If search engines did consider manufacturers' descriptions as duplicate content, the visibility would be throttled, and tens of thousands of pages would be filtered from the top 100 results for millions of queries. Although Google made it clear for years that manufacturers' descriptions are not considered duplicate content, optimization inflation takes precedence. More is required.

The question I wanted to ask John was, "Would it be against the rules to add a few paragraphs of original content to the manufacturers' descriptions?"

Successful sites begin with manufacturers' descriptions and then build from rock-bottom. Most sites, however, stop there and never attempt to differentiate.

Every content writer and copywriter with e-commerce experience can testify to the difficulty in writing dozens of unique product descriptions for products within the same category.

Imagine the mind-numbing monotony of creating 50 different descriptions for almost identical products. These are the types of tasks we give to interns, right?

Review any 3 websites for any type of product or category and you will find duplicate content describing products that are indistinguishable from their competitors.

You will find the same manufacturers' descriptions, same product lists, slightly different reviews but similar ratings, shipping costs, and custom purchase thresholds for shipping (e.g., Free Shipping over $49).

Look at any e-commerce site and compare their product descriptions with their main competitors. There is usually no outstanding page content. This will become even more frustrating when you finish reading what is possible with e-commerce 3.0 and function-driven content.

I scheduled another meeting with John, two of his programmers, a UX professional, and a front-end designer to provide an overview of what was needed to begin the process of creating function-driven content.

I requested their database admin be present, but he was out of town and could not connect via Zoom. The database work, however, was simple and was not expected to be an issue at all.

I began the presentation with a bang.

How to write page descriptions with 1,500 words - without writing much at all

All heads nodded. I began.

"The site has approximately 1,500 list pages including department, category, and subcategory pages. We are going to triple that number of list pages."

Then I hit them with the overall efficiency of the process.

"This means more than a half-a-million words and 7,500 internal links will be added to the current site. This strategy will cut the manual writing time down from about 14 months of full time writing to less than 2 weeks after programmers finish their work.

Lastly, you can update ad copy and above-the-fold page descriptions on hundreds of pages in less than 30 minutes."

"Are you interested in that?"

I would categorize the group as "motivated skeptics." The group knew they were not really given a choice, but to their credit, there was healthy curiosity mixed in there too.

What is Function-Driven Content?

I continued with the group, "Let me introduce you to **function-driven content**. Function-driven content is the beginning of a new way to present useful, updatable, specific, and unique content on the web."

Michael, one of the programmers, interjected immediately.

"We are all familiar with functions and how they work. We use functions for our telephone number, address information and some of our location information. Also, we use several 3rd party web tools that use them."

Michael graduated from IIT, a prestigious school in Chicago whose computer science program is still top tier in the United States. Writing a function is part of introductory level programming, so almost every programmer is familiar with functions.

When presenting to marketing executives, usability experts, and writers, there seems to be confusion when someone starts talking about programming. Their eyes glaze over and project that deer-in-the-headlights look. To make it easier on non-techies, I usually relate functions to Microsoft Excel.

"Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets use functions for almost all calculations, including SUM, AVERAGE, CONCATENATE (combines cells in a series), and more."

"When calculating a series of numbers, the TOTALs section automatically changes, right? There are no updates or "refreshes" needed. The same works with functions on the web. If I want to present the lowest price (As Low As) in a group of products, when a new lowest price product exists, that number automatically changes everywhere on that page. Simple."

Benefits of Function-Driven Content

- Visibility
- Ranking
- Click-through Rate
- Bounce Rate
- Page Quality
- Internal Linking
- Organic Revenue

The benefits of using function-driven content include the ability to update thousands of pages in minutes, conduct A/B testing faster and easier, consistent messaging, compelling clicks based on incentives and benefits in ad copy, higher engagement, more transactions, higher conversion rates, and increased organic revenue.

There are negative aspects of function-driven content that need to be addressed, as well.

"Once we have functions producing specific and custom content, it is important to train everyone on the team how to write this content accurately to ensure there are no spacing issues, missing content, or incorrect character length. We must also develop a way to manage exceptions," I began.

We Are Used to Seeing Incentives & Benefits

"Is there anyone here that has never received a **customized email** from a retailer?"

No one raised their hand. I continued.

"The best email campaigns have an incentive or benefit to entice a potential customer to open that email and investigate further.

"We will use the same strategy in Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 tags, and Captions with internal linking and text decoration."

Email marketers use:

- Highest percentage off
- Free shipping
- Scarcity incentives like "only 10 left"
- Lowest price information (as low as $19.99)

The reason email marketers put this in the subject line is because it compels more people to open the email and investigate the offers on the actual website.

"This training is going to be about adding those incentives and benefits to the ad copy of our pages, so the search engine result pages compel people to click on our listing over the online competition… And that my friends is just the beginning."

Finally! I had everyone's attention. Good timing, too! John seemed concerned that the technical talk would be too much for content developers. This was the part of the presentation that would require their focus.

"For the next 2 months we will create a system that allows us to post specific and updatable content on our pages to ensure we beat our online competition in ranking, visibility, click-through rate, bounce rate, transactions, e-commerce conversions, and organic search revenue."

John took the opportunity to add some color commentary.

He said, "We are including everyone here early in the process, to ensure everyone participates in the creation at almost every level. Kelly and Jason, you'll be writing content as usual, but you'll become experts in creating templates that achieve the highest results possible."

Jason seemed happy since he was ultimately bored with writing copy that could not be accurately measured and certainly not A/B tested.

"Do we have to wait until the site goes live before we can test the effectiveness of these new tactics?"

"No, we can write this content now manually for testing purposes over the next several weeks, then when it is time to scale, we'll have a winning strategy."

"This early testing will be extremely important. Once we discuss **conditional statements** and **sentence flow for page content**, having a solid base of understanding will help for more advanced natural language processing. For now, let's stick to the basics, though."

Michael, one of the programmers under Tim, seemed concerned and asked a common question.

"Isn't this just a lot of work on the programmers to help writers and SEOs avoid doing their jobs, which is essentially writing?"

John knew Michael would catch a lot of the early work in the new strategy but didn't expect such a brazen question. John looked at me for assistance.

"Michael, it is a little bit of work on the programming end, but we will save thousands of hours overall. This strategy will also help eliminate ongoing requests for new programming and custom updates. This will save you time, but your work WILL be front-loaded."

Michael seemed more at ease. "Well, if it eliminates the weekly fires that I have been putting out for the last two years, I'm all for it!"

I looked at John as if to acknowledge the small win and continued.

"If we work together for a few weeks, it will create an opportunity to produce unprecedented results that are currently impossible if we had to update content daily or weekly. Also, it will put this company above all of our online competition within a few months."

I finished that segment of the presentation and left them with a few of the benefits once the big push was completed.

"By this time next quarter, we will be able to update Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, and H1 tags on 5,000 pages in less than 10 minutes and then revert it back in another 10 minutes if we want. That alone would take hundreds of hours to do manually."

By using functions, we can put useful information in places that compel a person to click on the listing. The page quality alone will be better than almost everyone in our industry, as well.

Michael seemed satisfied with the ROI at least as far as helping save on efficiency and the speed of updating valuable information, not to mention his work-life balance.

Over the course of the next few hours and for several hours during the rest of the week, we pushed through the basics of implementation and moved toward the more advanced strategies.

Functions, Variables, and Shortcodes

Functions, Variables, and Shortcodes are not synonymous with search engine optimization. Functions are commonly written and used by programmers, but soon content writers may use them.

We began training the SEOs and content writers to ensure they knew exactly what the process would be when writing e-commerce content. We wanted them involved in the process to help customize and internalize it.

John was asked to attend each session, though he was aware of everything we were going to teach. John's presence ensures everyone is aware of the importance of this new strategy. Leaders should always lead from the front and provide a good example by participation. It sends a message.

I began the day's session with three assorted brands of coffee, a staple among SEOs, and a few healthy breakfast snacks, to keep them satisfied.

Donuts and bagels may be fun to eat, but they make people tired, me included. This type of training requires attention and alertness from the speaker and the learner.

After bonding through introductions and normal morning small talk, I began.

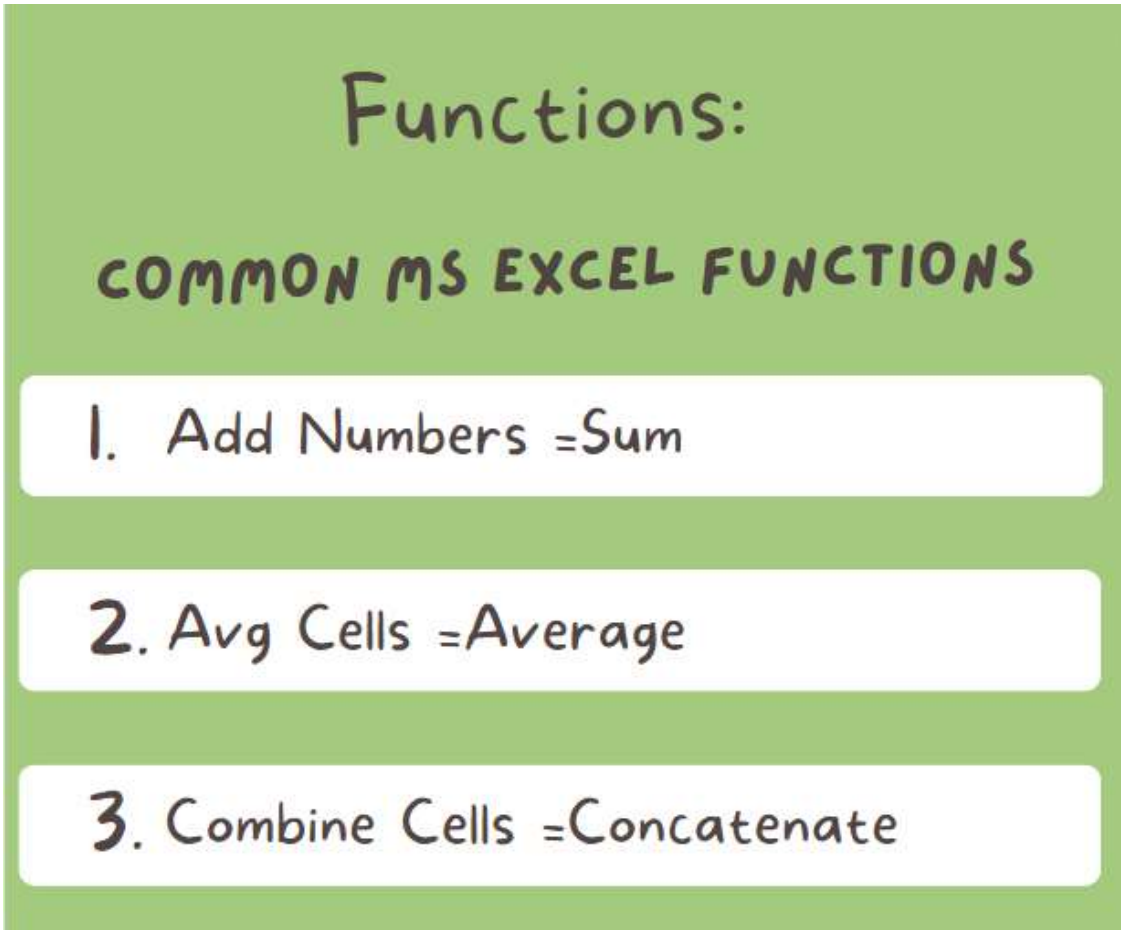
"Raise your hand if you have ever used MS Excel or Google Sheets."

Everyone raised their hand.

I continued, "If you have used MS Excel, you have likely used a function to calculate the sum of a column, to calculate the average of a set of numbers, or to concatenate several cells to create a sentence or combine data."

Even though John heard this information in an earlier meeting, he still seemed interested in how I incorporated our previous conversation into a presentation to his staff. I continued with the basics, highlighting examples of commonly used MS Excel functions.

I brought up a PowerPoint slide that illustrated a few examples of functions that most people have used in MS Excel.



Everyone agreed that these were fairly common and began to understand the usefulness of these calculations.

Functions Used with WordPress

I quickly transitioned from a desktop software version of functions to website-related functions.

"Raise your hand if you have worked on a WordPress website."

This time only a few folks raised their hands, so I knew there was a little more work than a simple PowerPoint slide would provide.

"If you have ever used a WordPress website, you may have used a function that shows a **company telephone number** or **address** to ensure the information is consistent across the entire site."

Tim interjected in a helpful manner.

"We do that here, which is why we never have to change that information in more than one place - it propagates throughout the site."

Everyone seemed to be onboard.

"Perfect! In WordPress, a *shortcode* is used by the content writer or SEO to display the content created by the function. You will help create the shortcodes and memorize them eventually."

Function
function telephone_function()
{ return '(312) 555-1212';}

Shortcode
[telephone]

Produces this HTML
(312) 555-1212

On Page Text
(312) 555-1212

If a person changes the telephone number in the function, the number changes in every place the shortcode exists - without further manual work. You get a clickable telephone number, which is excellent for mobile users.

We are used to seeing this in so many places, it has become normal site development.

Kim, the usability expert, shook her head in agreement or recognition. "At my last company, they used a **Table Press plugin** for all their pricing and event information. We would just change the information in one spot and the changes occurred in seven different places on the site."

"That's right! When a person edits that data, the updated information immediately appears on all pages where the shortcode was placed. We are going to include these throughout the site to display custom information that pertains to that page, product, category, and the like.

Except **no one will have to manually change the data**, it will come from the database."

A Function is the actual programming that produces a form of content we call a **Variable**:

- Numbers
- Results of calculations
- Text
- HTML

A shortcode is the "shortcut" code that calls forth the results of the function. A variable, for our purposes, is synonymous with shortcodes.

"Functions are becoming increasingly popular for all types of websites. Some of the newest uses for functions include Google maps, pricing tables, pre-built page snippets, in-page contact forms and more," I explained.

Kim raised her hand again. "I have a question."

"How is this different from how the site currently works? We have dynamic information populating our pages right now. I can't think of a website that doesn't have this already."

"You are correct. Most sites have dynamic information already populating certain areas. In a bit, we'll talk about how to do this more efficiently, but for now, I want to demonstrate that **we are not currently** creating the type of useful content that will make THE DIFFERENCE compared to the online competition.

Currently, this type of dynamic information is used to make it easier to manage the site, not create incentives and benefits or create useful content that compels a searcher to click or make a purchase."

"There is much more that can be done and almost no company is implementing the strategies we are going to cover in a few minutes."

For our product list pages we have a query that includes all the products that are listed under a particular category (e.g., Men's Shoes). We will create queries that grab the lowest price of all the men's shoes, total product count of men's shoes, the highest savings percentage off, and a few other bits of information. Then we'll display the highest savings percentage in the Title Tag."

I paused for a few seconds for the big reveal and then advanced to the next slide.

"Instead of only having 'Men's Shoes' appear, we can have any of the following:

- "Men's Shoes Up to 32% Off"
- "Men's Shoes As Low As $32.99"
- "Men's Shoes Up To 32% Off on 549 Products"

We are selling the SIZZLE, not just the steak. This is E-commerce 3.0 using function-driven content.

Why Are Functions Useful?

2005: Content is King
2010: Useful Content is King
2023: Specific, Unique, Updatable Content is Required

The evolution of website content from junk articles that were 250 words of unreadable drivel to the content today, took 15-20 years. These blog articles were ranking well and linking back to appropriate pages because that strategy fit in neatly with Google's algorithms available at that time.

After J.C. Penny, and many other e-commerce companies, used the 250-word blog strategy to a fault, Google made sure that content would have to be a little more useful. They attacked the problem aggressively.

The invention of Google's Panda Algorithm in 2011 was meant to eliminate content farms and the terrible content that flooded Google's first 3 pages. This poor content was ruining search results and Google knew it.

After Google's Panda Algorithm, search results were better, but still littered with garbage content that only served companies with large budgets.

Google no longer refers to Panda since they replaced it with a new powerful algorithm.

Individual bloggers with useful information and expertise were being "hip-checked" with every algorithm update. The more stringent Google became, the fewer **individuals** could be found on top pages. Today, the top spots are almost all reserved for the largest corporate entities.

Fast forward 10 years and every SEO worth their salt knows that 10X content (content that is 10 times better than what is currently online), also known as Skyscraper technique, rules the SERPS (search engine result pages) for many keyword phrases on informational content.

Producing a new piece of 10X content seems easy, but the manual process is arduous. John's two-year content strategy, if it proved anything, proved it took a lot of resources to create good informational content - **but it produced very little revenue.**

What is the 10X Content Strategy:

1. **Research** the top 10-20 content articles about the subject matter.

2. **Document** the amalgamation of topics and subtopics from the top articles and list the word-count, number of images, videos, animation, graphs, charts, interactive tools, comparison tables, HTML markup (H1 & H2), and more.

3. **Create** a more comprehensive article than all the current top articles combined including word-count, number of images, videos, animation, graphs, charts, interactive tools, HTML markup, and more.

4. **Write and Edit** the article until it is perfect.

5. **Post the article**, force index it on search console, make sure it is included in the XML sitemap, blast it on social media, and then conduct appropriate outreach.

Creating 10X content requires research, writing skills, programming or markup, time, effort, darn-near perfect on-page optimization, Photoshop skills, video editing, and aesthetic design.

10X content SEEMS easy, but it takes time because it requires one person with multiple disciplines or multiple people each with an expertise (which means more resources). This is the reason, most companies do not have 10X content as a regular strategy, they simply do not want to DO THE WORK.

Why Are We Talking About 10X Content?

Functions, variables, and shortcodes can be used to create 10X content on e-commerce sites without writing much as all. Most of the data needed is either already stored in the database or can be created by calculating current data (msrp - sale price)/msrp * 100 = **savings%**

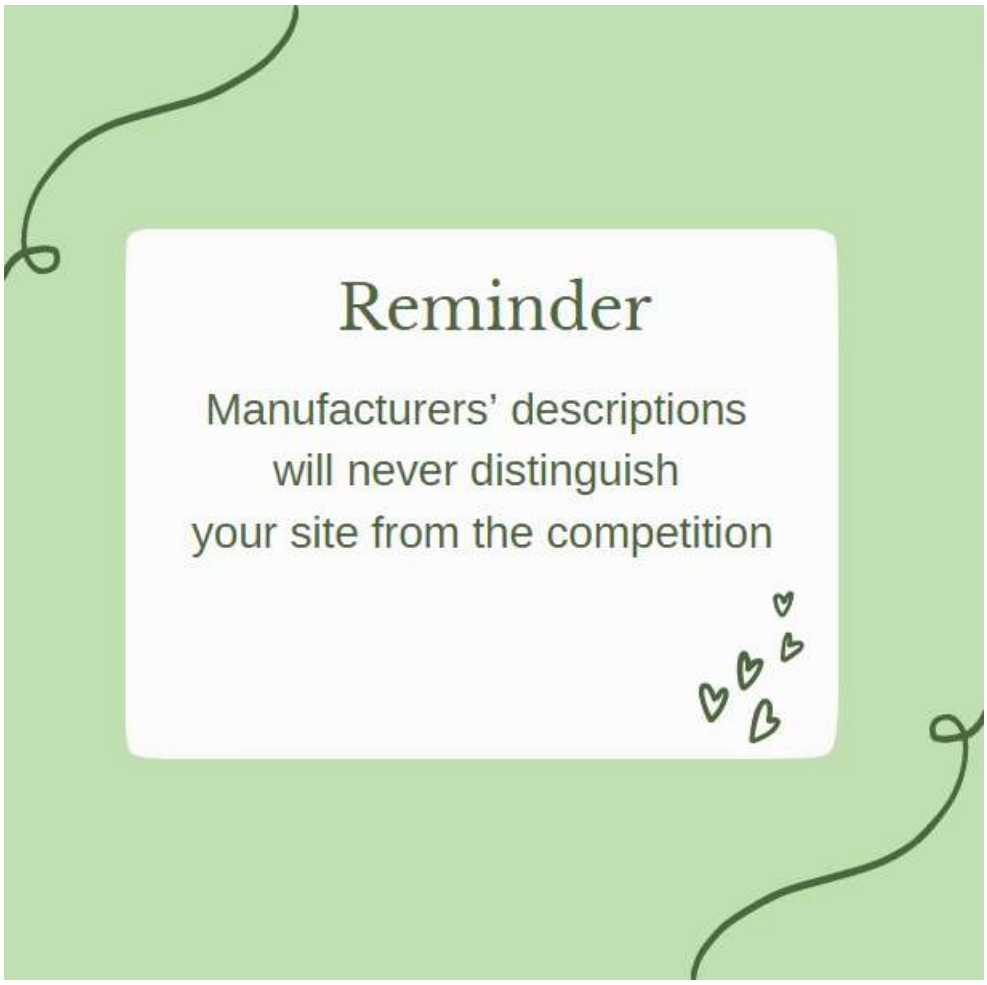
E-commerce 3.0 strategy retrieves that data or performs a calculation on data, then presents it in a useful way. Compared to a site's boring 2.0 strategy, function-driven content may be the equivalent of **10X content for every e-commerce page** on the site.

- Strategic useful content will create 10x e-commerce pages
- 10x e-commerce pages can create triple-digit % revenue increases

Function-driven content can transform bland page content that lacks detail, into a page that elicits trust, relevance, and authority to search engines and compels a searcher to buy.

Simply listing the category name in the Title Tag **does not differentiate** your site from competitors and it **does not compel** a searcher to click on your listing.

For years, Google stated "posting product descriptions from the manufacturer is not a duplicate content issue," but that has changed. Google, however, never mentioned the one immutable truth about this type of content and it is still true today, with or without AI content:



Using Manufacturers' descriptions means that a searcher will unlikely turn into a loyal customer. Afterall, they can get that information from any of your competitors and their buying decisions will become based on price, shipping, or brand recognition alone.

Improve Basic Content As Soon As Possible

Most website managers and marketing professionals do not realize how easy it is to create useful, specific, unique, and updatable content using functions.

Function-driven content allows a site owner to take advantage of all the manufacturer's content in a unique way that provides a competitive advantage.

While whetting everyone's appetite with some of the possibilities available with our improved content strategy, I reminded them of the difference between function-driven content and writing fresh content manually.

Function-Driven Content vs. Writing Fresh Content

"Who wants to write 50-100 different product descriptions with almost identical features and specifications?"

Kelly raised her hand. "I've written content like that before and it is painstakingly boring, extremely difficult to maintain any sense of creativity, and nearly impossible to differentiate one product from the next. I hated it."

Functions can make writing useful content easier and more efficient.

"Kelly, imagine only writing 5-6 sentences that end up producing 100 pages of unique and useful content. This is possible using functions."

"To write quality e-commerce page descriptions, it takes a minimum of 30 minutes per page. It would take at least 50 hours to write 100 pages of short content. If a content writer also includes internal linking and text decoration, which they should, it would require two weeks to finish 100 pages."

"Function-driven content takes 60-90 minutes of writing for all 100 pages, including Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 tags, and Captions. That sounds a bit better and positively affects your work-life balance, right? Not to mention, we all get to see results faster and can change those same 100 pages in a flash, instead of manually rewriting or editing."

As I wrapped up the day's training, I ended with a few examples of popular websites using **women's shoes** for a product type.

I gave everyone an assignment.

"Your homework before the next training session is to write Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags, and Captions with internal linking and text decoration for five products posted on any

popular shoe-related site. Your second assignment is to track how long it takes to write that content and bring the completed assignment to the next training session."

Examples of E-commerce Sites for Women's Shoes:

- Roadrunnersports.com (1,385)
- Footlocker.com (708)
- Nordstromrack.com (18,427)
- Zappos.com (40,445)
- DSW.com (10,765)

Notice the number of shoes (productCount) in parentheses. Imagine writing Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags and Captions with internal linking and text decoration for 18,000 products including Price, Savings, and Deals on a constantly changing basis. It would be impossible. It is impossible!

When the team returned to the next training, these were the results of writing for 5 products:

- John: 2.5 hours
- Jason: 50 minutes
- Kelly: 1 hour
- Kim: 1.5 hours
- Tim: 3 hours

The average time for 5 products was just under 2 hours. At that rate, the total time to write 10,000 DSW Shoe descriptions would be:

- 4,000 hours / 100 weeks / 2 years

Function-driven content can be written for over 10,000 shoe products and automatically update incentives and benefits **in under 8 hours.**

Page Segmentation

Small business owners have no confidence that SEO strategies work because most of the SEOs hired to optimize their site, never actually did a damn thing.

Most marketing professionals, SEOs, and site owners do not actually optimize their list pages, product pages, or even develop landing pages that convert visitors to buyers.

Most marketing professionals do not engage in page-type segmentation like:

- Department pages
- Category pages
- Subcategory pages
- Brand pages
- Brand + Category pages
- Multi-variant product pages
- Variant product pages
- Review pages

Having these page types is a basic strategy that most digital marketers NEVER create or even consider. I will show you how to segment your page types and optimize them using function-driven content, so they rise in the rankings, qualify for more keyword phrases (higher visibility), and best of all, convert to sales.

REI Co-op - Leaving Money on the Table

John's dilemma was similar to REI's issue.

The REI stores are a hub for great customer service and information about outdoor activities. The REI e-commerce site, however, suffers from a similar fate as most e-commerce stores. REI has little content on their actual e-commerce pages.

Similar to John's website, REI created quality informational pages, but useful, specific, updatable, and unique content does not exist on the pages that make the most money - **the e-commerce pages.**

Large e-commerce sites, including Fortune 500 companies, are no different than many other online stores when it comes to product descriptions and manufacturers' descriptions. Product list pages on large sites lack quality content just like every other small to medium-sized online store.

List pages with a grid of product names and images and nothing else is the Achilles heel of large e-commerce sites. These sites are user-friendly, but their online sales are anemic compared to what is possible.

Smaller e-commerce companies can beat the Amazons, REIs, Macy's, and Dick's Sporting Goods of the world by creating function-driven content.

During our next session, I created a tab for several popular e-commerce websites in order to display the current paradigm of site development.

I began the presentation with a shocking statement.

"Chock full of user-friendliness, these stores ignore what brings in the most customers: **E-commerce 3.0 Content.**"

"These stores concentrate on user-friendliness but ignore organic search, which is like spending five years rearranging the store shelves, but never opening the doors for customers to come in and buy merchandise."

"It doesn't make sense!"

The Current Paradigm of Site Development & Why It Does Not Work

"REI has an excellent structure and a filtering menu that serves as the left navigation menu. The structure is almost perfect - but there is no real content or internal linking for Google to associate with the many pages and versions." Their left navigation has recently included static links to page types, which is an excellent beginning. But there is no content.

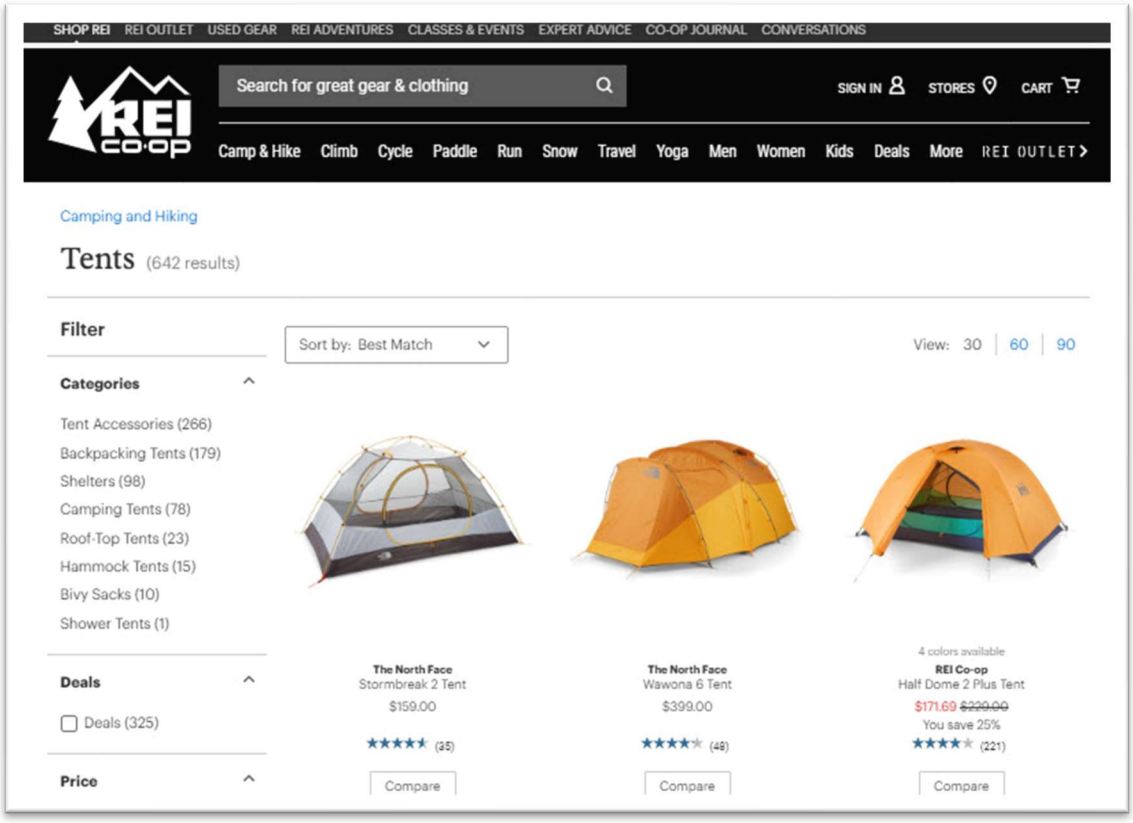
There are no captions, no internal linking, no text decoration, but there is whitespace reserved for it. The lost revenue and profit are overwhelming for most companies, but as a fan of the company, I still have hope for them.

"Is this really the best page name (Tents) that could be conjured up?" I asked.

"Would it be too much to add incentives, benefits, linking to subcategory pages and perhaps a few brand pages, as well?"

REI has some of the best content on the internet

(Why do they leave so much money on the table?)



"In this example, REI has done the absolute minimum as far as optimizing the above-the-page content with 1 word for the category name and that's it. Yes they have static page names with links to related categories, but no related brands, subcategories, no text description, no incentives, benefits, or social proof shown. There is more that can be done."

"Large corporations try to benchmark technology, strategy, and even media-spend from their competitors. Large companies rarely innovate. If anything, they upscale their site only after a competitor already demonstrated proof of concept."

"This means they are always followers, never in first place. When we are done, the big boys will be following us - but it'll take them at least two years to realize they are not leading anymore."

Most big companies are happy with their piece of the pie as long as they are meeting their stated public goals, so their future earnings report looks good to the CEO and to Wall Street.

You have seen this with billion-dollar company sites that you visit every week.

Function-driven content produces useful, specific, updatable, and unique content that does not require branded terms to rank in the top spots. Even the best of the best can still do better, and the best can be surpassed when using function-driven content.

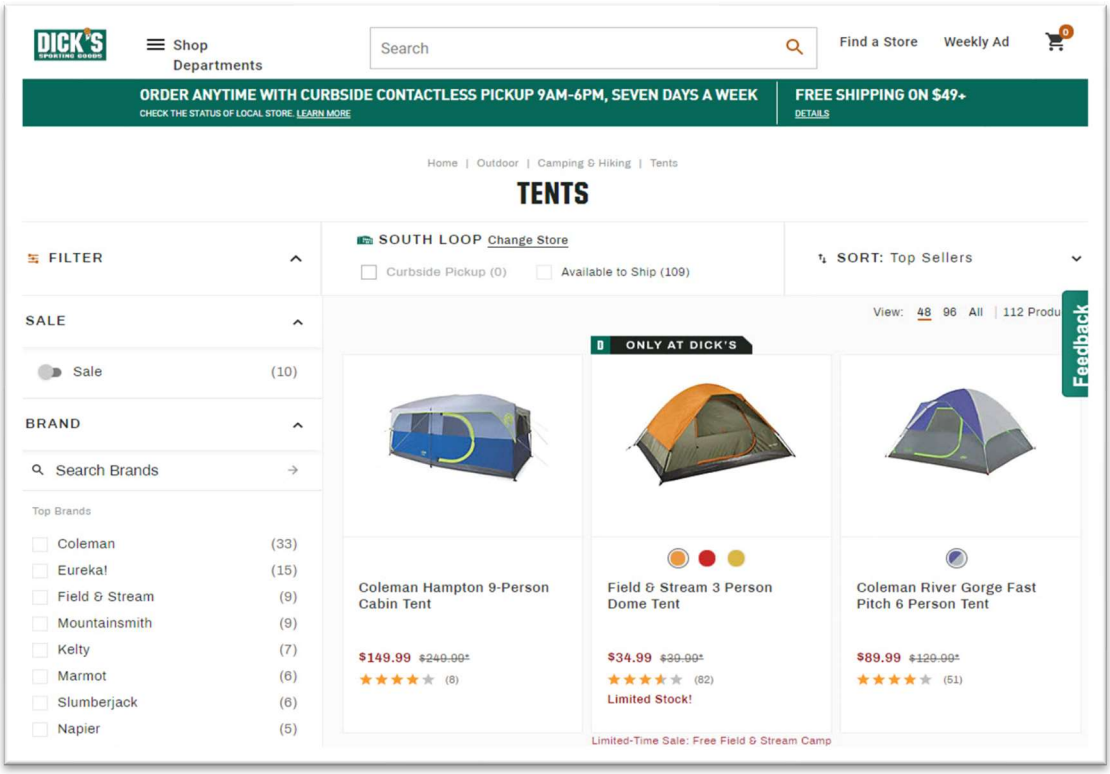
"Yes, YOU can beat huge companies like REI!"

The team seemed to be on board as I moved on to other stores related to their industry. I continued with a few slides of national competitors.

"Dick's Sporting Goods has practically the same website functionality and content strategy as REI."

- Filtered navigation on the left column
- No captions
- No subcategory description with internal linking or text decoration
- The same old normal breadcrumbs
- Page names are listed and then the start of a product list

"This means they can be beaten!"

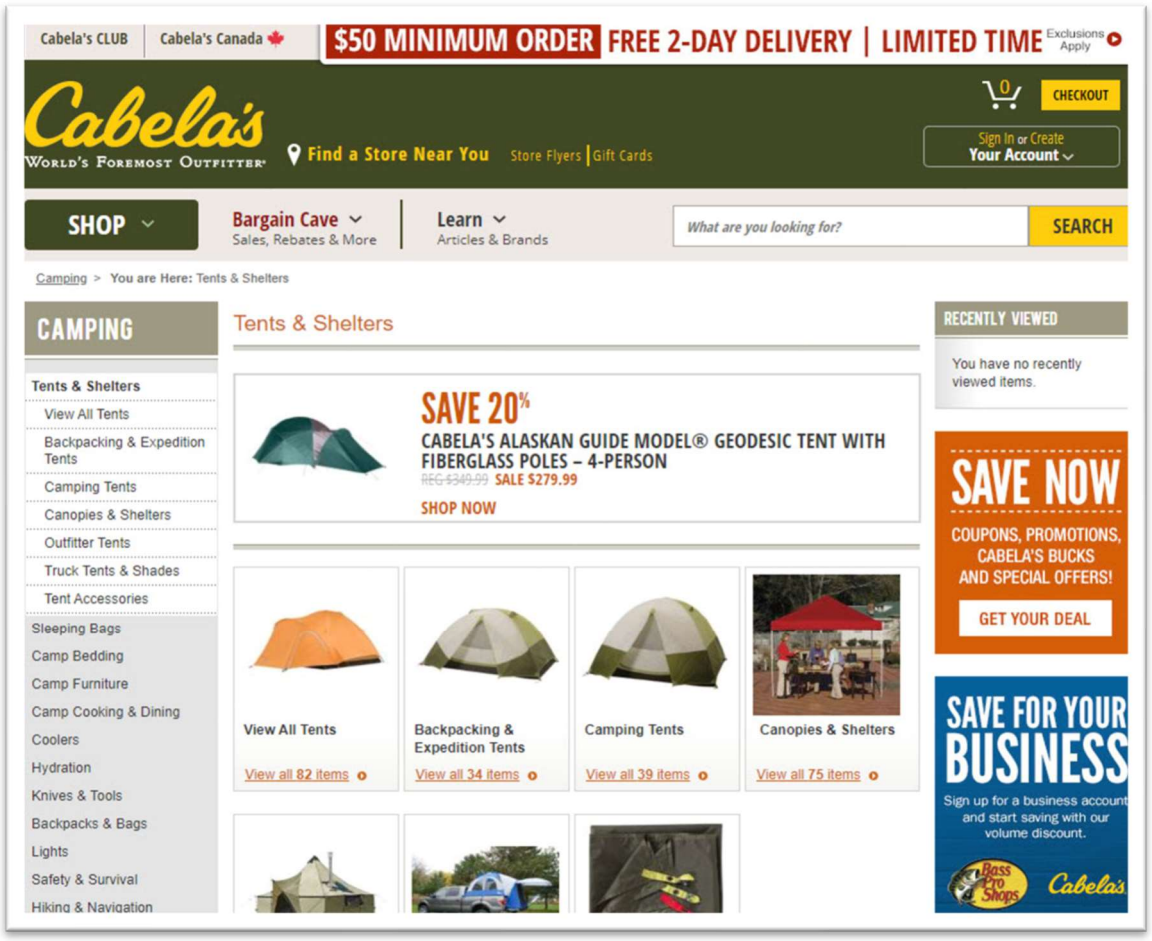


Cabela's

"Even though Cabelas.com has been 10 years behind technology and marketing best practices, they have something that the other stores do not have."

"Cabela's has a list of pages on the left menu without AJAX filtering, just a list of category and subcategory pages. Cabela's also has captions with internal linking at the bottom of the page. Not optimal, but better than nothing."

"We can still easily beat Cabela's. They gave it the old college try, but they stopped short - way short."



"I have conducted many A/B tests that measure the difference between ranking, visibility, bounce rates, pages per visit, and conversions when captions are "above the fold" compared to when they are listed at the bottom. Above-the-fold always wins."

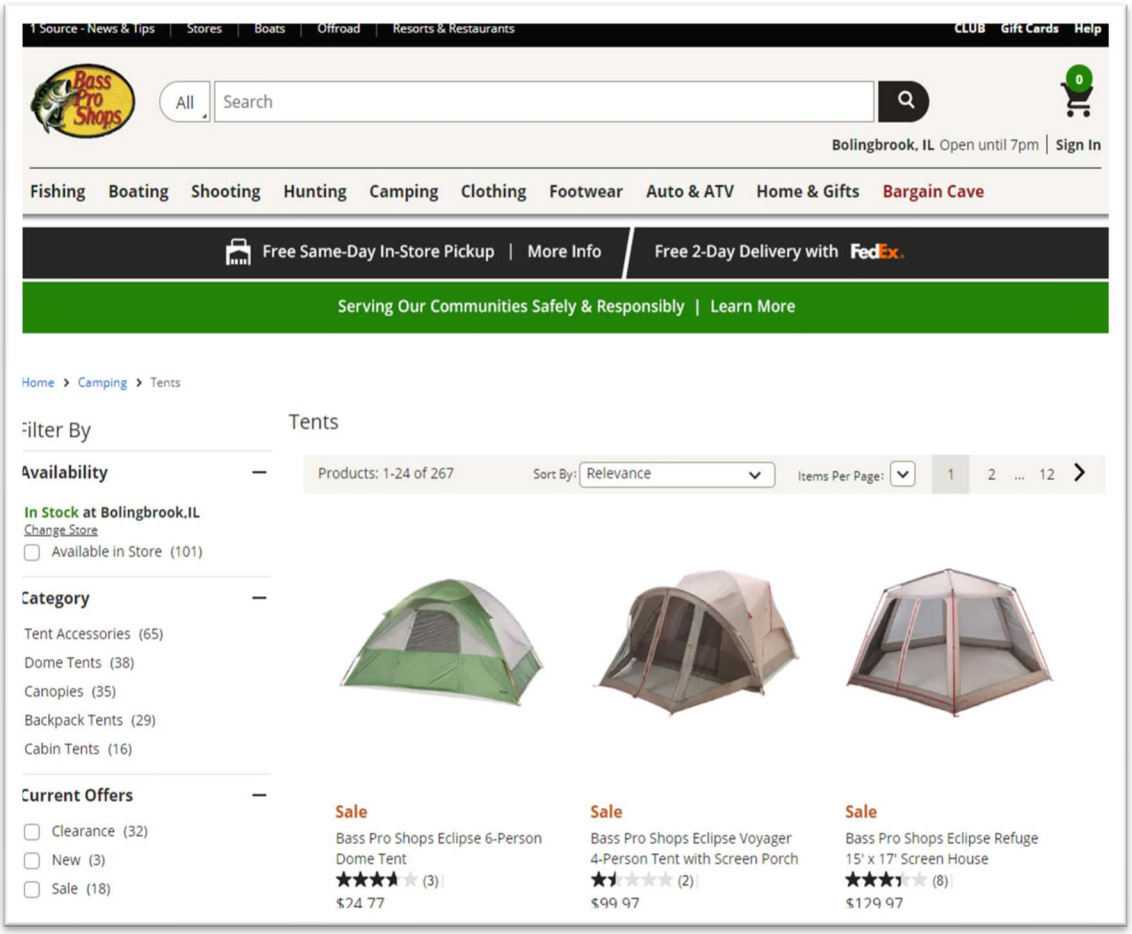
https://www.cabelas.com/category/Tents-Shelters/104779080.uts

Basspro.com

Bass Pro Shop has owned Cabela's since 2017. Basspro.com has a different site than Cabela's, however. Basspro.com does have a filtered AJAX navigation system setup but with the same terrible H1 Tag Page Names.

As you can see below, the Page Name, similar to REI, is simply "Tents."

This is a terrible page name: Tents



I provided an example of what our function-driven content will look like on similar category pages.

"Our page names will produce revenue, increase visibility and ranking, and improve conversion rates. Take a look."

****

We Have 267 Unique Tents including 2-man, 4-man, and 6-man tents for 3 or 4 seasons. Receive Up to 32% Off Plus Free Delivery or In-store Pickup.

****

This template, used on thousands of pages, will rank for more keyword phrases (visibility), rank higher (Avg Position), and produce higher organic search revenue, even triple digit percentage increases."

Basspro.com has no captions or page descriptions on any page that I could find.

BassPro.com has an old E-Commerce 2.0 strategy.

Notice the typical strategy:

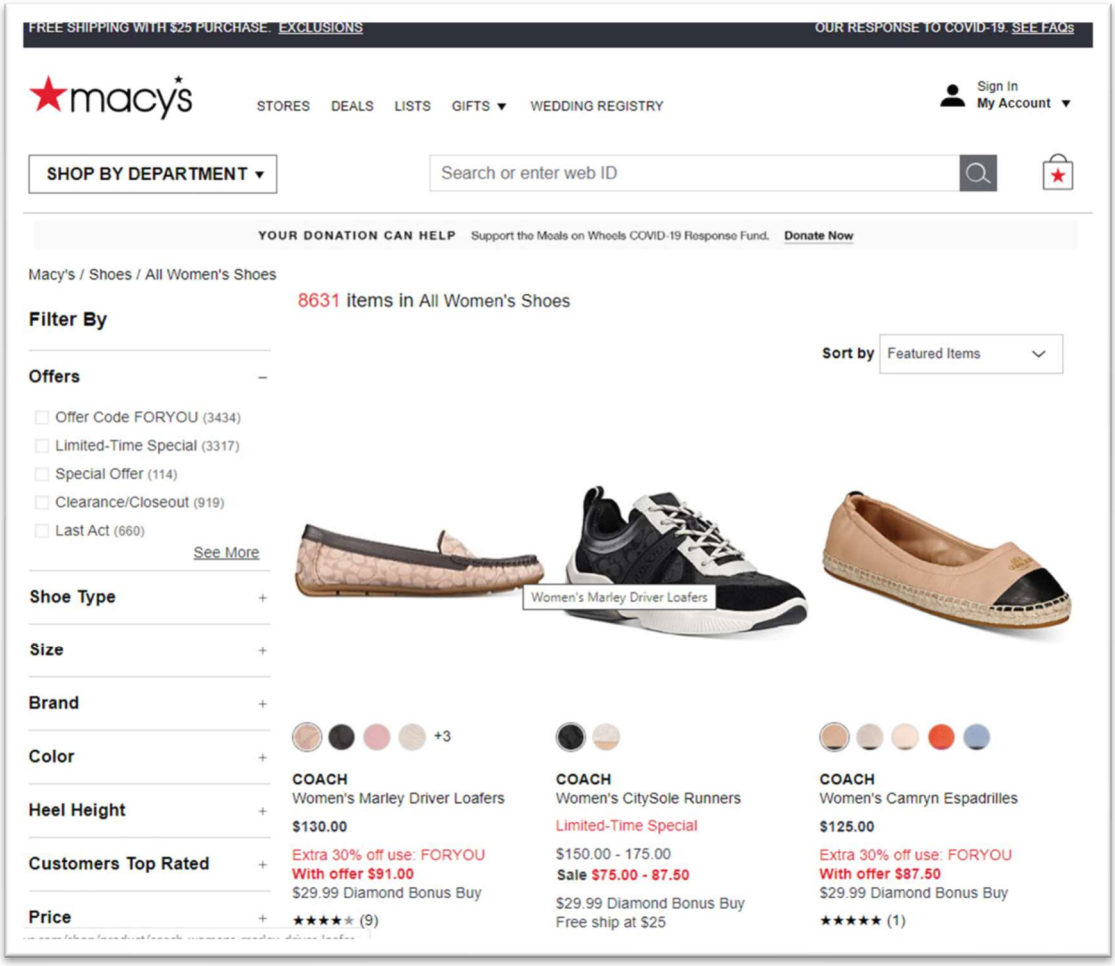
1. Profile an Image
2. Add the word "Sale" to trick people
3. Show the product name
4. Add a rating snippet
5. Try to hide the price at the bottom
6. Let the brand name influence the purchase

More can be done!

Macy's

"You'll notice the same e-commerce set up for Macy's, even though these sites are in completely different industries and target markets.

This is what I mean when I say that companies benchmark technology, they seldom innovate."



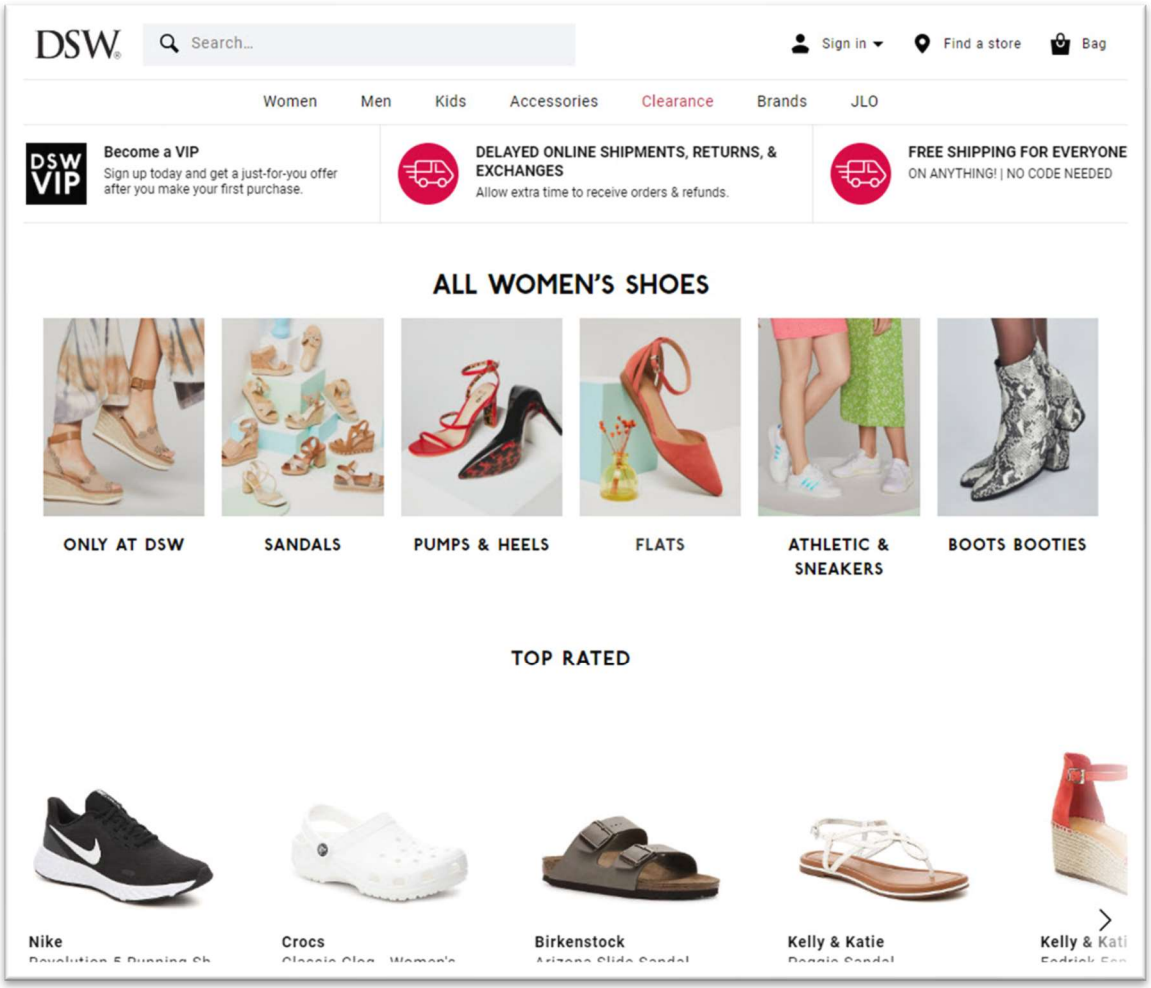
"Macy's has more than 8,500 pairs of women's shoes with dozens of ways to segment the product line. However, you'll see lost opportunity and revenue as we work through the examples."

"For one, captions with internal linking and text decoration are missing on every page."

Similar to other stores, Macy's has an AJAX filtering menu on the left column and lazy H1 tags and page names. A billion-dollar company can do better than this.

DSW Shoes

The first page for Women's Shoes on the DSW site is a semi-artistic display of subcategories with descriptive images and sliders for Top-Rated Women's Shoes.



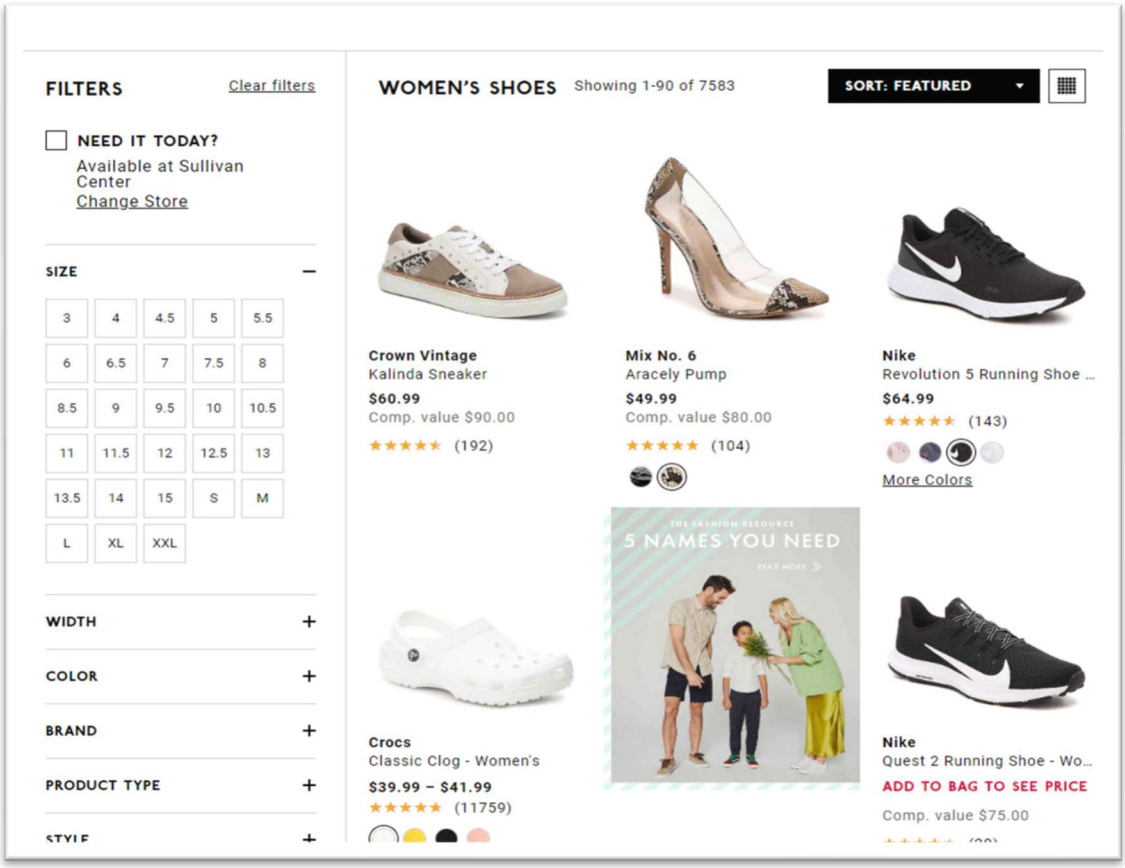
My issue with this format is that it requires **a lot of screen real estate**. Too much space is dedicated to showing customers a different link - asking a visitor to keep clicking deeper and deeper into the architecture becomes an issue with usability.

I addressed this with the group.

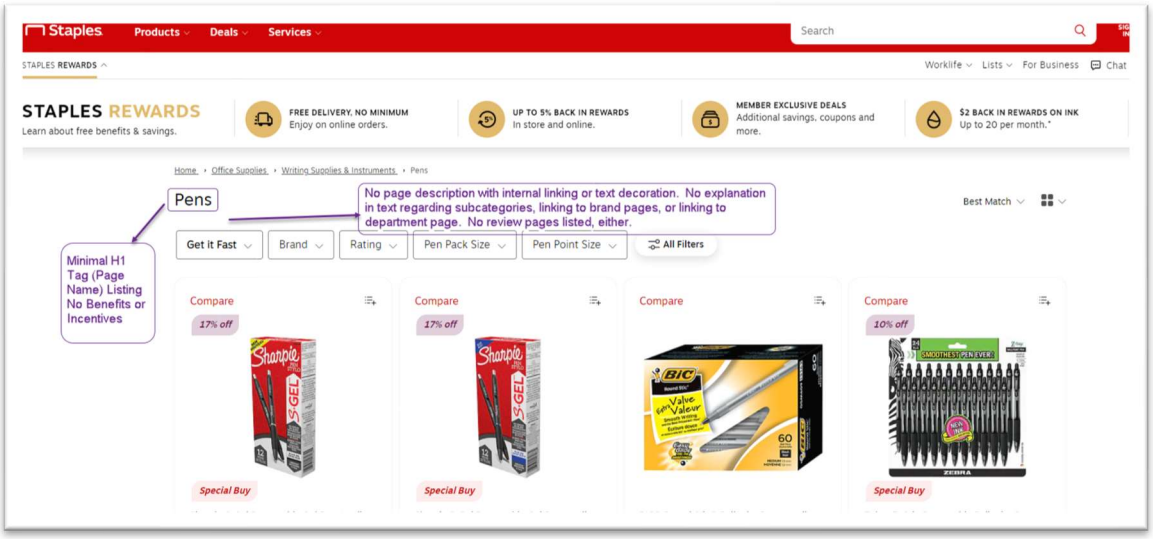
"Notice, there are **no captions or descriptions** and definitely no internal linking or text decoration. There are no incentives or benefits, and nothing is updatable."

"Again, these sites can be beaten in the rankings with a similar strategy that includes internal linking and text decoration, not to mention **better Ad Copy** like Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, and Page Names using function-driven content."

The team was starting to see the mistakes their competitors had been making, but inside the 2.0 paradigm, it was impossible to see how to win.



We can take one last look at a real powerhouse, Staples.com. A team of SEO experts have ignored some of the most powerful strategies available.



"Staples has so much data available and some of it is even listed on their pages, it is a shame they do not use it for Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 tags, or Captions where they can really make a difference."

The danger of having total market domination is that it creates an environment that will not innovate.

It may not occur to any of these companies to innovate until their competitors pass them by. Playing "catch-up" is a fool's game.

We continued with the lessons and began discussing page templates and site build-out.

"I call 'build-out' the creation of every possible type of content piece that is useful. Often companies do as little as possible to have a website presence or they benchmark with their competitors. You saw a demonstration of this when we reviewed the sites earlier today."

Site Build-Out

In order to properly build out a site, additional page templates are required and desired. Page templates serve a valuable role in the creation and organization of a robust and useful site, not just for search engines, but for people as well.

An SEO may create the same look and feel for a department page template as a category and subcategory template. The difference is the type of information that appears in each section.

The organic search channel requires a multidisciplinary approach for effective optimization. This is one of the reasons why the training with John's company required so many people with diverse expertise.

I showed a few slides that I had created the evening before.

Normal E-Commerce Page Templates Include:

- Home Page
- General About Pages
- Blog (perhaps)
- Category
- SubCategory
- Product Pages
- Check Out Related Pages

"For business owners that utilize Shopify, there is a similar approach as well."

Kelly raised her hand.

"Why do you only have one page for the About section? I think we have at least 6 pages that explain the history of the company, staff profiles, shipping policies…"

"Kelly, I classify all About pages as "administrative" type pages, including:

- Privacy pages
- History of the company
- Shipping and return policy
- Contact us & 404 Pages

These are just the templates, not pages.

We could have 1,000 category pages using one template, for example."

"Ahhh ok. I knew about the e-commerce pages, but I thought the About page was limited to one."

I continued.

"Strategic templates can attract qualified visitors by matching search intent with page and site content. **Function-driven content** makes page content easier to create and more useful to the visitor. However, to take full advantage of all the features of function-driven content, the site must be prolific."

"Build-out is an important strategy in creating a profitable site."

"On the next slide, you will see a hierarchy of template opportunities for a function-driven site. Each has the potential to attract thousands of keyword phrases and searchers."

- Homepage
- Department Templates
- Category Templates
- Subcategory Templates
- Tertiary Subcategory Templates
- Brand Page Templates *
- Brand + Category Templates *
- Family/Model Templates
- Product Pages
    - Multi-Variant Product Templates
    - Variant Product Templates *
- Review Templates (important)
    - Department Review
    - Category Review
    - Subcategory Review
    - Brand Review
    - Brand + Category Review
    - Product Review

"We will begin with the highest level of templates, the department pages..."

Department Page Templates

Department page templates hold the highest level of shopping than any other page template. All products within that department should be displayed.

"A Shoe Department Page should display a list of all the **shoes** sold by the store, right?"

"On a large website like Macy's or Nordstrom, the shoe department should list all the shoes sold by that store AND list a series of categories like Men's Shoes, Women's Shoes, and Kids' Shoes within that department."

"In a grocery store, people ask for the **Meat Department** or the **Butcher Shop.** You might ask a grocer where the **Produce Department** is located in a grocery store, for example."

Kim raised her hand to ask a question.

"When creating this comprehensive website architecture, how will we label the new sections of the site? I think we should run a few usability tests to ensure visitors don't get confused."

It is important to name the department page appropriately. A mislabeled department name in a site's taxonomy can be costly. The wrong label or name for the department can eliminate the site's visibility from common search phrases.

"**Mirroring the language of your brick-and-mortar customers is a great beginning**."

"Another important aspect of **labeling** is to create labels that will create **continuity in the sentence flow** when we produce natural language processing. We'll talk about how your department and category labels can help with Natural Language Processing (NLP) in just a bit."

"How can department names help with natural language processing exactly? I have heard about NLP quite a bit in the past 3 years, but haven't looked into it much," Tim said.

"Natural language processing is simply using data to help create sentences that read naturally."

For example

- We have 190 2-man tents available in 6 colors ranging from 3-season to 4-season including waterproof tents.

Everyone nodded in agreement. Not a perfect sentence, but it was off-the cuff. They liked the sound of that sentence well enough that they could see how our data could be integrated into our page copy.

- We have 190 2-man **[departmentName]** available in 6 colors ranging from 3-season to 4-season including **[subcategoryName].**

- We have 190 2-man **tents** available in 6 colors ranging from 3-season to 4-season including **waterproof tents**.

"Good navigation does not attempt to **retrain visitors to adapt to the site taxonomy**, but rather, uses existing visitor language to create the navigation labels. Name your departments appropriately."

"When a person walks into a mall, they may find stores like Macy's or Nordstrom. They'll find the men's department, the jewelry department, and if they are searching for home goods, they may ask where the furniture or bedding department is located."

"Know the language of your customers and get the department names right. This is crucial for function-driven content."

I continued on with the rest of the templates.

Category Page Templates

If a department within the site is labeled "Apparel," a category might be **shirts**, **pants**, or **shoes**.

An outdoor gear site that has "Hiking" as a department may have **backpacks**, **tents**, or **boots** as categories. Every site should have multiple category pages under each department.

This is normal and should always be included on an e-commerce site.

Subcategory Templates

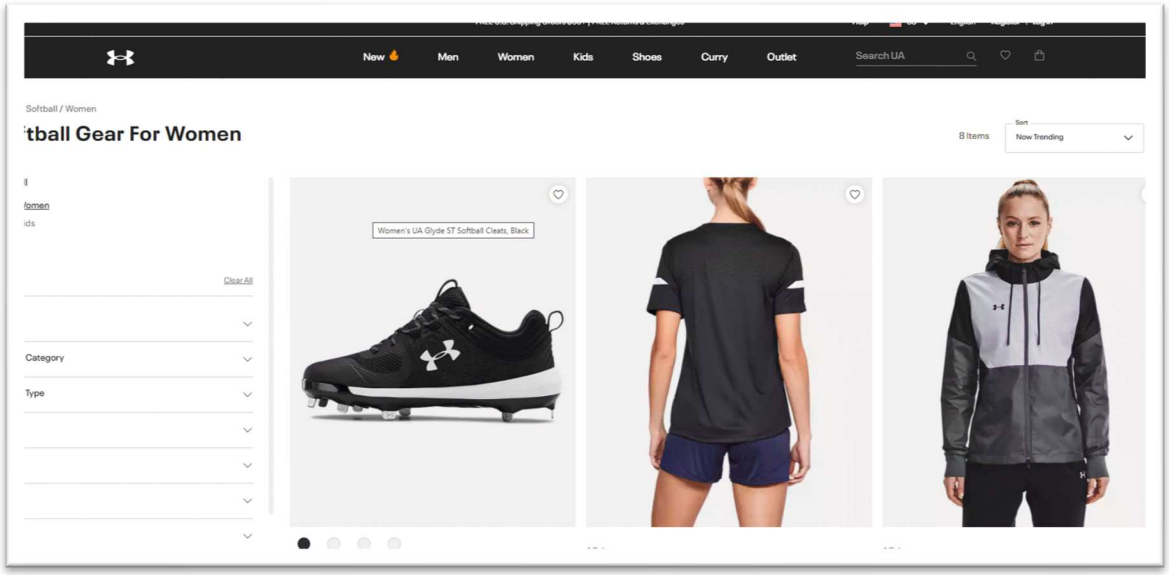
Fewer e-commerce companies have subcategory pages, but these pages often receive a higher click-through rate and conversion rates, since the focus is a bit narrower.

If you are wondering what might constitute a subcategory, you can include variations of your category.

Using variations helps create useful subcategories.

Subcategory Examples and Associated Breadcrumbs:

- Zero-Drop Running Shoes (Shoes > Running > Zero-Drop)
- Hiking Backpacks (Outdoors > Hiking > Backpacks)
- Women's Mountain Bikes (Bicycles > Women's > Mountain Bikes)
- Office Desks (Furniture > Office > Desks)
- Living Room Wall Art (Art > Wall > Living Room)
- Cowboy Hats (Apparel > Hats > Cowboy Hats)
- Gaming Laptops (Computers > Laptops > Gaming)
- Commercial Freezers (Refrigeration > Freezers > Commercial)



I gave the group a sneak peek at what would be possible with function-driven content by showing an example of a Meta Description with department, categories, and subcategories within its template.

Under Armour's *women's softball gear* section has **35** pairs of ***softball cleats*** as low as **$40.00** including **metal and plastic cleats**. Choose up to **5** assorted colors to match your team's uniform.

Function-Driven Content Template

> **[brandName]**'s **[category]** section has **[productCount]** pairs of **[subcategory]** as low as **[lowestPrice]** including **[productSpecification,2]**. Choose up to **[maxNumberColor]** assorted colors to match your team's uniform.

The team was excited to see the simplicity and sophistication at the same time. It was beginning to make sense.

"This template can be used as a base for most of the subcategory list pages on the site."

Tim asked, "Are you saying we can use that one template for all the different subcategory pages?"

"Yes, Tim. Again, this can be made a bit more generic, or as specific as you like. Some product-types may require some adjustment, but once a good core template is created, it only takes minutes to alter it."

Tertiary Subcategory Templates

I jokingly refer to these as Sub-Subcategory pages, but the idea is the same as a subcategory page, just one level deeper.

"You may think that we are getting a bit too deep, especially since there are **flat site architectures** out there that do very well. However, comprehensive flat sites often have this deeper level even though they may not illustrate that in the URL structure."

I pointed out that one of our competitors have a 1-level deep URL structure for the most part, but some also have several levels: Camping > Knives > Multi-Tools > Shovels

The URL is sitename.com/camping-shovels.html

Don't be fooled by short URL structures – it's not an advantage, it is just a site architecture preference.

Brand Page Templates

The biggest mistake in e-commerce taxonomy is the **absence of brand pages**. A brand page is simply a page dedicated to a brand that is sold on the site.

If you sell electronics, perhaps you sell **Nikon products**. Nikon should have a dedicated page with information about the brand and a full list of products sold on the site by that brand. A dedicated brand page begins a huge opportunity for external links and more.

How To Make a Fantastic Brand Page

1. Create an entire **brand section** that includes a list of every single brand sold on the site (https://www.example/brands/)

2. Create a dedicated page for each **brand** sold on the site (https://www.example/brands/under-armour/)

3. **Include this media on the brand pages (50-200 words at the top of the page):**
    a. Brand logo
    b. General information about the brand
    c. Company history
    d. List the product categories they sell
    e. List special accolades and awards they have won including customer service awards, local, regional, and national acknowledgments
    f. List the associations they belong to including local organizations
    g. List Nonprofit organizations they donate to no matter how large or small
    h. List physical locations of any brick and mortar if possible
    i. Tell the "hero's journey" of the original owner, how it started
    j. Include as much useful content as possible about the brand
    k. Create a grid with all the categories and subcategories they sell - these links should lead a person to the Brand + Category page discussed below
    l. Display a **full product list** below all the above information

Try to think of this information as the elevator pitch that you may give when telling a friend about the brand. Create a more useful page than the actual brand's About Us page on their site.

Not only will those brands appreciate the exposure, but creating a page just for them can include a lot of information they often do not include on their own site.

High-level e-commerce companies often **feature brands on the homepage** or category pages at a premium price.

Creating hundreds or thousands of brand pages provides a lot of opportunities for visibility and ranking on short-tail phrases (money phrases), in addition to the **ultimate link-building strategy** to be discussed later.

Kelly and Jason gave each other a glance. They knew this was not function-driven content and would require good old-fashioned research and content writing. They smiled and shrugged when they realized they could still write content in their own creative way.

Brand + Category

One of the best page templates in existence is the brand + category page. Since the brands often create and sell products under multiple categories, creating a page that combines these two is called a brand + category page.

The creation of a **B+C** page becomes easy and useful. Here is an example of just a few B+C pages that may rank for hundreds of short-tail keywords:

- Nikon Binoculars
- Yeti Coolers
- Pampers Diapers
- Ford Trucks
- Dell Laptops

Combining **Brand + Category template pages** creates the possibility of ranking for intuitive and short-tail search phrases used by searchers since the beginning of e-commerce. This specific page also serves a purpose when creating internal linking and text decoration.

Most of the time a well-constructed **B+C page** will qualify for hundreds or even thousands of keyword phrases, not just the initial and obvious short-tail phrases.

The ad copy (Title Tags and Meta Description) should also be congruent with those short tail phrases. When combined with internal linking and links from brand websites to the site's specific brand page, those pages really do rise to the top quickly.

Internal Linking and Text Decoration is a Powerful and Effective Strategy

> We want to create **internal linking and useful descriptions between 50–150 words** at the top of the list pages, called captions. Having several pages in the taxonomy provides better context for Google to understand the products on the site. Your category page and your specific brand page can both internally link to the B+C page.

You will begin ranking for more **short-tail keyword phrases** when internal linking is strategic and cascades to other useful pages.

Family/Model + Category or Brand

Few websites will invest in family page types, but they can be useful for searchers that don't use a lot of keyword phrases. REI is definitely a company that has Family Pages and more.

Family (This only works well with certain products)

- F150
- ProStaff
- Monarch
- Venom

Family + Category

- F150 Trucks
- ProStaff Binoculars
- Monarch Rangefinder
- iPhoneX Accessories
- Caad SuperSix Evo Racing Bike

Brand + Family Model

- Ford F150
- Nikon ProStaff
- Nikon Monarch
- Apple iPhoneX
- Cannondale Caad SuperSix Evo

Jason seemed upset and immediately spoke up.

Are These Doorway Pages?

"Pages rank for more than just a few keyword phrases and creating so many templates, forces your pages to compete with each other. It sounds like you are advocating doorway pages.

Doorway pages go against Google best practices, so how do you justify these strategies?"

I immediately addressed this concern because Google specifically mentions doorway pages. (https://developers.google.com/search/docs/advanced/guidelines/doorway-pages)

"Nothing could be further from the truth," I said.

"A site that has specific, unique, updatable content that is segmented well is called optimized. Creating almost identical pages with trivial differences is the definition of a doorway page. **I am advocating the opposite**."

"Site build-out, while using function-driven content for ad copy, useful page names, and captions with internal linking and text decoration, is called optimization.

Site build-out is strategic and creates useful information. Site buildout helps create differentiation between unique list pages."

"When a person builds a site so thoroughly that their own pages compete with each other rather than their online competition, they have reached a coveted place."

I gave examples everyone would be familiar with while searching.

"If you search for t-shirts, you will find sites that have t-shirts from varied brands including, Hanes, Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, Gildan, Under Armour, and a hundred others. The information that differentiates between these types of t-shirts is paltry at best.

The brand name is essentially the only phrase that differentiates between them. The material is the same (cotton, cotton blend, or polyester). The sizes are the same as well (small to xxl). By most people's standards, these would be doorway pages or duplicate content, but they are not."

"Hotel location pages differ almost exclusively by geographical location (city, state, zip code). Their amenities are almost exactly the same and when they differ, it is minimal. Are these doorway pages? No, absolutely not"

In a recent article by Eblogger, they described a doorway page as follows:

> "Doorway pages are large sets of **poor-quality web pages** created for spamindexing where each page is optimized for a specific keyword or phrase. A doorway page might even take a searcher **away from the page they thought they were being directed to** and send them to a different website.
>
> Doorway pages tend to be **very generic** and are **sometimes written in a way that they make no sense to a human reader** but would perform very well in the search engines."

Each type of page created, using these templates, can qualify for hundreds and even thousands of keywords. Depending on the site authority, number of products, caption size, and backlink profile, these pages will perform very well for diverse search queries. That is one of the reasons you may see two pages in a row by a company – they optimized it.

We are not after one keyword phrase; we are after ALL relevant keyword phrases.

Function-Driven Content

- Requires a comprehensive site build-out
- Addresses multiple page types
- Produces high-quality pages with unique, specific, updatable content
- Creates useful/helpful content

Multiple pages, fueled by smart templates, and a comprehensive site taxonomy with specific, unique, updatable content is the beginning of true site optimization.

"This strategy is, in fact, the opposite of a doorway page," I said.

Jason lowered his hand and smiled in defeat. "Ok, ok, it just seemed like Google might punish our site if we had too many pages that seemed similar."

"When you have unique Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 tags and actual content on the page that describes the products on the page with different internal linking, it is impossible for Google to see those pages as similar. In fact, it helps search engines direct the perfect page for a searcher's query."

I moved on to the next page-type, product pages.

Product Pages

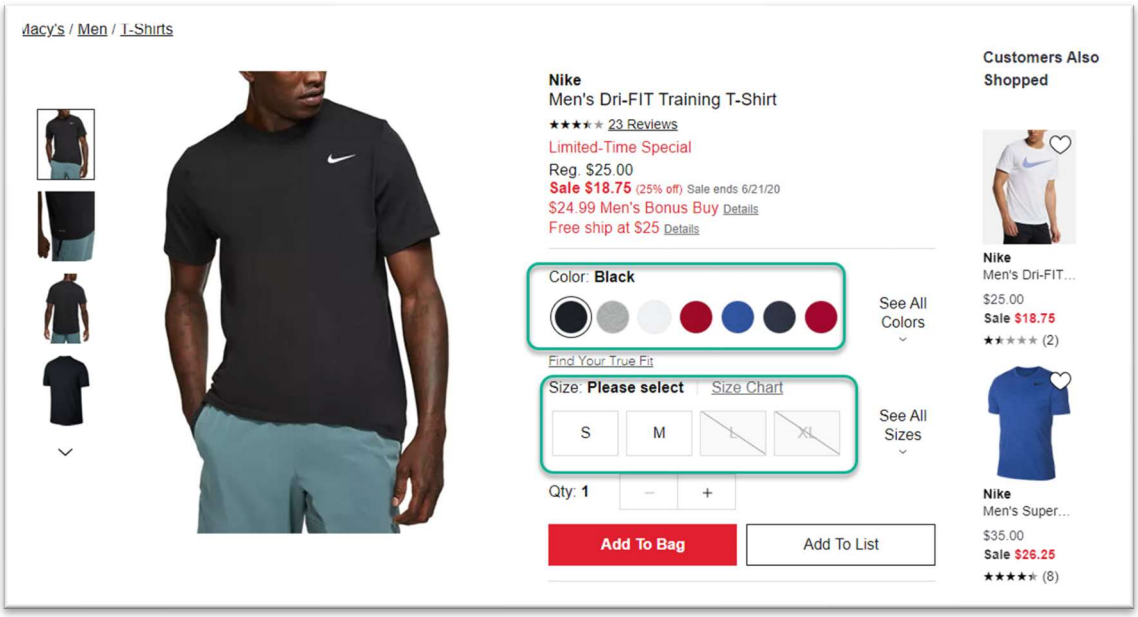
A. Multi-Variant Product Pages

Multi-variant product pages show multiple options like size or color on the same page.

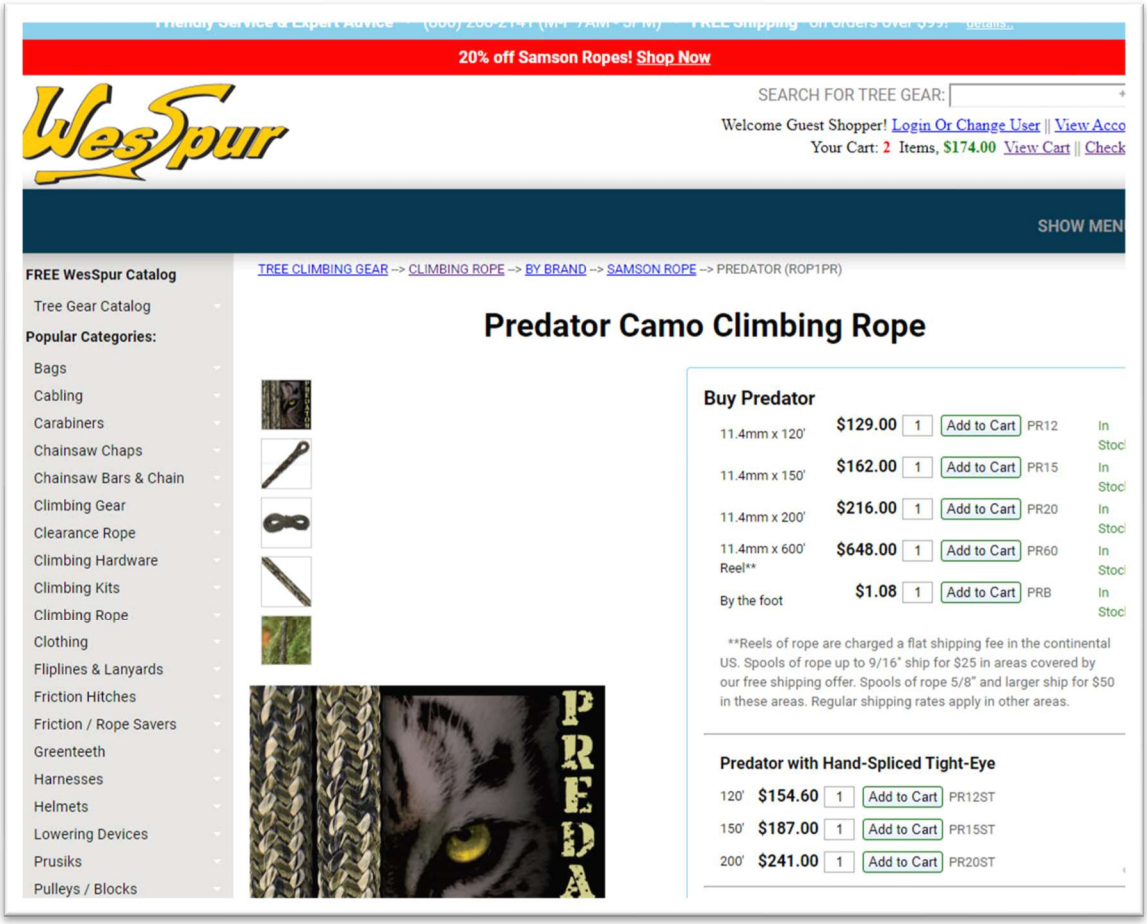
When a company sells t-shirts with color or size options all listed on the same page, that is a multi-variant product page. The page lists **multiple variations** of the same product. Take a look below.

Most e-commerce pages have multi-variant product pages, which is good for usability, but more can be done for optimization purposes.

In the image below, outlined in green, the page has color and size options on the same page. These specifications are the most common variations in apparel.



Many sites have multi-variant product pages. Multi-variant product pages allow a person to choose the exact specifications they want. A multi-variant product page is very user-friendly. However, more can be done.



In the WesSpur example above, this page has variants for climbing rope length and finished ends. Notice options for the following:

- 120-foot rope
- 150-foot rope
- 200-foot rope
- 600-foot rope
- Priced by the foot

The length of rope is crucial for rock climbing, rappelling, and more. There are variants for 120 feet of rope all the way up to 600 feet. In some cases, a multi-variant page is useful but variant pages are extremely specific and unique.

It never hurts to have both multi-variant and variant pages in highly competitive markets. In fact, it might be worth creating a page for each specific product variation, depending on your site.

I'll explain below.

B. Single Variant Product Pages

A single variant product page has all the information of a multi-variant product page but specializes in that **specific variant** (options). That specific information can be highlighted in the Ad Copy, Page Name, Captions, and more. A variant page for a t-shirt company might have the gender, material, color, and size for that particular t-shirt listed on the page.

A single variant page template allows specific pages to rank well for **long-tail queries.** This means, they not only rank well but they have a higher click-through rate and conversion rate, too.

The example used above can also produce 28 more variant pages, each for color and size. This is fantastic for specific, unique content. The pages will not have a high impression count, but I have seen click-through rates above 80% and conversions up to 30% on variant product pages. Normal conversion rates are under 5%.

The Title of the Page above is "Men's Dri-FIT Training T-Shirt."

Create specific pages for each of these variants. Google will find and index these pages.

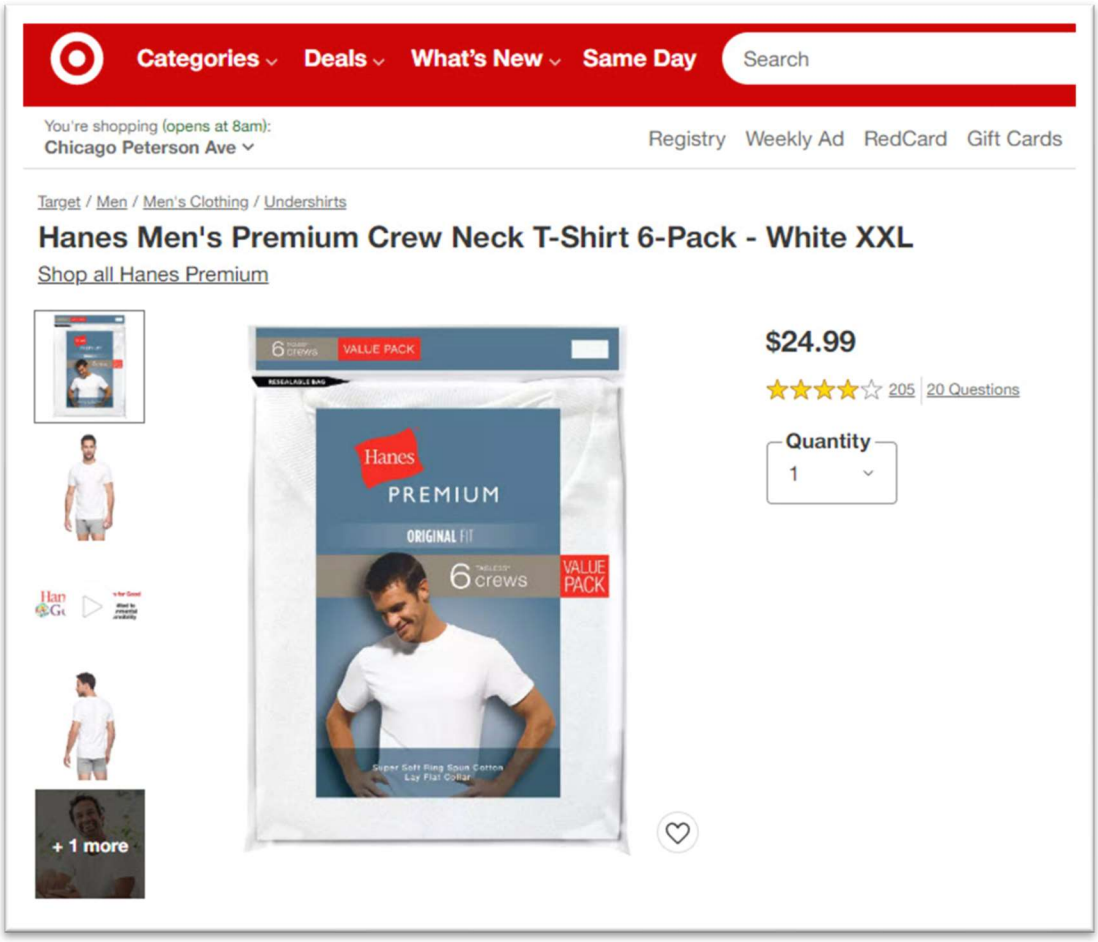
Here are examples of variant page titles from the multi-variant page above:

- Men's **Medium Blue** Dri-FIT Training T-Shirt
- Men's **Medium Red** Dri-FIT Training T-Shirt
- Men's **Medium White** Dri-FIT Training T-Shirt
- Men's **XL Black** Dri-FIT Training T-Shirt
- Men's **Large Gray** Dri-FIT Training T-Shirt
- Men's **Small Green** Dri-FIT Training T-Shirt

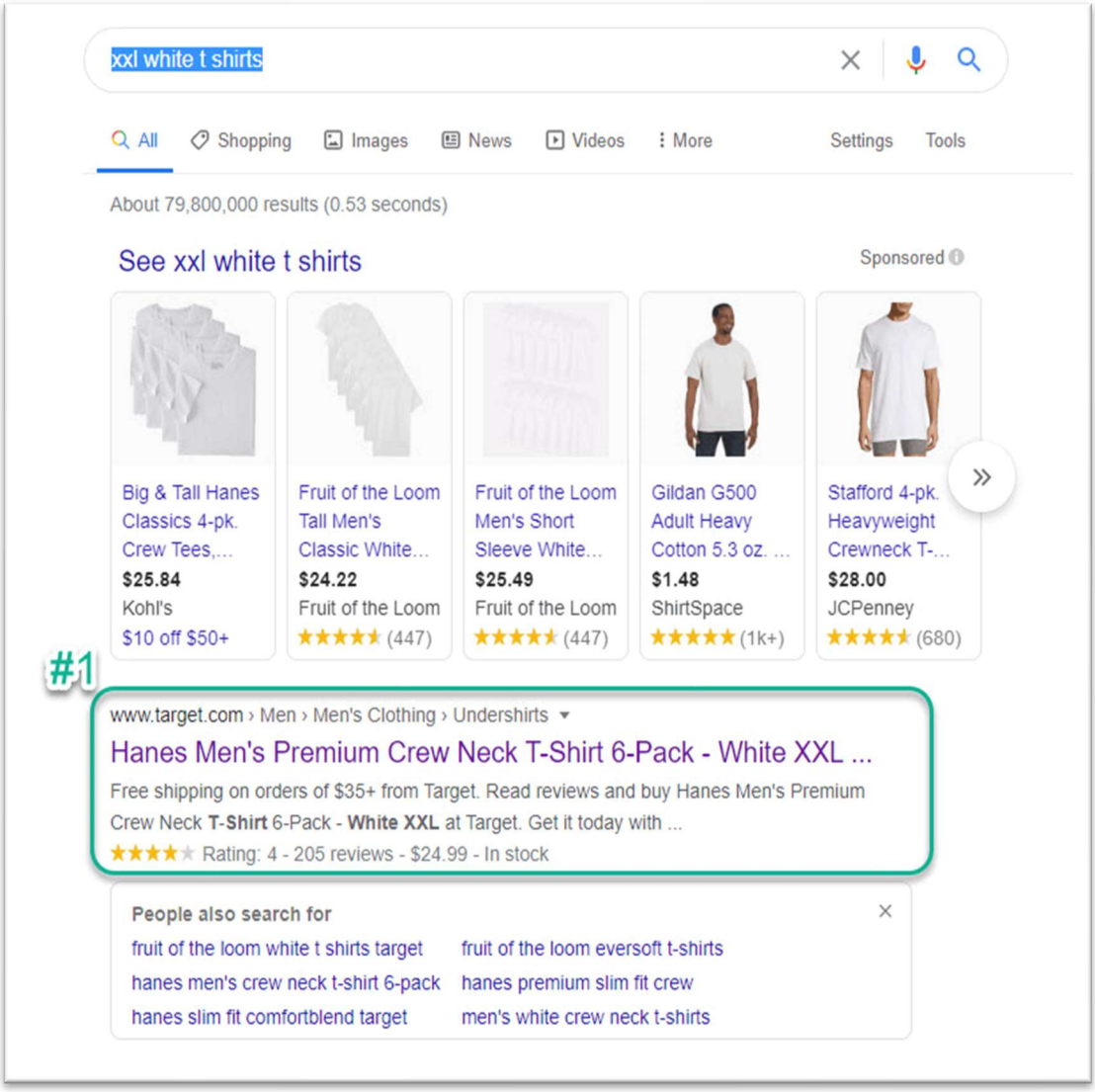
When searchers are entering long-tail queries, your pages will show up high on Google's first page - or at least have a much better chance since YOUR content is specific, unique, and congruent with the query. Everyone else has one page with a lot of different options. **You have both! That is optimization.**

XXL White T-Shirts

This variant page from Target was ranked #1 in the SERPs. Qualified variant pages often win top spots even without a lot of content.



Variant product pages may not receive high traffic, but the click-through rates and conversion rates are extremely high, making them a valuable template.



Pro Tip: Create multi-variant product pages, then link to each VARIANT page and link the SKU as the anchor text.

This is a fantastic way to allow Google to find and crawl variant pages, which create high click-through rates and extremely high conversion rates.

When a person creates internal linking to those specific variant pages, it creates very useful, specific, and relevant search results.

This is an excellent strategy for long-tail search queries that produce high-percentage sales.

Imagine having variant pages like this:

- Nike Small Men's Dri-Fit Green T-shirt
- Nike Medium Men's Dri-Fit Green T-shirt
- Nike Large Men's Dri-Fit Green T-shirt
- Nike XL Men's Dri-Fit Green T-shirt
- Nike XXL Men's Dri-Fit Green T-shirt

- Nike Small Men's Dri-Fit Blue T-shirt
- Nike Medium Men's Dri-Fit Blue T-shirt
- Nike Large Men's Dri-Fit Blue T-shirt
- Nike XL Men's Dri-Fit Blue T-shirt
- Nike XXL Men's Dri-Fit Blue T-shirt

- Nike Small Men's Dri-Fit Red T-shirt
- Nike Medium Men's Dri-Fit Red T-shirt
- Nike Large Men's Dri-Fit Red T-shirt
- Nike XL Men's Dri-Fit Red T-shirt
- Nike XXL Men's Dri-Fit Red T-shirt

When a person searches for their specific size and color, the exact page will likely appear, making the click-through rate and conversion rate higher than a multi-variant page. This is optimization!!

Review Pages

Each of the templates above should have their own review page with a link on that page to the actual product page.

All templates should have their own amalgamated reviews, as well. This means, Department, Category, Subcategory, Brand, B+C, and Individual Products should all have reviews and ratings. Each online customer should also have a profile created that allows Google to confirm the review was made by a verified buyer. Just like Amazon, you should be able to see each person's profile page and all their reviews.

Any rating and review on an individual product can qualify to appear under the product's department, brand, category, b+c, and subcategory page, to name a few.

If your site sells 20 pairs of binoculars from 5 brands, each having 10 reviews, that equals 200 total reviews for the binocular category page. It would average 40 reviews for each brand +

category page, at least 40 reviews on each of the brand page, not including reviews from other product categories.

When you combine all the reviews of all the products, some brand and category pages may have more than 10K reviews and ratings and all of them are legitimate from verified buyers.

When the database can associate the same review with multiple sections, that is a win-win-win situation. You can also use those ratings and reviews as content in meta descriptions, captions, and other places on the pages. This is optimized!

We will discuss reviews and ratings in meta descriptions in detail later.

Reciprocal Review Links

Again, many sites have all their reviews and ratings on the product pages, but they stop there. Big mistake. By adding a page-type just for reviews, you can include the product name, image, product description, specifications and then a listing of all the reviews for that product. The same type of strategy can be used for each category list page, subcategory, brand, and more.

Anyone doing research on Harley Davidson Motorcycles may find a review page on a seller's site, which would include all the individual ratings and reviews for all models of Harley Davidson Motorcycles by those customers.

Include a link to the actual Harley Davidson Motorcycle page, as well.

Anyone doing research on Harley Davidson Motorcycles that finds the review page also has direct access to purchase that product and you double your visibility of that brand + category with researchers and buyers. It works well!

Google has announced that user-generated content DOES QUALIFY as legitimate page content, which means when a person writes a review, everything they write counts toward your quality page content (Panda algorithm) and Google's new algorithm, launched in April 2022, and updated in April 2023, that analyzes quality reviews.

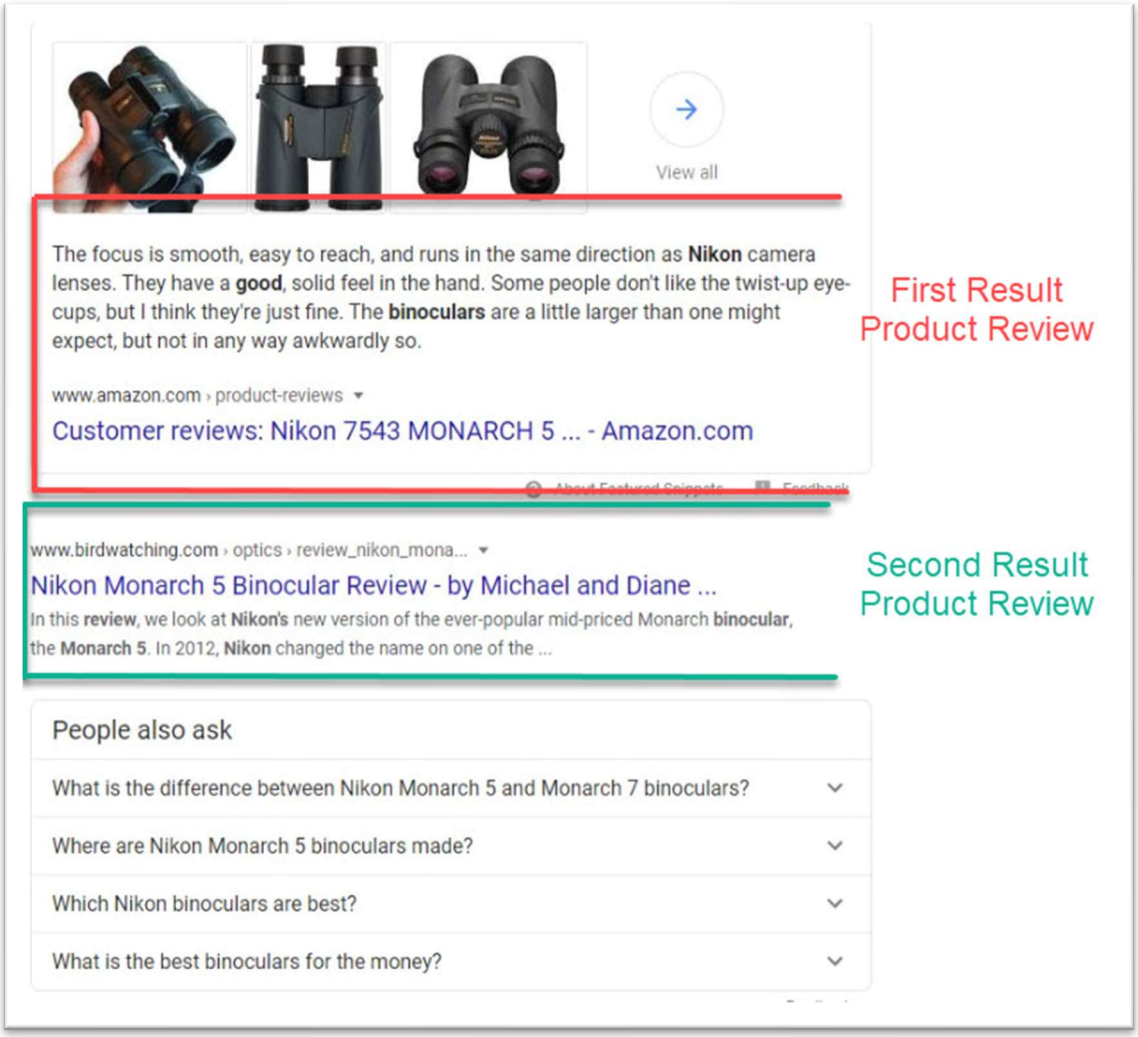
Having great reviews listed on a strategic page type is now a double whammy of optimization and content.

Imagine having all this great content listed on your site, connected via internal linking. Your site will appear high in the SERPs for buyers and researchers, not to mention the trust a visitor will have when reading the useful content.

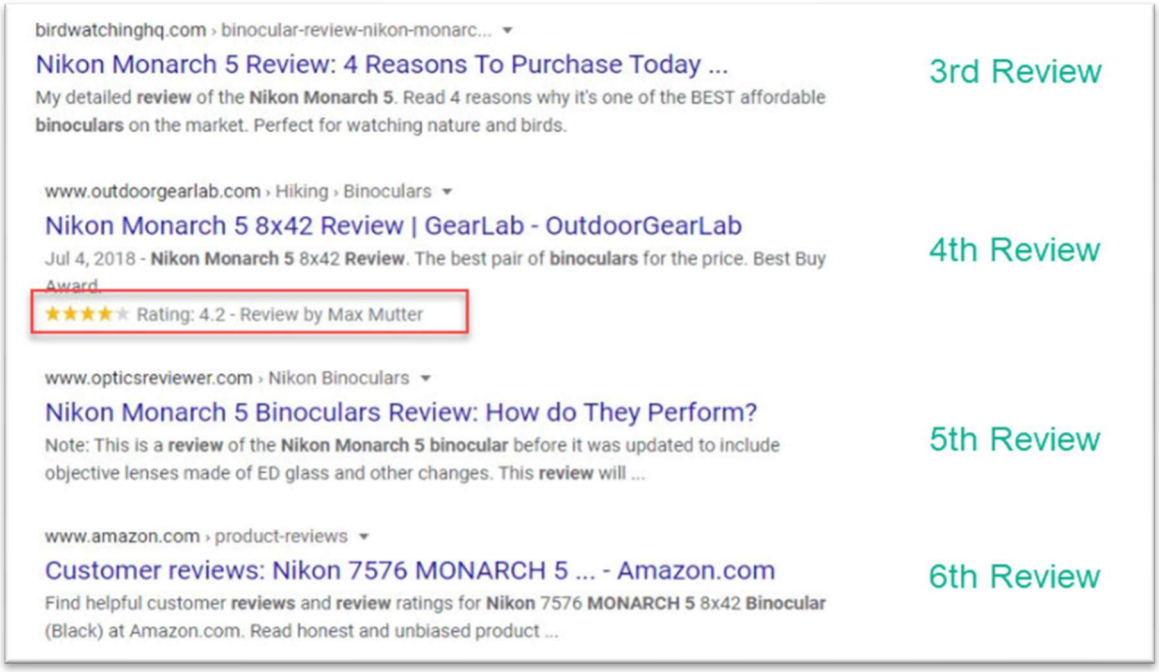
I searched for ***Nikon binoculars reviews.***

The top results are ALL review pages for the **[Brand] [Product Name]** or **[Brand] [Family/Model]** page on each of these sites.

The First Page of Google



Continuation of 1st Page of Google Results



This produces two results and a major opportunity:

1. Excellent results for the **product page** when searchers are entering queries related to purchasing products
2. Excellent results for **review pages** when people are doing research and looking for review type pages to make buying decisions
3. Ability to add ratings and reviews in ad copy - even if Google will not show a rich snippet. This would be a huge win for the site, searchers, and Google

A binocular review page would be particularly useful for people conducting research and will convert a small percentage of those visitors into your customers. Now you can use e-commerce 3.0 strategy to produce informational content that is unique, specific, updatable, and thereby useful.

This creates congruent and useful content that will lead to more traffic, higher conversion rates, and more organic search revenue.

Additional Templates

Implementing new page combinations will help create higher visibility, new visitors, higher ranking, and more conversions.

Brand + SubCategory Review
This page template is similar to Brand + Category, but subcategories are unique and helpful. This means they will perform well with long tail searches. Your page may not initially rank high enough for short-tail words like "women's shoes," but may initially rank for longer queries such as:

- women's high heel shoes
- women's running shoes
- women's marathon running shoes
- women's trail running shoes
- best women's running shoes for 10K race

People have learned to enter more specific keyword phrases in order to receive the exact type of pages that will help them achieve their goal.

Subcategory Examples:

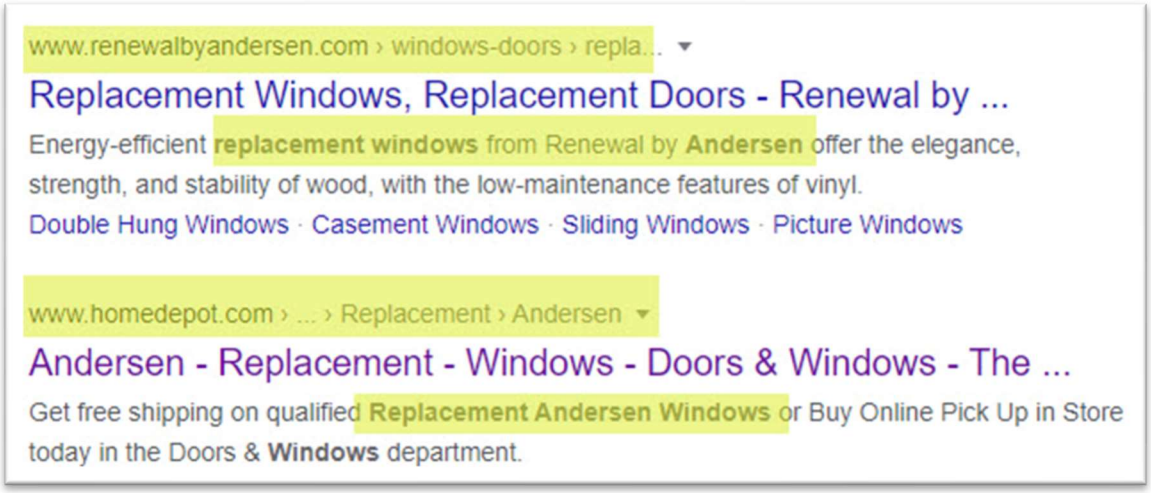
- Nike Trail Running Shoes
- Magellen® Corner L-shaped Desks
- Anderson Replacement Windows

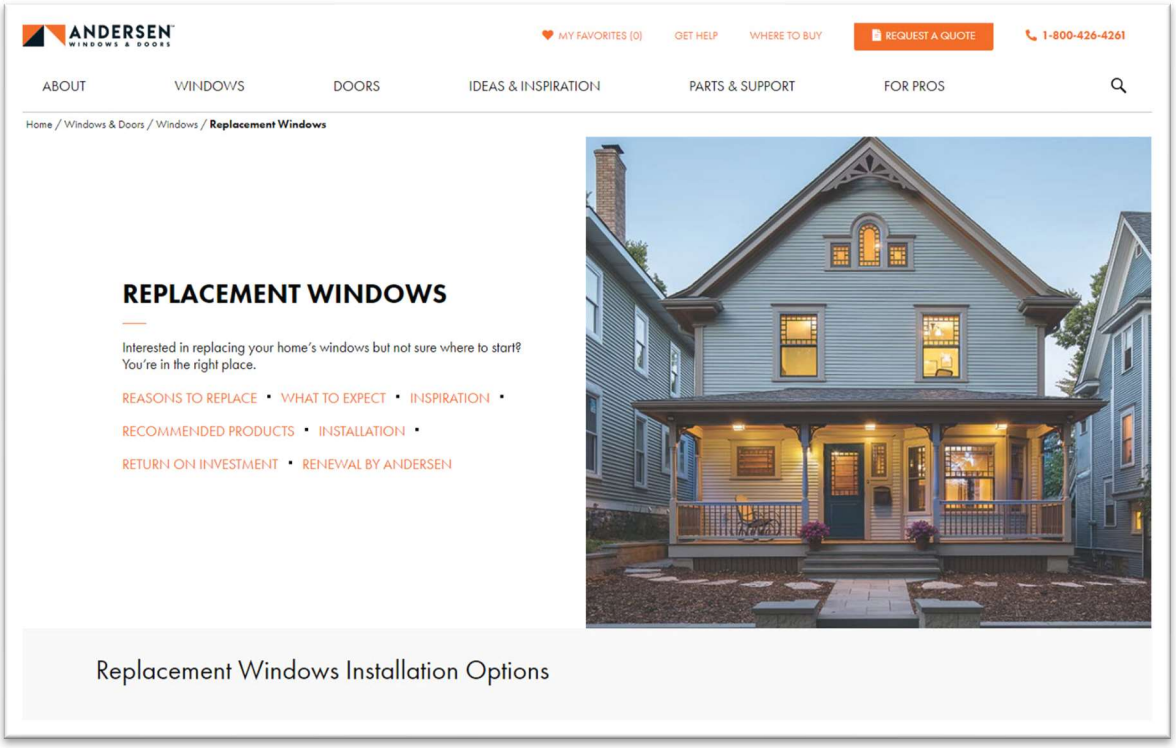
Notice in the breadcrumbs below:

- **Windows and Doors** qualifies for the department
- **Windows** qualifies as the category
- **Replacement Windows** as the subcategory

Home Depot is a reseller and strategically posts a **Brand + Subcategory** page online.

Renewal By Andersen and Home Depot are positioned on the SERPs as the first and second listing after Anderson's site for "*Anderson Replacement Windows*." This is further evidence that the technique works!





There are many more page template options that are available, but currently underutilized.

This is only a short-list.

After an entire day of providing examples and training the team in how to create new templates and which templates would produce the best results, we agreed to meet again in a month.

Creating new templates is easy work, so I was confident that the team would be able to complete the work on time. We agreed that the templates would be published to the test site in a 30-day review.

One of the changes the team needs to make is to create space at the top of the page templates for captions (page descriptions). This work is not difficult, but we need to make sure the page flows with the site's current design.

No query should escape your site from ranking well, compelling a click, and keeping that visitor there for the intended purpose - to make a purchase.

Adding Incentives & Benefits

Why are Incentives & Benefits Missing from Title Tags and Meta Descriptions on Almost Every Organic Listing on Almost Every E-commerce Website?

Every successful advertisement or salesperson has included an incentive or benefit (or both) to convert an interested prospect (searcher) into a buyer.

In many cases, discounts and savings are the ONLY form of advertisement some companies use to create and convert customers.

As an example, an advertisement that includes happy people using their product communicates, "If you use our product, you will be happy."

Apple does an excellent job of including cool and hip people using their products, which signifies, "Use Apple products and you'll be cool, too" messaging.

Some are more overt and direct. "Save 40% on Father's Day!"

Benefits and Incentives are evident everywhere on television, billboards, the coupons section of the Sunday paper, digital paid ads, store windows, and even ads pinned to cork boards in every small coffee shop in the world.

I began the next training session asking one thing:

"Why are Incentives and Benefits Missing from Title Tags and Meta Descriptions on Almost Every Organic Listing?"

I looked around the room, but everyone thought it was a rhetorical question.

I repeated the question. "Why are incentives and benefits missing from Title Tags and Meta Descriptions on almost every organic listing?"

Kim raised her hand.

"No one has figured out how to add or update incentives and benefits since they change so frequently. I think people don't want **inaccurate information** to appear on the site or on search engine result pages."

Kim was accurate in her assessment. In my experience, most marketers are deathly afraid of any inconsistency between Google search results and page content.

Tim raised his head up momentarily.

"Are people afraid that with all the dynamic information being rendered, servers will be overtaxed? Also, page speed would decrease."

Jason interjected. "Page speed is a ranking factor, after all. What if the information changes on the site but the search engines show incorrect information?"

"Tim is correct, some people are afraid of overtaxing their server resources with so many pages and queries, but isn't there a way to fix that?"

"Also, companies are not responsible for inconsistent or incorrect information on a search engine result page. As long as the information on a **web page** is accurate, we are not guilty of bait and switch tactics."

To ensure everyone was clear about incongruent information on search engines, I felt the need to elaborate.

"Every single time a Title Tag or Meta Description is updated in any way, the page is inconsistent with search results. This happens millions of times per day. Until Google crawls the site again, the information may be different."

I looked around the room to ensure everyone was satisfied that there was no issue with **temporary** incongruent information. After seeing no looks of concern, I returned to the database resources issue and raised an important question.

"What can be done to eliminate or mitigate queries to the database?"

Jonathan, a front-end developer with 5 years' experience and a quiet demeanor didn't hesitate. "We could cache the information. The best way to do that is to actually create a static HTML page with all of the data in a very readable format like HTML. Anytime any of the crucial data updates in the database we could set a trigger to republish the HTML page with the new information. Even a simple WordPress site allows cached content and static pages like that."

Out of nowhere, one of the newest members of the team just solved a problem that has kept big-box stores from having rapidly changing content appear using fast pages. We were making progress.

"Kim, by using that method, what types of problems would we solve if that's how we planned to add incentives and benefits on thousands of pages?"

Kim thought about it for a few seconds.

"We could have that unique, specific, and updatable content you were mentioning on all sorts of places on the page, not just ad copy. I would imagine database resources would be reserved only for pages that had recently updated content instead of accessing the database for every single visit to the site, but I'm not a programmer or database person, so I am just guessing."

"Exactly. Creating static HTML pages would eliminate constant calls to the database, would still allow fast rendering pages, and pages could easily be republished when new variables changed."

"Even if a site is using server-side rendering JavaScript, AJAX, or any other technology, adding a few more data points is not going to affect the page speed. HTML is not required, but in many cases, it is preferred for the best readable, crawlable sites."

Jonathan returned to the second issue. "If we're not responsible for the information on the search engine results page, there would still be an issue with the SERP copy and page copy from a visitor's point of view."

I shook my head in agreement. We were finally getting somewhere and getting to the questions that stop almost every marketing department from making progress.

"Let me make a small correction in your assertion, Jonathan.

I'm not saying that the information should not be accurate. What I'm saying is that immediately upon changing your Title Tags and Meta Descriptions on a website page, incongruence is created between the page content and the SERPs. Again, this happens millions of times per day. The information on the page should always be as accurate as possible, but a funny thing happens when pages are updated often.

The more often a page is updated, the more often search engines will crawl the page. Therefore, updating page content often results in a shorter time of page inconsistency. Over time, pages that change weekly, get crawled weekly, for sites as popular as ours, at least.

It is actually better to have content changing and updating all the time."

Kim seemed confused. She fidgeted with her chair and hesitated to raise her hand but looked around to see if anyone else was concerned.

"That seems a bit counter intuitive."

Kim was a bit of a news junkie. She often had various local and national 24-hour news sites on her monitor as she created usability reports. This seemed like the perfect example.

"When you search for news on Google, don't they have updated content and breaking news on the results pages all the time?"

"Yes, I think every 10 to 20 minutes the news section updates."

"So, if our pages change every 7-14 days, Google will crawl our pages every week or two instead of every month. This keeps our information more accurate, not less."

I reminded the group again that news outlets change the content on their homepage all the time and search engines usually crawl those pages every 10 - 20 minutes.

"Search engines know that news content is going to change, and they want to be able to display the most up-to-date information, so they crawl it as often as necessary. Similar to us, Google doesn't want to waste server resources by crawling every site every day, they only crawl when necessary."

Jason smiled. "If we never change or update a page, Google will only crawl every 30 days, but by updating often, Google crawls more often so the information will always be updating, accurate, and useful. Yes, that is counter-intuitive, but it makes sense now."

I summarized our little Socratic inquiry by restating the method, "pages that change often are crawled often. Those pages also they have incentives and benefits, which usually results in higher click-through rates, since people respond to incentives.

Higher CTR means eventually higher ranking if searchers stay on the page. The cycle repeats itself until the page reaches its full potential and usefulness. In a year, we may find certain pages on the site being crawled every single day."

The group seemed to understand the benefits of rapidly changing content, how we could mitigate server resources, and enhance page speed simultaneously. However, the initial question was not answered fully.

"The real reason that companies don't add incentives and benefits to ad copy or page copy is because **they simply don't think of it.**"

"Have you heard the adage, 'Sell the sizzle, not the steak?'"

All marketing professionals have heard this at some point in their career, if not in their very first Marketing 101 class. When it comes to digital marketing,

The Sizzle is Missing in Action!

I'm not sure why it happens on more than 99% of sites including those billion-dollar big-box e-commerce sites, but they almost never list an incentive in Ad Copy (Title Tags and Meta Descriptions) and only a few have comprehensive Page Titles (H1 tags), and almost none have captions or descriptions listed on the top of the page.

Unfortunately, incentives and benefits get pushed aside in SEO marketing, mostly due to marketing professionals lacking knowledge of programming technology and being unaware of the options available to them. Programmers traditionally have no marketing or SEO experience. This is why pages rarely have incentives and benefits and never ones that change dynamically or update automatically.

Programmers, as talented as they are, are trained to follow requirements only. Collaboration meetings between the programmers, database administrators, and marketing professionals are rare. Almost never!

This means that synergistic strategies that produce triple-digit results are not possible. Compartmentalization is a lose-lose-lose situation. **The company loses, the department loses, and potential customers lose.**

Marketing professionals anticipate the following technical problems:

1. Price changes
2. Discount % changes
3. Product availability
4. Coupon expiration dates
5. Short-term deals/daily deals
6. Shipping costs and timelines
7. Stock availability (In Stock/Out of Stock)

These are problems that programmers can dig into and solve in a short amount of time. Without collaborative meetings, there are no opportunities to solve those issues, discover what is desired, or implement technical solutions.

Function-driven content can solve these issues while simultaneously mitigating and even eliminating risk.

People React to Incentives and Benefits

I worked at a small grocery store in Northwest Indiana beginning at the age of 14. It was clear to me that most people bought the Sunday paper solely for the coupons. I can verify that easily by having been scolded by multiple elderly customers on any given Monday afternoon when they would angrily yell, "The coupons section was missing from my Sunday paper. The only reason I buy the paper is for the coupons!"

The incentive to buy the Sunday paper was the coupon section. The benefit was that a person can save 1,000 times their investment in the paper by cashing in on the hundreds of deals, discounts, and coupons from local and national chain businesses.

The number of research studies, meta studies, books, articles, and even Nobel Prizes documenting how human beings react to incentives and benefits are too many to list here. Most students of marketing (life-long learners) are aware of Behavioral Economics, which is the field of economics that combines psychology, neuroscience, and other fields to better understand how and why people make buying decisions and how incentives influence that behavior.

Nobel Laureates in the field of economics related to incentives, just in the past 25 years, include Oliver E. Williamson (2009), Daniel Kahneman and Vernon Smith (2002), and James J. Heckman (2000). Their work is magnificent and should be read by every digital marketer.

Incentives should create enough interest for a person to take a particular action.

- Discounts
- Low Percentage Rates
- Free Shipping over $49
- Save Up to 15%
- 2 for 1 Deals
- In-store Coupons or Mail-In Rebates

Benefits are a positive outcome that a site visitor expects from your product or service.

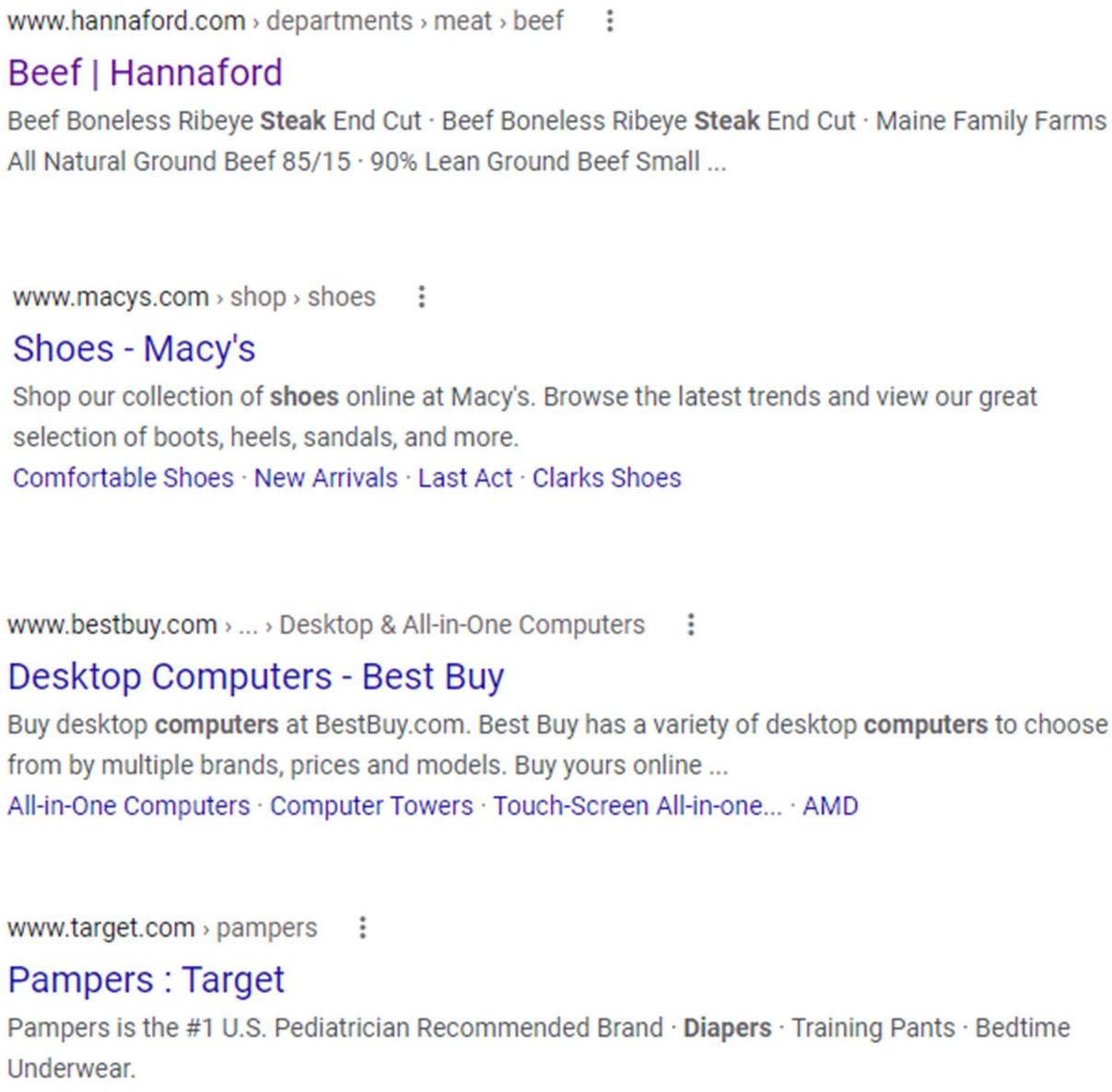
- **Save Time** by Ordering Groceries Online and Delivered to Your Home
- Top Quality Egyptian Cotton **Feels Soft and Doesn't Shrink** (TrueFit)
- Order 3 TrueFit T-shirts and **Receive Free Shipping**
- **Free Returns** on all Online Purchases

Sell the Sizzle, Not the Steak.

I finished the session with a few Ad Copy examples from big-box stores. My goal was to demonstrate loudly how anemic ad copy on the internet had become.

"These are real world examples from Google's own search engine! These are billion-dollar companies that could easily have better Ad Copy."

Would You Consider These to Be Compelling Title Tags?



"Executives rely on their brick-and-mortar stores to bring in revenue and they ignore the innovation it takes to win online. You can beat them with a bit of ingenuity, innovation, attention to detail, and function-driven content. That I promise."

I ended the meeting and thanked everyone for allowing me to demonstrate the possibility beyond the current paradigm. I could tell they left with ideas, strategies, and purpose. I hoped they would return with more questions.

Previously, the team was apathetic at worst, resigned at best. They spent two years trying to compete just on informational content. However, they are starting to see how they can make big gains optimizing their e-commerce site. In my opinion, they saw the most important thing, possibility.

This small shift in thinking will become the catalyst for substantial changes and revenue.

In 2022 & 2023, several new algorithms were created, not to mention ChatGPT and other AI generating content. These will never replace the type of content and content generation possible with function-driven content. Function-driven content provides unique, specific, updatable content that is useful. AI content can never do that.

When online visitors view a product description, they are likely reading the same manufacturer's description that appears on 15 other websites selling that same product. Hoping for results from terrible content is like hoping to win a marathon wearing lead shoes. You won't win no matter how hard you try. In 2023, Google has finally announced officially that manufacturers' descriptions are no longer acceptable by themselves. Better content is required.

Manufacturer supplied descriptions tell no story, provide no differentiation, and have no incentives or benefits. With duplicate product descriptions on every site, it requires a person to determine **value** simply by price, shipping, and company reputation.

A smaller company with fewer stores or just an e-commerce business with no brick and mortar, can beat those billion-dollar companies and online stores by listing benefits and incentives in Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags, and Captions with internal linking and text decoration.

Creative writing helps with small sites, but large e-commerce sites must implement **smart writing** that is heavily entrenched in technology and is scalable.

Can Google Really Measure Useful Content?

Google can determine if the Title Tag and Meta Description is a good match with the landing page's H1 Tag and Page Content. Google doesn't determine this, they track user-interaction and behavior.

Most SEOs agree that usefulness is determined by calculating and tracking if a searcher **stays on the landing page** and continues browsing and does not return to the SERPs. Sometimes a person may go back and alter their query, but that does not seem to affect ranking.

Simply measuring bounce rate does not help determine if the page was helpful or not. A person may have received the information they were looking for and then leave the page.

A highly calculated algorithm may track user-interactions and behavior over time to determine real-world usefulness. Re-ranking and recalibrating occurs constantly to help ensure results are always useful to the searcher.

Congruence between ad copy and page content makes a difference.

The purpose of a webmaster, digital marketer, or an SEO is to deliver **results**. This means unique, specific, and updated content is required.

The best way to ensure results is to make the Title Tags and Meta Descriptions congruent with the Page Name and Top-of-Page content with 50-150 words with internal linking and text decoration. This provides useful information at the top including incentives, benefits, and social proof. If you only do that - you will begin to win.

Labeling and Natural Language Processing

The group returned from lunch and filed into their seats; a bit tired from just having eaten. I decided to make the first part of the afternoon lesson a bit more interactive.

"Ok, I'd like everyone to pair up and outline the architecture of the current site, not by pages, but rather by **Page Types**."

As everyone gathered into groups of two, they outlined what they thought was an accurate representation of the current site according to page types.

Some of the outlines looked similar to out-of-the-box platforms that include, of course, the home page, department pages, category pages and product pages. Also, there are "about us" pages, the blog, and informational pages which were developed over the last two years.

The results were as expected.

As each group presented their findings on the Whiteboard, it was very evident that there was a fairly good understanding of the current site.

I returned to the front of the room and began the next lesson.

"Now let's talk about how to set up a site's architecture to ensure function-driven content and natural language processing can occur."

I began with standard templates from out-of-the-box content management systems and explained that most of the online competition doesn't expand beyond whatever system they choose to use.

I showed the first slide, which listed all the standard templates.

"Everyone has heard of a paradigm, right? If you want to identify your paradigm, all you have to do is discover all the constraints. In this case, they are page templates. We discussed this in detail before, and now we will take it to the next level."

Like clockwork, everyone in the group took out their notebooks or laptops and began taking notes.

"**Page templates are at the heart of creating useful content**. Page templates determine the type of content, products, variables, and functions required to create useful content."

"Since we are speaking about e-commerce sites, let's begin with the most basic set of page types or templates as discussed previously."

I listed the following:

- Department Pages
- Category Pages
- Subcategory Pages
- Product Pages

"Personally, I cannot imagine an e-commerce site with a more concise architecture than this, so we can begin here and then discuss comprehensive architectures."

I explained to the group that we would **not be discussing** checkout pages, confirmation pages, about pages, or any ancillary type of content. For right now we were only going to discuss e-commerce pages.

I held up a well-worn book I purchased more than 15 years ago that outlined information architecture in a comprehensive manner.

"One of the most useful books regarding information architecture is the famous 'Polar Bear' book.

"Anyone in IA, usability, site development and sales should read Information Architecture: For the Web and Beyond by Louis Rosenfeld, Peter Morville, and Jorge Arango. This book is one of the most highly rated technical books ever written for the Web.

We are going to go above and beyond what is inside of this book, because it did not specialize in e-commerce or search engine optimization.

We will begin with the highest level of e-commerce page, department pages."

Department Pages

"In the online grocery delivery business, developers try to mimic a grocery store. Often, the first navigation label says, "Browse Aisles" or something similar. Underneath this top navigation tab is a list of Departments. The usual suspects are displayed; Meat, Produce, Bakery, Canned Goods, and more.

In the apparel business, they may have a single drop-down that says, "Shop by Department" and then they list each department, such as Men, Women, Baby, Furniture, and so on.

These are what I refer to as **Department List Pages**. A department list page should not only list all of the products inside of that department, but also list multiple categories within that department.

The department list page and all other list pages should include 50 to 150 words at the top of the page, which I call **captions**. We will discuss this in greater detail at a later time, but the captions should describe what is on the page so that a person and a machine can make sense of its content and the context of the page and how it relates to other pages on the site."

Google (John Mueller) confirmed in 2020 that simply listing a bunch of products in a grid does not help search engines determine what that page is all about. It takes text and context.

> "There's also the situation where an e-commerce page has absolutely no informational content at all and is essentially just a list of products and from our point of view that is also hard to parse because we don't really know what this is about.
>
> We might find different brand names, different type names listed there with an image embedded there with them, but we don't really know are these shoes, shorts, sportswear, what is the overall goal of this page?
>
> Some amount of informational content is good, no informational content is kind of problematic and too much informational content is problematic so you're aiming for the center area there."
>
> ~ John Mueller, Google Webmaster Central office hours Sept 8, 2020.
>
> *https://youtu.be/9BWJoXtnks4?t=1539*

Pro Tip: It is much easier and intuitive for a person to review the content of the site by listing the departments across the top of the page without requiring an action like clicking on a menu or by hovering. Forcing a user to *CLICK* on a menu label to display the next level of hierarchy is less than optimal if it can be helped.

"This is an area where design, usability, and search engine optimization all meet in a Venn diagram of effectiveness."

Kevin and Jane, the company's main designers, began whispering to each other. Jane glanced at Kevin for a moment.

"Is that an absolute requirement for all sites?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we've tested our design multiple times and it seems to be aesthetically pleasing to searchers on the site. Are you saying that we need to change the design of our entire navigation menu?"

Jane looked a bit worried that I was going to mandate a site design change even though they had evidence that people liked it.

"What I'm saying is when there are department labels that CAN be listed and viewed above the fold without requiring a person to perform an action, like clicking on a menu drop down, that is preferred."

Kevin raised his hand in solidarity with Jane and asked a follow up question.

"Mobile devices always use a drop-down menu, so what is the difference?"

"That is true. The difference is that on mobile devices, people are used to performing an action to see a top navigation menu. However, this is not true while using a desktop or laptop. When a large screen is being viewed, requiring a click to uncover the navigation becomes an irritant. Since the screens are wider and people have larger monitors, it's best to show the visitors all the departments at once, when possible."

I reiterated the difference to ensure everyone understood.

"Usability testing shows that when the same type of click action is required on a desktop as a mobile device, it annoys the site visitor because on desktop, it is not necessary."

I glanced over at Kim to include her usability experience in the conversation.

"Kim, are you willing to work closely with Kevin and Jane, and any other designers that are included in the project? When they are creating the header section, top navigation, and side navigation it is important to ensure the site is user-friendly on both desktop and mobile devices, correct?"

Kim nodded in agreement.

"We have done multiple usability studies on mobile devices and desktop. The results are so overwhelming that people ask why they have to click on the hamburger icon if there is so much room to place a horizontal menu."

Kim looked over at Jane and winced. "Sorry…"

I continued with the presentation and also included Tim, who programmed most of the website himself.

"We want to make it easy for crawlers to crawl the site by using technologies that are universally accepted. The requirements for any changes to any menus and links on the site are to make those links HTML, not JavaScript."

To ensure they understood and will comply with the seemingly simple requirement, I told the story of a company that I had worked with only two years prior.

"I have seen billion-dollar, brick and mortar companies make this mistake and it literally costs them millions in organic revenue. Google requires HREF links to properly crawl a site."

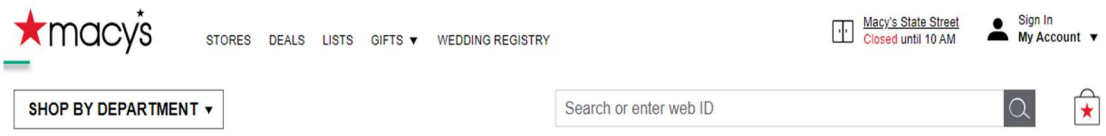
One company, which had 110 brick and mortar locations, earned about $6B in sales and about $150M in organic search revenue. When they migrated their site to an innovative design and technology, they forced the users and crawlers to click on a JavaScript menu to see category pages.

As a result, crawlers could not see or crawl the hierarchy of the site properly. Googlebot cannot perform a click. Rather, it reads the link and follows it.

The coupon pages, for example, became invisible to crawlers and the site lost important links from coupon affiliates. This was because the crawlers, ALL crawlers, can't click on a JavaScript link, so it goes nowhere like a Roomba stuck in the corner of a room. Google-approved linking standards are required to optimize crawlability and visibility."

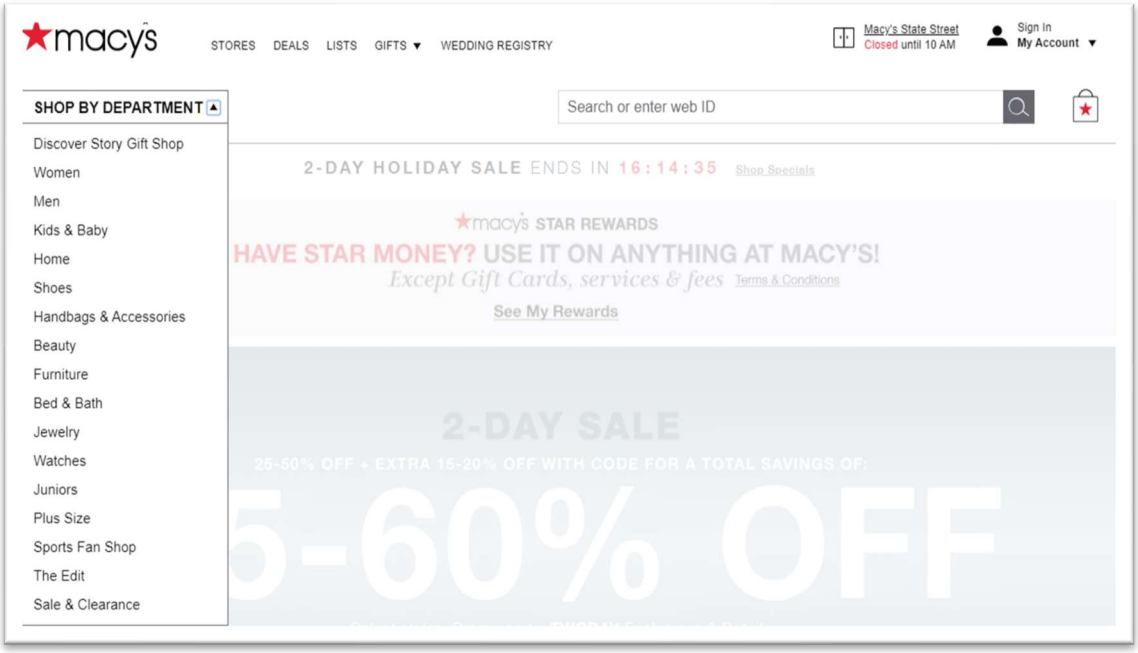
I cycled through a few other presentations and found examples from popular stores all over the United States from different industries.

"In the example below, you can see all the available space to display the department names. I made an adjustment to this page that you will be able to see on the next slide."



"What does this have to do with function-driven content you may ask? We are building a useful site with unique content."

Too many e-commerce sites have their most useful information hidden. The top of Macy's has a lot of white space available, and the search bar is almost half the width of their page. The usability is poor at best.

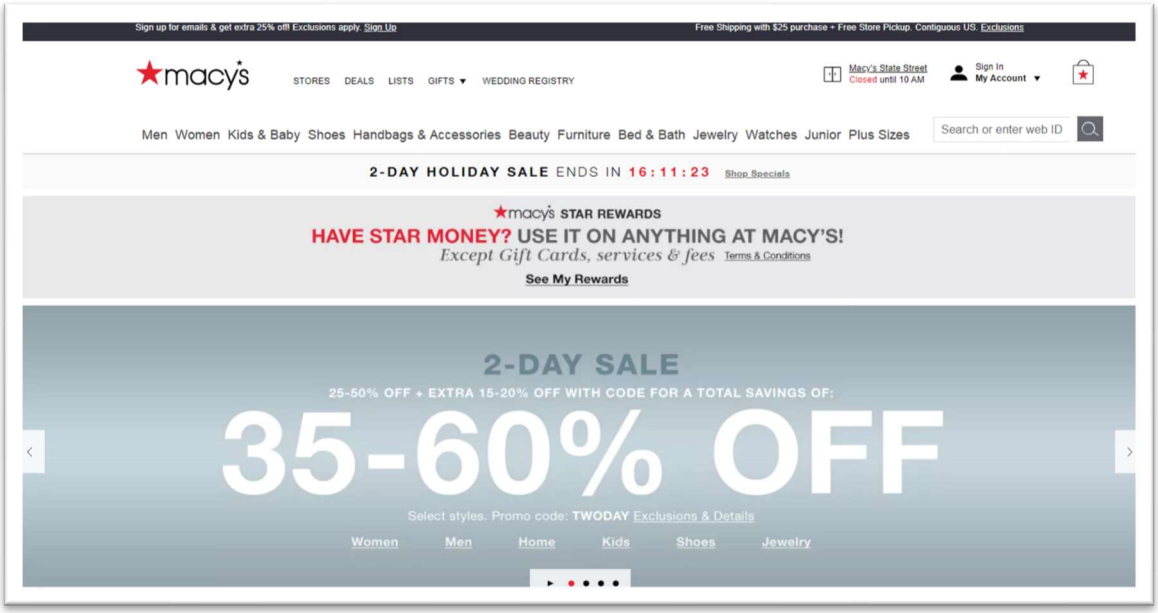


I demonstrated how the spacing and decoration of the department names below can always be adjusted slightly to accommodate useful information.

I showed my mocked-up version of the site with a visible horizontal menu.

"I re-built the navigation menu horizontally and reduced the size of the search bar. This works much better for readability, usability, and crawlability."

Kevin and Jane both looked satisfied that the page still looked aesthetically pleasing and didn't alter their hard work or creativity.



"As you can see the department and category pages are more apparent and crawlable. Crawlers can read the type of content and products on the site without following a menu system. This solution also eliminates the requirement of a visitor hovering over a menu or clicking any labels to see the rest of the navigation."

I finished my examples and tried to make my way back to taxonomy and natural language processing. We took a short break while I re-uploaded my original PowerPoint and notes and continued where the conversation ended.

Department Names and Labeling

A single department page holds the content for each category assigned to it. Often, the label on the menu and the actual name of the department are not the same. This is an important part of setting up a useful **Information Architecture for Function-Driven Content.**

I began to outline common mistakes that are made when determining what a navigation label should be, specifically to help natural language processing and function-driven content.

"The Men's and Women's Department should not be named Men's or Women's. This is a common mistake. The actual name might be [The Men's Department] or [The Women's Department]."

Immediately, several people raised their hands to ask questions. I pointed to the person that was waving his hand vigorously with wide-eyed exuberance. It was John.

"Why does it matter?" he asked.

"As the lessons progress, **we will actually use the information architecture to create sentences**. The name of a department matters, not just to describe what products exist within that department, but we will use that label in a sentence and that sentence must make sense to the reader."

That didn't seem to satisfy Tim one bit.

"Tim, if you name an entire Department '**Men's**' it won't make sense when you're writing a paragraph that begins, 'We have 1,250 shoes inside of our men's.' This type of sentence just does not make sense. What we want to do is **future-proof our information architecture** including our navigation labels so that we can use those labels inside of a sentence."

Tim opened his computer and began typing away. I assumed he was doing some research or checking email. He raised his hand after seemingly finding something on his computer.

"Houston, we have a problem. The table columns and data that feed the navigation menu have the same data as our page names.

So, when you were talking earlier about changing the page names (H1 tags) to include additional information like product count, category names, and the like, it would completely blow up our menu. Some extensive H1 tags might expand beyond the length of the menu width, in fact all of them will."

"I understand. I have found that this is most common with e-commerce websites. I don't want to get too far into the weeds on the technical aspects yet, but this problem has been solved in the past by doing 4 things:

1. Duplicating the H1 column in the database
2. Naming the new column H1 or page name
3. Changing the query slightly to include the new column name
4. Changing the page template H1 variable so that the menu label and the page name (H1 tag) can be separate"

Tim followed right along as if to visualize the database before the group's very eyes. He nodded as if to completely understand what was needed. The rest of the group just looked at Tim and seemed to relax when he affirmed that he understood.

"We may also want to create an alternative to a navigation label that can be used within the sentence, but we always want to make sure that we are strategically thinking ahead so that the words that we are using, and the descriptions also accomplish three things:

- The word describes the department accurately
- The word is intuitive to the shopper
- The word flows naturally when we use it in a sentence no matter how it is used in a sentence

This is the part that requires collaboration between marketing, search engine optimization, UX, programmers and our database engineers."

Forward thinking is required.

Tim initially thought he had run across a huge blocker. Luckily, this was not the first time the issue had come up, so the solution was easy.

"If a category page is going to reference its parent department in a sentence, that sentence would flow with a more appropriate name, a secondary name, wouldn't you agree?"

When we write content for category pages, we **do not want** a sentence to look or sound like the following:

> "We have over 527 suits including tuxedos, pinstripes, classic, suit separates and more within **Men's**."

Again, I reminded the group that teamwork, collaboration, and forward thinking would be required.

Imagine walking into a clothing store and asking, "Where is the Men's?" Intuitively, people do not speak this way. A more appropriate question would be, "Where is the **men's department**?" or "Can you tell me where the **men's department** is located?"

This is the type of mistake that often happens when IA is not strategized for writing function-driven content, natural language processing, or never considered at all.

The same is true for category, subcategory, brand, and product pages. When there is an option to use a slightly different name for a Department, Category, or even Brand Name, there is more flexibility in the database driven content.

A good formula looks like this:

> "We have [productCount] [category] items including [subCategory, 4], and more in [department]."

This produces useful, updatable, and specific content that can be used for hundreds of pages.

> We have **541 Women's Clothing** items including **dresses**, **pant suits**, **sweaters**, **blouses**, and more in **Women's Apparel**.

This can be used for many different department, category, and subcategory pages.

> We have **460 Men's Suit Separates** items including, **pants**, **vests**, **jackets**, **ties** and more in **The Men's Department**.

The functions and variables are plain to see. Later we will add internal linking automatically to those functions. This is how to leverage different strategies together for full optimization.

We displayed the following:

- Product count within the category
- Category name
- Four of the subcategories within the main category
- Department name (not the label)

Here is an example when we add internal linking and associate the page URL with each bit of data. This can be used, in part, as caption content at the top of the page.

> We have **541 Women's Clothing** items including dresses, pant suits, sweaters, blouses, and more in Women's Apparel.

> We have **120 Men's Suit Separates** items including, pants, vests, jackets, ties, and more in The Men's Department.

This template formula can be used on every single category or subcategory page, and it will flow using unique, specific, and updatable information. Always double check your work. Some tweaking may be required, but this saves time and allows that product count to always be accurate.

Also, we have not even begun to include incentives and benefits, just unique content with internal linking and text decoration. There is so much more.

Some websites try but produce confusing language on thousands of pages. They likely receive complaints from site visitors about the "weird sounding sentences."

Sometimes navigation labels must be shortened or abbreviated so as to not create menus with long text and knock the aesthetics and page formatting off.

Double check all your department, category, subcategory, and brand labels. Each of these can be displayed using functions.

Mandatory Department Page Features

- Title Tags
- Meta Descriptions
- H1 & H2 tags
- Captions / Page Descriptions
- List of Products w/ images
- Sale Price
- Savings % (msrp – sale price/msrp x 100)
- Reviews/Ratings (Total for that Department)
- Individual Product Deals (Coupons, Rebates, Free Shipping)
- Value Propositions (Best Seller, Highly Rated, Staff Choice)
- Schema & Open Graph
- Canonical

Additional Features of Department Page Templates

- Site-Wide, Department-Wide Discount with "Code"
- Product Count
- Highest Savings Percentage in Department
- List / Slider / Carousel of Categories within that Department
- List / Slider / Carousel of Popular Brands within that Department
- Trending Products
- Social Proof (How many sales in 30 days, total sold this year)
    - Purchases
    - Downloads
    - Ratings
    - Reviews
    - Sales in last 30 days

- Filtering System
    - Most Popular
    - Price (low to high)
    - Price (high to low)
    - Savings % Off
    - Avg. Rating: High to Low
    - Most Reviewed First
    - A to Z
    - Z to A
    - Newest First
    - In Stock/Out of Stock
- Also Purchased Items
- Popular Searches Related to Department
- Clearance / Closeout
- Shipping (Free Pickup, Free Shipping, and Free 2-day Shipping)
- Carousel of Recommended Items (Batteries, Hat, and Gloves with Jacket)

Thankfully, almost every feature here also applies to every other page template, including categories and subcategories.

I have included several page templates that make sense and should be included in every major e-commerce architecture. These are powerful strategies that can be created when there are **additional page templates**.

Brand Page Templates

One of the many benefits of having brand pages on your site is ranking high on the SERPs for short-tail phrases.

- [brand name] = **Vortex**
- [brand name + category] = **Vortex Binoculars**
- [brand-name + subcategory] terms = **Vortex Golfing Binoculars**

Brand templates should include information about the brand company, as mentioned before. Include information about the top product categories that are produced by that brand. Include internal linking to the main categories, b+c pages (up to four is adequate), and when review pages are created, add a link to the brand's review page and more.

A simple formula looks like this:

Template

> [brandName] has [productCount] [category] items including [url.subCategory, 4]. Browse our Huge [url.department] and check out all the great [url.reviewsDept] as well.

Result

> **Jonathan's Outdoor Gear** has **127 Camping items** including portable stoves, lanterns, coolers, sleeping bags, and more! Browse our Huge Outdoors Department and check out all the great Outdoor Dept Reviews as well.

This produces better brand content than your competitors because most do not even have brand pages, but you will have their entire history and specific information about the products and categories of products you sell from that brand, plus internal links to those pages, discounts, deals, ratings, and reviews, etc.

I would include much more information than this, but this is to help get you started. Remember to list all the products sold on your site from that brand.

Brand + Category Page Templates

Once a site has brand specific pages, then combinations of category-related pages can be created, as well.

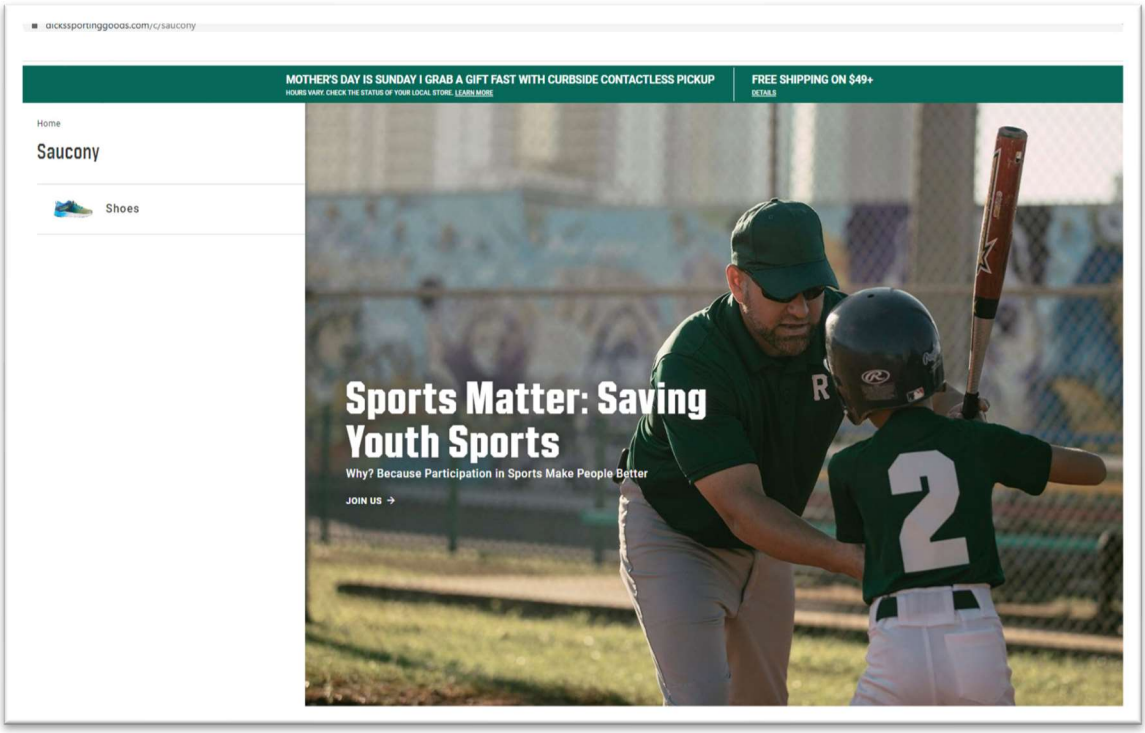
Brand templates aren't required for brand + category pages, but many internal linking opportunities exist when they are present. Internal linking is a valuable strategy that most sites do not implement.

Dick's Sporting Goods, which does not currently have a complete list of their Brand Pages, does list **Top Brands**. I suspect those "top brands" have paid for placement, which is why Google should be punishing their site with a manual penalty.

These pages are not featured near the top navigation, but rather in the footer, which decreases opportunities for usability and optimization.

On the Dickssportinggoods.com site, under the top brand page for Saucony, the only content on the page is an image of a coach helping a young child holding a bat (see below).

Not only is this **incongruent** with the products Saucony produces, but there is also no content on the page to associate all those Saucony shoe-related keyword terms.



Source: https://www.dickssportinggoods.com/c/saucony

There is a link that leads to the Saucony Shoes page (Brand + Category) in the upper left corner, but the Saucony page is **void of any content.** What a waste.

During a search, Dick's Sporting Goods ranks 21st for Saucony Brand Products and is listed on the 3rd page just below svsports.com, big5sportinggoods.com, and robertwayne.com which I'll bet you've never heard of or visited.

Unfortunately, Dick's Sporting Goods completely wasted an opportunity to gain a reputable link and produce useful, updatable content to help the customer. There is nothing here that encourages organic search visibility, ranking, or conversions.

The weakness of big-box stores is their reliance on Brick & Mortar sales. That's how many big-box stores operate today – total and complete lack of innovation, mediocrity, and dependence on walk-in traffic.

List of Updatable, Specific, & Unique Information

Below is a list of possible content that can be used for e-commerce and service-oriented websites. We will review all the benefits and strategies that can be implemented on a website on sections that produce results including Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, Page Names (H1 tags), H2 tags, Captions, and more.

Product Count

A product count might seem like it is just a variable, but a function is required to produce the correct number of products under that brand, category, or subcategory page template. Product count can be gained from each page template including:

- Department Pages
- Category Pages & Subcategory Pages
- Brand + Category Pages
- Brand Pages
- Deals Pages
- Brand + Deals
- Category + Deals
- Subcategory + Deals
- Brand + Category + Deals

Product Count is an important piece of content for e-commerce sites especially when used on Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, and H1 tags. Product Count conveys specificity, opportunity, and availability to a searcher.

Product count could be used as a signal to identify the site as an e-commerce site, as well.

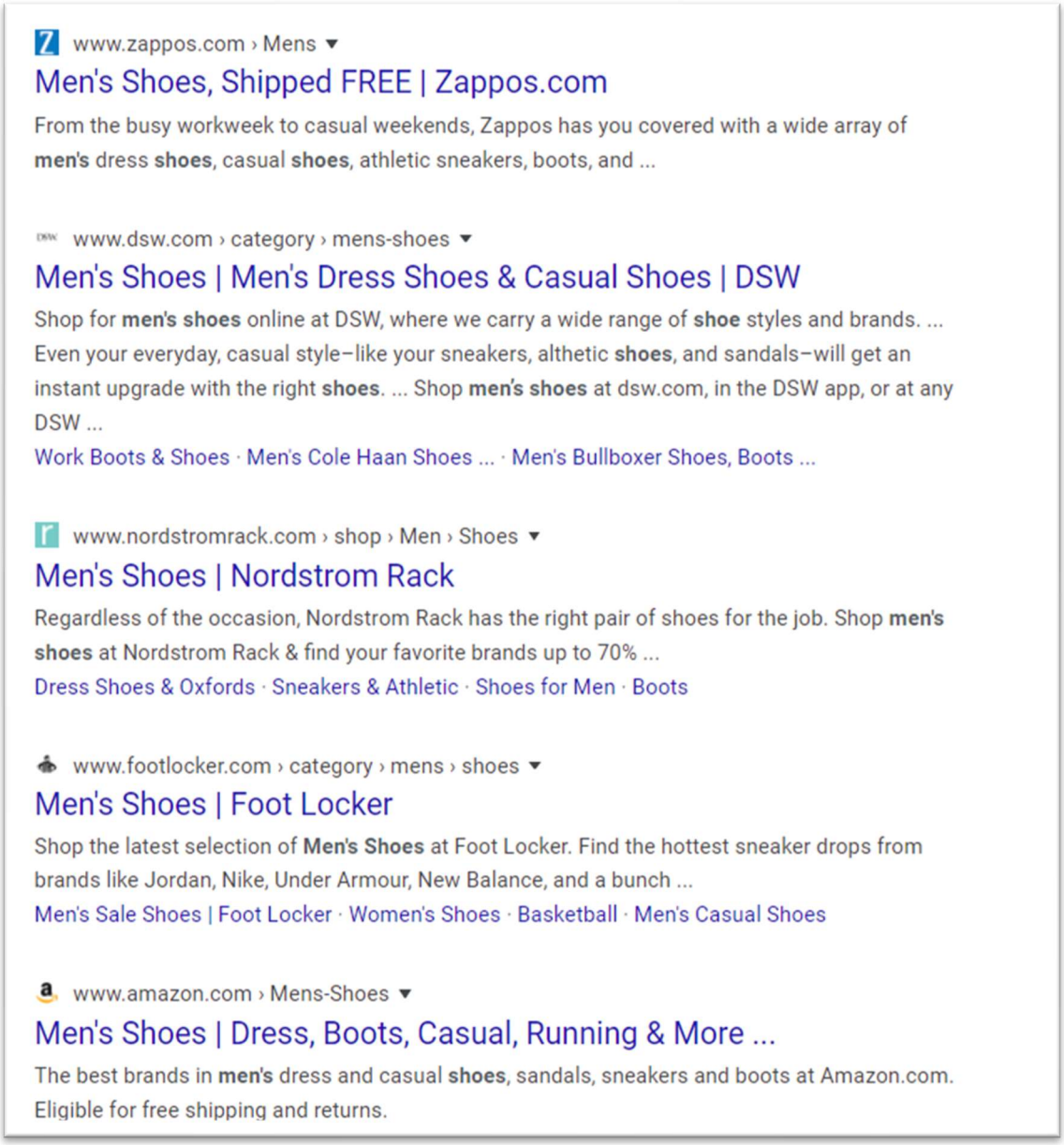
Differentiating between e-commerce and informational sites is important for Google to match the most useful pages to search queries.

Which Title Tag Compels YOU?

- Men's Running Shoes
- Browse 126 Pairs of Men's Running Shoes Up to 32% Off

It does not take much to beat the competition. Most e-commerce sites do not have specific information that compels a searcher to click on a listing.

These are the top 5 results when searching for Men's Shoes. There is only one benefit listed in Title Tags. Notice that listing is ranked #1.



Adding the **Product Count** in Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 tags and captions can be the first step to improving click-through rates and keeping those visitors on the site.

Single Item Hierarchical Text

Fancy name, simple concept. Most pages have this listed in the **breadcrumbs** already. We used this in some examples earlier and highlighted why it was important to label departments, categories, and subcategories used in a sentence. When we use a single item hierarchical text, we are grabbing that label and using it in a sentence.

Again, breadcrumbs are an example of single hierarchical text but are orphaned labels and do not need to be used in a sentence structure. The information is already on the page, so use it.

When using category templates, for example, we want to know what Department is associated with that particular category page. Displaying the department name on a category page is the use of that **single item hierarchical text**.

Example of an Online Floral Site

Dept Name: Flower Arrangements
Category Name: Get Well Bouquets

> We have 32 styles of Get-Well Bouquets with Vases. Save Up to 32% including next day delivery plus hundreds of **Flower Arrangements** available every day.

The same strategy exists for category pages, subcategory pages, brand pages, and more.

Example of an Auto Dealer:

- Department Name = New Cars & Trucks
- Category Name = Trucks
- Brand + Category = Ford Trucks
- Brand + Family = Ford F150

We have 26 Ford Trucks On Sale! Save Up to $3,000 in December with great deals on over 600 **Trucks** available every day.

It is easy to see how the first **function-driven template** can be used for many categories on that site. The **single hierarchical text** function can be used in a function-driven template for every category of cars or trucks on the site. The content produced will be specific and unique for every page.

This strategy provides specific and useful content that compels a searcher to investigate further, especially if it includes a link.

We can write content for a subcategory page like ***Running*** and reference its hierarchical parent, "Shoes." This is not difficult to do when writing custom content, but when using function-driven content, the page templates and hierarchy must be clear and predictable.

Now this type of caption is possible:

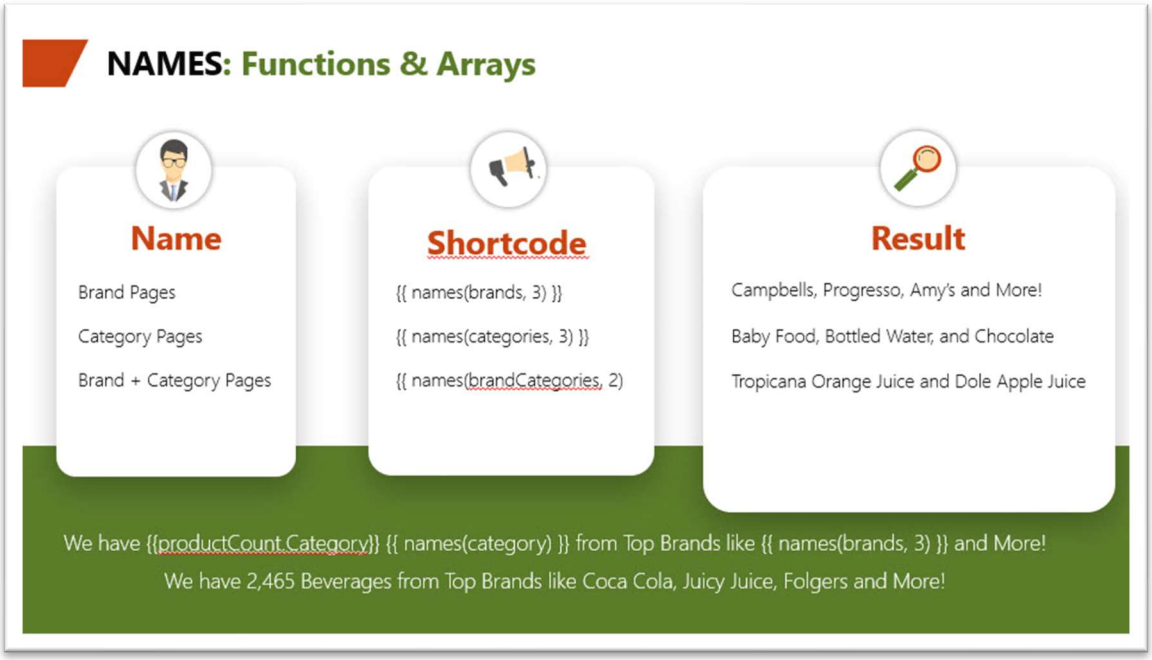
Template

> Our **[department]** department has **[productCount(category)] [category]** including **[subcategory, 4] [department]**.

Result

> Our **Shoes** department has **343 Running Shoes** including **lightweight, neutral, stability, and trail running shoes**.

Using Arrays to Display a List of Useful Information



You have already seen shortcodes that use arrays in previous examples, so this tactic will be easy to understand and implement.

Arrays used in Meta Descriptions, H1 tags, and Captions will help create useful and relevant content like listing categories, brands, and subcategories based on the page template and taxonomy of the site.

Here is a variation of the previous example outlining the array that was used to produce the list of subcategories.

Template

> Our **[department]** department has **[productCount(department)]** products including **[subcategory, 4] [department]**.

Result

> Our **Shoes** department has **343** products including **lightweight, neutral, stability and trail running shoes**.

The example above lists 4 subcategories in a series that relates to the category called running.

Using a similar template, we can produce useful content with a different type of site. It took 7 seconds to alter the template for a completely different site and product.

Template

> Our **[department]** department has **[productCount(category)]** types of **[category]** including **[subcategory, 4] [category]**, and more.

Result

> Our **Meat** department has **14** types of **steaks** including **ribeyes, t-bones, filet mignon, flank steaks,** and more.

If a visitor is reading a Meta Description, page name, or caption, it might make sense to list some of the top brands, categories, subcategories, activities, and other useful information. That is the power of using an array instead of a single hierarchical text. Both are powerful and should be used together.

One More Example of Function-Driven Templates Using Arrays

Template

We have **[productCount] [Category]** including **[brands, 3].**

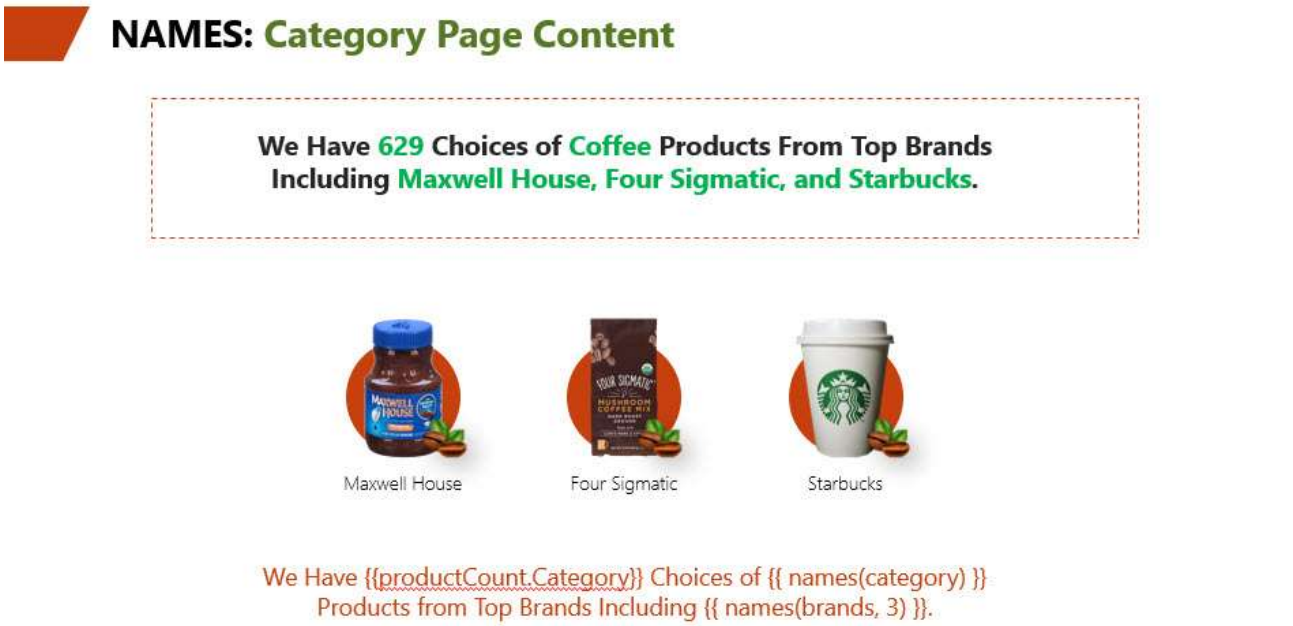
Result

We have **110 Backpacks** including **Osprey, Thule, and Jansport.**

When using arrays, the function should always include the word "and" between the last item and second to last item. Otherwise, it would not read correctly.

Not Good: We have 110 Backpacks including **Osprey, Thule, Jansport.**

The function that was written for the shortcode produces the results and is programmed to grab an array of brands inside of the Backpack category. The shortcode specifies how many brands should be shown. In this case, three.



If you are wondering which brands to display and in what order, you may choose from the following:

- Best sellers
- Premium brands (most well-known)
- Most products
- Highest priced
- Highest saving
- Best rated
- Highest profit (you'll have to call it something else like *Featured*)
- New brands

Most of the choices here are obvious, but at some point, a business decision must be made.

The function must grab the top elements according to your hierarchy.

Do not settle for alphabetical order. There are better and more profitable ways to order important information. Your database table may need to include a priority and that should be handled by your database team and programmers. Again, this is why collaboration is required.

On Brand pages, an ***Array*** of **product categories** can be included. Most brands sell products that belong in multiple categories.

Function-Driven Content Using an Array

Template

> [Brand] sells multiple [department] products including [**categories, 3**].

Result

> Dell sells multiple computer products including **Laptops, Desktops, Workstations, Monitors, Servers, and PC Accessories**.

The function could grab the top 3 categories associated with that brand.

The formula could be posted on **every single brand page template** in the appropriate area. Each time the page is visited, it will display the top categories for each brand page. The content is generated **automatically.**

A variation of that formula can be used in the Meta Descriptions or in the first part of a page description (caption) as well.

Function-driven content reduces writing time. Imagine writing one template that feeds 200+ brand pages. With this method, you just saved yourself about 4 weeks of writing.

We will discuss using **arrays and internal linking** to enhance link equity distribution in later chapters.

Savings % and $$ Amount

One of the most effective ways to influence someone in e-commerce is SAVINGS.

Listing **Product Savings** in Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 tags and Captions with internal links and text decoration can improve visibility, ranking, CTR, conversion rates, and organic search revenue.

Incentives compel people to act. Savings is one of the most powerful incentives. When your visitors see the same savings on the page as they do the SERPs, it wins trust and keeps the visitor on the page.

A Winning Strategy

There are multiple ways to display **Savings** depending on the page template. Exact savings, like the dollar amount saved, can be listed on **product pages**. Any product list page can display the highest savings percentage of all products within that list (e.g., Up to 32% Off).

A site needs 2 things to calculate savings: MSRP and Sale Price.

The calculation of savings can be done within the code, within the database, or on the fly:

((MSRP – Sale Price) / MSRP) X 100

($100 - $80) / $100) X 100 = 20% Savings <-formatted correctly of course
($600 - $450) / $600) X100 = 25% Savings <-formatted correctly of course

1. Program that result into a percentage

2. Propagate that variable in key areas to create an incentive

How To Make the Savings Function More Effective

On the web there has to be 10% savings or more displayed to compel a person to select a listing. This has been tested and retested.

Compels A Person to Click - Excellent Incentive

> Browse 40 Winter Coats for Women | Up To 46% Off
> Download MS Office for Mac and Save 32%

This Does Not Compel (discount too low)

> Browse 40 Winter Coats for Women | Up To **3%** Off
> Download MS Office for Mac and **Save 85 Cents**

Displaying "Up To 3% Off" **does not compel someone to click** on a listing. Not only does this not compel a person to click, but savings under 10% could be a disincentive. Most often, stores decide to limit sales information to items that are 10% off or more.

Before the function was fully vetted, we did receive complaints from visitors for listing a low percentage off. This prompted improvements to the function logic, which has now been active for over 5 years.

Product List Page Algorithm:

IF HighestSavings >=10% Show "Up to X% Off"

ELSE If HighestSavingsDollar >= $1.00 Show "Save Up To $X.XX"

ELSE If HighestSavingsDollar < $1.00 & >$0.01 Show "On Sale"

ELSE Show Nothing or "On Sale"

The last resort is to show "On Sale" or Do Not Display Anything.

Again, check your state laws and consult your attorney when determining conditional statements and the amounts that are not deceptive. E-commerce stores that offer products with higher prices might not be an issue, but a product with an MSRP of $1.49/lb. priced down to $1.39 is 6.7% and is only 10 cents. This might be cutting it close for a grocery store, but completely inappropriate for other types of products.

Product Page Algorithm:

IF Savings >=10% Show "X% Off"

ELSE If Savings >=$1.00 show "Save $X.XX"

Else If Savings<$1.00 & > $0.01 Show "On Sale"

Else Show Nothing

This means that only savings of 10% or greater will show the percentage off but if the savings is greater than $1.00, it will show the dollar savings and so on.

If there are no savings at all, the function will display nothing, not even a space. An empty space can alter the spacing and readability depending on the template for that listing, so we leave it off.

Depending on the type of product or service being sold, you can change the function to fit your industry or pricing structure. However, keep in mind that if small percentages are listed, it may demotivate a searcher from selecting your listing.

I remember in the beginning of this project, there was a product for sale that was $12.99 but the discount percentage was 8%, so the savings total was listed as $1.03.

Discretion, state law, industry, and product type should determine how savings are displayed and this is why working closely with your programmers is essential.

Internal marketing teams and tech professionals can calculate the algorithmic details and business rules, but creating a compelling incentive is the real goal.

- Portable Phone Chargers Up to 48% Off Today
- Portable IOS and Android Phone Chargers As Low As $49.99
- Browse 32 Portable Phone Chargers ON SALE Today
- Portable Phone Chargers Buy Today & Save $4.00
- Portable Phone Chargers Up to 32% Off + Mail-in Rebate
- Browse 12 Portable Phone Chargers $69.99 - Free Shipping!

Add Pricing Information

In many industries, simply listing the price provides enough incentive to attract potential customers or even increase average order value (AOV).

Industries such as car services, limousine services, manicure/pedicure, auto sales, men's haircuts and other products and services can entice new customers simply by displaying the price.

- Car Service to/from O'Hare $49 | Drivers, Inc.
- Manicure/Pedicure in Omaha $24 | Mary's Nails
- Men's Haircuts or Fades $15 at Xtreme Hair

E-commerce companies are bound by brand requirements, which are known as minimum advertised price (MAP).

MAP policies are perfectly legal under U.S. antitrust laws. MAP policies only restrict the **advertised price** of a product, not the final sales price.

Minimum advertised price is a requirement most brands put on their products to ensure resellers are not consistently underbidding their competition and lowering the perceived value of their products and brand name. E-commerce companies can display the minimum advertised price or the sale price so long as the sale price is equal to or higher than the MAP price.

Before function-driven content, marketers thought that the only prices to list in a Title Tag, Meta Description, H1 tag, Captions, or Schema Markup were prices that rarely changed. However, I will show you how to list prices that change often.

Though e-commerce companies are not responsible for the prices shown on search engine results pages, it is best to have all prices match as much as possible. Update your pages often to ensure frequent page crawling.

These are some reasons businesses do not list prices or savings:

1. Constant and never-ending updates
2. The fear of a complaining customer
3. Accusations of false advertising

These can all be a deterrent to innovation, until now! Simply republish the page whenever there is a content change including price, discount percentage, ratings and reviews, and the like. Many companies have a policy of hourly updates to any page that has a change in content, daily updates to high traffic pages, and often an entire site update once per week.

As Low As $X.XX

Most filtered navigation has "lowest price" options. You can also calculate the **lowest price** through functions and display them on list pages or on multi-variant product pages.

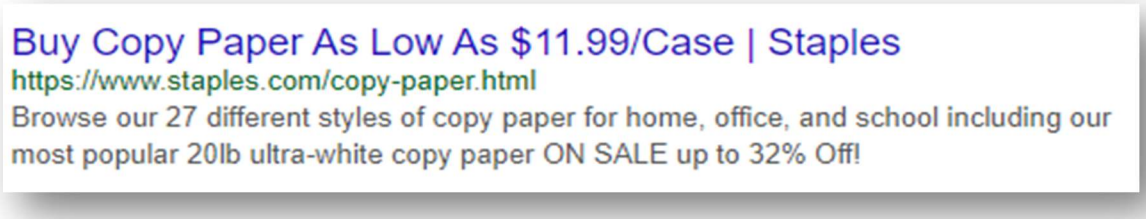
This template works for certain product types.

Title Tag: Copy Paper **As Low As $23.99**/Case at Lou's Office Supply

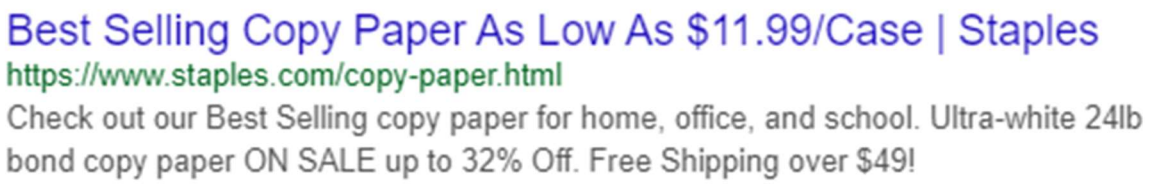
Template: [Product Name] As Low As [lowestPrice]/Case at [brandName]

Simply calculate the lowest price on the subcategory page for Cases of Copy Paper and put that in the Title Tag, H1 Tag, and Schema property (lowPrice: https://schema.org/lowPrice).

Below is a fake listing that shows exactly how the SERPs would look. Enticing isn't it?



Another consideration could be to combine **social proof + price** to stack the ad copy in your favor. Notice, listing "Best Selling" is a form of social proof on this fake SERP result.



Search engines and people prefer unique, updated, and specific information. Adding the actual price or the lowest price in a collection is an excellent way to provide useful information to potential customers.

Rank, visibility, click-through rate, conversion rate, number of transactions, and organic search revenue will improve, not to mention higher quality scores on Google's paid ads tools.

Action Words / NLP

Neuro Linguistic Programming is a way of speaking and writing that subtly influences perception and compels action.

Entire books have been written about NLP, including sales books, coaching, mentoring, therapy, and more. Well-written NLP usually goes unnoticed, which increases its efficacy.

Sample NLP Copy

> When you register for our newsletter, you'll receive information and tools to increase your emotional intelligence which helps increase trustworthiness and influence on the job with coworkers, supervisors, and customers.
>
> Studies show that the skills gained from an increase in emotional intelligence often lead to higher salaries, job promotion and leadership opportunities. As your emotional intelligence is improved, you will be more relaxed in stressful situations, think more clearly, and make better decisions. Register today!

Both paragraphs were filled with NLP. Did you notice the "**embedded commands**" throughout this paragraph?

"When you register" - I like this because it is an assumptive close. It does not say, "IF" you decide to register or "We invite you to think about the benefits of registering." This is a soft command (embedded command) that is not perceived as being pushy because it educates and entices the reader of the benefits they will receive upon registration.

It can also read, **register for our newsletter**, which is more direct.

"**You'll receive information and tools**" - The power of this phrase is not just the benefit, it is also the embedded command, "**receive information and tools.**"

The next one is "**increase your emotional intelligence**." You can see these are all commands, but they are not pushy, they are wrapped in a benefit.

We can go on with examples in these two paragraphs alone, but let's just take a look at the action words and commands in bullet form.

- Register
- Receive
- Increase
- Gain
- Be
- Think
- Make
- Register (again)

Often, embedded commands begin with an action word. The action words are embedded in a paragraph that is ripe with **benefits**.

- Increase Emotional Intelligence
- Increase Trustworthiness
- Increase Influence
- Higher Salaries
- Job Promotion
- Leadership Opportunities
- More Relaxed
- Think Clearer
- Make Better Decisions

All of these benefits are associated with the action mentioned in the beginning and end of the paragraph: **Register.**

Here is another version of that same copy.

> When you **register for our newsletter,** you'll **receive information and tools** to **increase your emotional intelligence** which helps **increase trustworthiness and influence** on the job with coworkers, supervisors, and customers.
>
> Studies showed that the skills gained from an increase in emotional intelligence often led to higher salaries, job promotion and leadership opportunities. As **your emotional intelligence is improved**, **you will be more relaxed in stressful situations**, **think more clearly**, and **make better decisions**. **Register today!**

Action words also communicate the type of information on the page.

- Download (Software or music - an action must be taken)
- Review (A single or collection of reviews)
- Check Out (Informational page)
- Browse (List of products)
- Buy (Product page, e-commerce)
- Compare (Benefits, features, price, availability)
- How To (Instructional or guided content)
- Learn (Informational page)

These action words may be a trigger to notify "intelligent" search engines of the content-type, which can correctly match a searcher's intent.

Even if search engines aren't that smart yet, it certainly notifies the searcher of the type of content that exists behind the link. Do you remember the fake results listing about copy paper? The first word in the Title Tag was "Buy." If that is too aggressive, perhaps, "Browse" would work just as well.

Date Function for New Products or Services

Website visitors have become accustomed to seeing the copyright year in the footer of a website homepage. Most web developers use a JavaScript variable to identify the current year, because it represents current and updated content.

This section is NOT about putting a variable for the copyright year in the footer.

Date Functions are useful in Ad Copy, H1 Tags, and Captions with internal linking, and text decoration, as well. Entering a variable for the current year might be appropriate for some content, but not others. Writing a date function provides flexibility.

A shortcode like [date(Year)] might be useful for the current year, but there may be other opportunities such as specifying the month and year to communicate updated content, new products, or current information that might be useful now.

Template

New [Category] Products for [date(year)] at Footlocker

- New Men's Running Shoes for 2023 at Footlocker

Many searchers value new and trendy running shoes rather than old styles, technology, and color. Feel free to add this template to enhance your site build-out and see some examples on the following pages.

New is sometimes associated with **better**. People often select listings and review pages that have current information advertised by the date.

The following Title Tags were all produced using the same function-driven template.

Template

Top 10 **[Subcategory]** for **[date(year)]** | Movies.com

- Top 10 **Action Movies** for **2023** | Movies.com
- Top 10 **Scary Movies** for **2023** | Movies.com
- Top 10 **Comedies** for **2023** | Movies.com
- Top 10 **Romantic Comedies** for **2023** | Movies.com

This example does not require someone to update the actual year on January 1st, which does not happen on most sites. This saves time and still provides accurate information.

Template

Government Holidays in **[date(monthYear)]** | FDA.gov

- Government Holidays in **January 2023** | FDA.gov
- Government Holidays in **February 2023** | FDA.gov

When "building out" the architecture of a site, **new templates** could be created for the following:

- Category and Subcategory
- Brand
- Product
- Brand + Category

People want to know that their research information will be current. Date functions usually improve click-through rate (CTR) when searchers are looking for new products.

Template

New **[date(year)] [brand] [subcategory] |** Best Buy

This formula can be used for each New + Category/SubCategory page.

- **New 2023 Dell Computer Monitors | Best Buy**

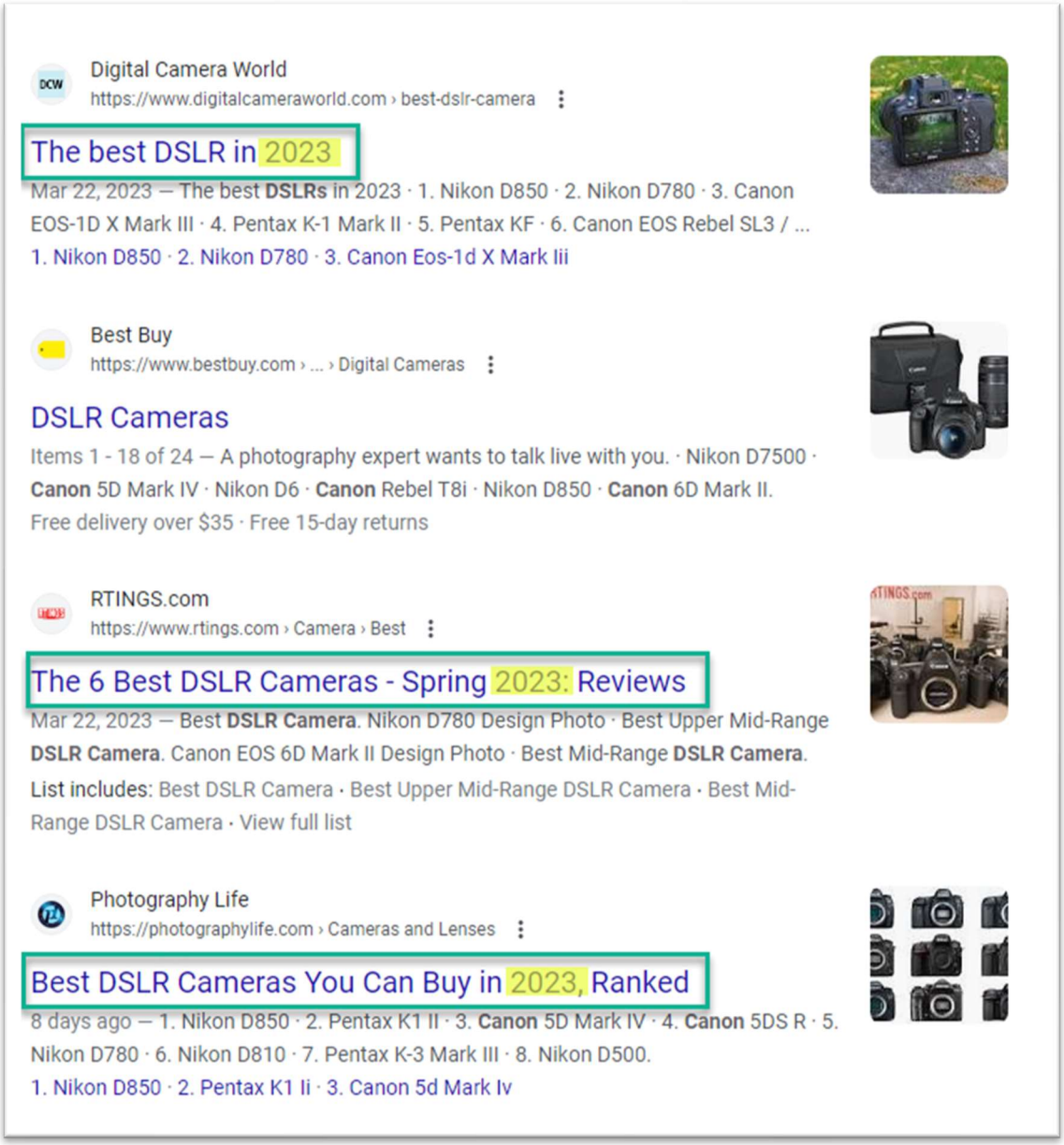
If you want to test formulas via A/B testing, changing formulas only takes minutes to affect hundreds or thousands of pages. Changing formulas back only takes minutes, as well.

Template Formulas & Results:

New [date(year)] [brand] [subcategory] | Best Buy
New **2023 Samsung Flat Screen Televisions** | Best Buy

Browse [productCount] New [date(year)] [brand] [subcategory]
Browse 36 New 2023 Samsung Flat Screen Televisions | Best Buy

Browse our New [date(year)] Selection of [brand] [subcategory]
Browse our New 2023 Selection of Samsung Flat Screen Televisions



Without using a word, phrase, or number to indicate the year, Google will assume the searcher wants the current year product when the word "new" is entered in the query.

* The search query was simply [**New Digital SLR Cameras**]

SKU, Product ID, Model Number

New SEOs and inexperienced marketers may question the listing of a SKU or Model Number in a Title Tag, Meta Description, or H1 tag. However, there are many reasons to list a product SKU, or an array of SKUs, depending on the site architecture and page template.

Page templates that benefit the most are variant product pages and multi-variant product pages.

SKUs can help differentiate between very similar products and pages to reduce the chance of duplicate content issues.

These pages could be seen as duplicate, even though the page content is slightly different.

- Nikon D3500 DSLR 2 Lens Bundle | Jim's Cameras
- Nikon D3500 DSLR 2 Lens Bundle | Jim's Cameras
- Nikon D3500 DSLR Camera 2 Lens Bundle
- Nikon D3500 DSLR Camera 2 Lens Bundle

One of the cameras above is gray and the other is black, but the database structure and template of Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, and H1s do not have the color automatically in Title Tags and other Meta information, resulting in some pages NOT even being indexed.

These four results only display the main product information, including Brand + Camera Model + Accessory.

Adding SKU can help ensure these pages are categorized as **different** to a machine.

- Nikon D3500 DSLR **#37847** 2 Lens Bundle | Jim's Cameras
- Nikon D3500 DSLR **#37857** 2 Lens Bundle | Jim's Cameras

We can also list specifications to outline the two different colors.

Function-Driven Content Template:

[color] [product name] **[sku]** [accessory] | [brand]

Using the above template produces the following copy:

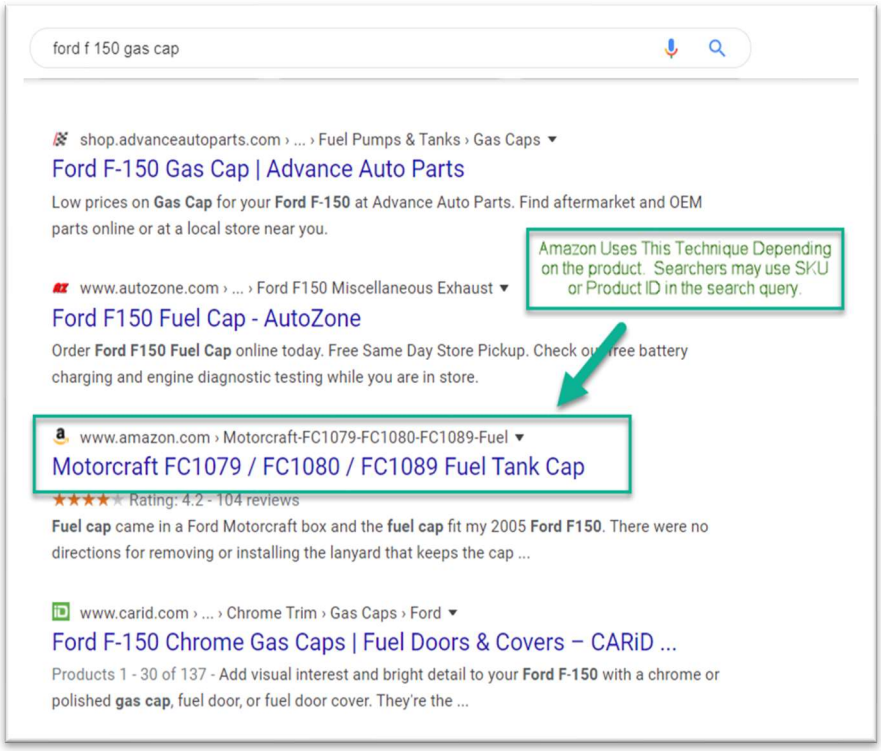
- **Black** Nikon D3500 DSLR **#37847** 2 Lens Bundle | Jim's Cameras
- **Gray** Nikon D3500 DSLR **#37857** 2 Lens Bundle | Jim's Cameras

Or

- **Black** Nikon D3500 DSLR Camera **#37847** 2 Lens Bundle
- **Gray** Nikon D3500 DSLR Camera **#37857** 2 Lens Bundle

John Mueller (Google's SEO Liaison) has repeatedly recommended **displaying individual pages as long as they are unique products**. Ad copy and page content should reflect uniqueness. Function-driven content can help ease the burden of listing that information manually.

Notice some real-world results in the image below. These sites take advantage of using SKU in the URLs and Ad Copy to ensure they are differentiated between other similar products.



If you notice, in these real-world results, the SKUs are not only in the Title Tag, but also in the URL listed at the top.

This is a strategy for an e-commerce site, obviously. In the example above, listing multiple SKUs clearly shows a multi-variant product page since there are 2 or more SKUs listed in the Title Tag.

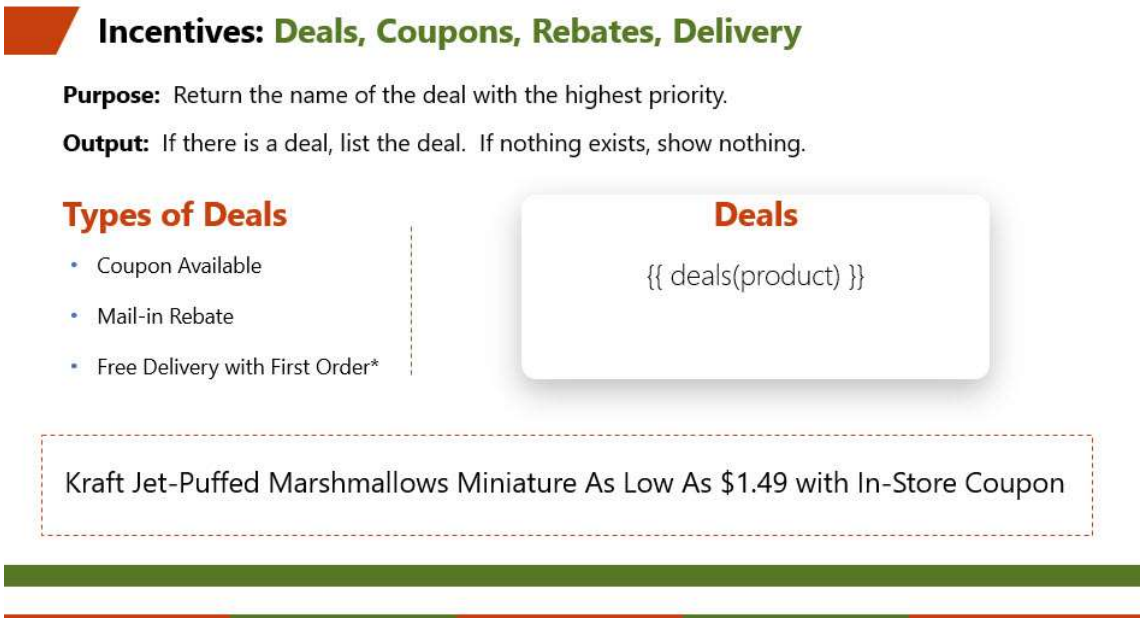
In a variant product page, each individual SKU would be listed. This serves two purposes:

1. The page is an obvious good choice when a person enters the SKU in a search query
2. SKUs prevent search engines from limiting the visibility due to perceived duplicate content

The SKU acts as **THE Differentiator** between 2 or more similar products.

Adding the SKU in the URL and the Title Tag helps prevent duplicate content throttling and takes very little writing. I recommend using the SKU in the page name and page content if the SKU is going to be used in the Title Tags and Meta Descriptions.

Deals & Discounts



The purpose of creating function-driven content is to produce unique, updated, specific, and useful content without writing much at all. One of the benefits often overlooked is the "updatable" part of the content. Incentives change often, so make it easy.

Most e-commerce companies have **in-store deals**, **specials**, and **discounts**.

Brands also have their own deals, specials, discounts, and associated incentives. The combination of these deals creates an opportunity to ***incentivize*** a searcher and site visitor.

Some deals may include:

- Buy 1 Get 1 Free / 2 for 1
- Buy 1 Save 25% on Another

- Save $15 Off $100 Purchase
- In-Store Coupons
- Mail-In Rebates
- Free Shipping
- Free Delivery (different than free shipping)
- Same Day Delivery
- Free 2nd Day Shipping
- Reward Point Incentives

Stacking monetary incentives compels a searcher to click on that listing.

When content is congruent with the ad copy, bounce rates are typically low, which indirectly helps ranking and visibility. Many believe this is the RankBrain Algorithm at work. Regardless if that is true or not, it works.

All good things happen when YOUR ad copy (Title tags and Meta Descriptions) matches well with the H1 tags and Captions with internal linking and text decoration.

Women's Boots Save 20% + In-Store Coupon | DSW
Browse our entire selection of 210 Pairs of Women's Boots On Sale Today including UGG, AquaDiva, Nine West & More at DSW Shoes.

Chicago Orthodontist: 1st Visit Free Gift | John Smith, DDS
We are accepting new patients through 2022. Cash discounts and we accept most insurance. Free Parking and Great Smiles!

Free Grocery Delivery for 6 months | Welch's Supermarket
Sign up today and receive free grocery delivery for 6 months including same-day grocery and alcohol delivery on purchases more than $59.

Search results on high-level stores are beginning to show incentives, but not the kind that can update immediately or update content throughout the site easily.

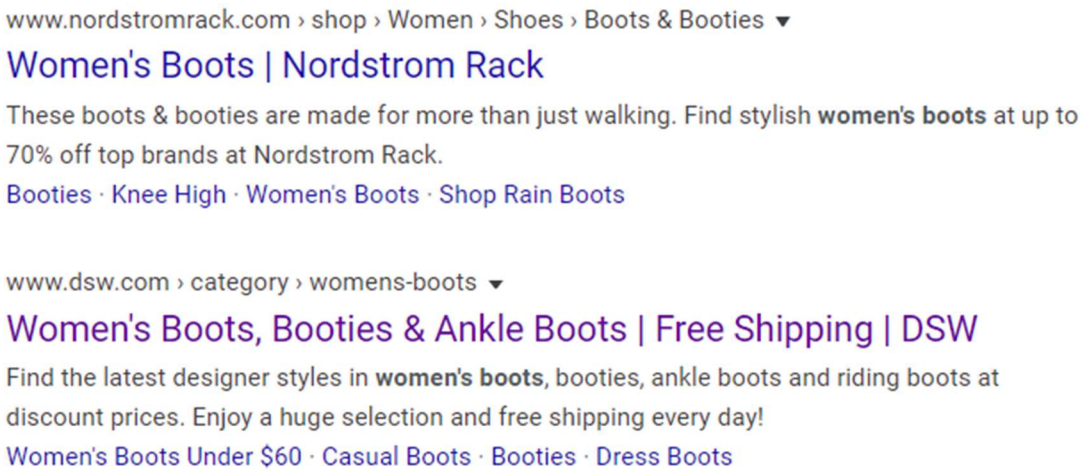
Never depend on Google to create your Title Tags and Meta Descriptions.

Google has no incentive to differentiate your store from your competitors

Google changes Title Tags and Meta Descriptions to their liking, depending on queries and page content, but Google has said the best way to reduce the chance of them from changing your ad copy is to create ad copy that is interesting or compelling.

Only YOU can differentiate your products and services. As much as Google representatives talk about how their algorithms can create good Title Tags, they will never be an advocate for YOU. Google's goal is to get as many people as possible to search using Google so that 10-20% of those searchers click on the sponsored ads - that's it.

Notice, the listing below has Free Shipping for DSW Shoes and in the Meta Descriptions for nordstromrack.com lists "up to 70% off." That incentive is actually in their Meta Description. Nordstrom is experimenting. Hopefully, they will eventually implement function-driven content.



In-Stock/Out of Stock

Displaying a product's availability as **in-stock** or **out-of-stock** may be crucial for customer service and user-experience. This function can be added to Meta Descriptions, H1 tags, captions, and product pages. Most e-commerce stores either only list in-stock items or they order the product list to display out of stock items at the bottom of the list.

Using this type of conditional formatting helps create a sentence that makes sense to the user and creates original and unique content that becomes useful.

For example, if there is a conditional statement that asks if the product is available and the answer is yes, this sentence can take place.

> "Since **[product-name]** is currently available, you may add it to your cart today and it will ship within 24 hours."

If the answer is no, this sentence is possible:

> "Although **[product-name]** is not currently in-stock, you may **add it to your wish-list** or **sign-up here** to be notified when it becomes available. Please also review similar products below that are available today."

We saw the importance of product availability content during the COVID-19 pandemic. This messaging may be important for drop-shipping or deals-type sites (Group-On). Remember: useful content is specific, unique, and updatable.

Implementing Social Proof

I was driving my daughter to school one day and took advantage of a teachable moment. We stopped behind numerous cars waiting impatiently at the stop light adjacent to a grocery store. There were 30 people waiting in line for the "grand re-opening" of this local grocery store - it was 7:20am.

I leaned over to my daughter and said, "Do you see the long line of people waiting to get into the grocery store? They are all paid actors. The store paid them to stand in line this morning while all the cars passed."

"How do you know, Daddy?"

I pointed out the smiles and patience of all the men and women in line, none of them had children with them.

"No one would be smiling while waiting in line at a grocery store this early in the morning. Anyone waiting in line that early would be annoyed, in a hurry, and frustrated. Have you ever seen a line around the block at a grocery store?"

Aldi was using **social proof** to get people talking about the store's re-opening. Demonstrating value by using a line of people with smiles can be much more effective than simply buying a Grand Re-Opening banner.

The best thing about social proof is that even when a person knows the technique is being used, it still works. I went into the store for the first time ever, 2 weeks later. I was curious.

There are many ways to demonstrate social proof online. Let's take a look.

- How Many Items Sold, Total $$ Sold, Total Sold in the Past 30 days
- Popularity of Site (3rd party reviews)
- Product & Category Reviews & Ratings
- Number of Members
- Shares to Social Media/Likes
- Number of Views & Comments (Profile photos are important)
- Celebrity Endorsements (Free is best)
- Industry Experts/Ambassadors
- Pop-up of people that just completed a purchase
- Testimonies (show real people, verifiable, links to their profile, etc.)
- Trust Seals & Security Certificates (Verisign)
- Customer Ratings on 3rd Party Sites
- Creating Scarcity Means It Is Popular

Adding social proof helps click-through rates and improves conversion rates.

The beauty of posting your own social proof on the ad copy and within the page copy is that **you can control the social proof** without having to depend on Google algorithms.

For example, it is best to show ratings and reviews when a certain threshold has been achieved. Typically, ratings above 4.2 are very helpful. Anything below 4.0 may be detrimental. The good news is that those ratings can be posted in the Meta Descriptions and updated when the number of reviews or ratings change.

Do Not Depend on Google to Show Rich Snippets

Creating functions for social proof can include conditional statements to ensure natural language is being used in content.

SEO SUPERPOWERS

There are several ways to **synergistically improve** ranking, visibility, click-through rate, clicks, transactions, and organic search revenue. When combined, these strategies improve your organic search in greater proportion than if they were applied individually.

SEO SUPERPOWER #1 - Stacking Strategies

The power and possibility of rapidly improving organic and paid search revenue occurs when displaying function-driven content and strategically **stacking unique, updatable, and specific information** in Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags, and captions with internal linking and text decoration.

Posting one incentive or benefit on your organic search listing may help improve a few percentage points in click-through rate. However, **posting 2 or 3 incentives or benefits in your ad copy and top-of-page content will rapidly increase** those KPIs.

Function-driven content is great for organic AND paid search revenue. The image below helps demonstrate the full possibility of stacking function-driven content.

This is a fake SERP result. However, notice how it encourages/compels a person to click.

> Browse 128 **Men**'s **Winter** Coats Up to 32% Off | **Coat** Rack
> https://www.thecoatrack.com/mens-winter-coats
> **Men**'s **Winter** Coats starting at $89.00 up to 32% off. Our **Men**'s **Winter** Coats have 4.6 Ratings with 189 reviews from verified buyers. Free Shipping!

Title Tag Template
Browse [productCount] [subCategory] [Savings] | Coat Rack

Meta Description Template
[subCategory] starting at [lowestPrice] [savings]. Our [subCategory] has [ratings] with [reviews] from verified buyers. [deals]

These templates can be used for all subcategory page Title Tags and Meta Descriptions.

With a few minutes of editing and testing, the same formats can be used for category level Title Tags and Meta Descriptions as well. Thousands of pages can be improved in minutes instead of weeks or months.

Visibility, ranking, click-through rate, calls-to-action/transactions, and revenue all increase as a direct result of unique, updated, specific content. This is achieved by adding relevant content to the page and ad copy.

How many incentives and benefits are optimal? **TEST IT!**

Begin stacking two incentives or benefits in the Title Tags and two or more in the Meta Descriptions… then track the results.

People respond to benefits and incentives, particularly ones that are specific and address saving money and time, not to mention adding convenience. Your particular business may be slightly different, but in general these are good policies for any site.

Sell the Sizzle, Damnit!

Stacking functions can be extremely effective since some searchers may be interested in value and convenience, while others may be interested in price. Stacking functions also allows the ad copy and site content to present compelling incentives and benefits to different audiences.

Here are a few examples of Title Tags with two incentives or benefits:

- Dell Laptops Up To 32% Off + Free Shipping
- Dell Inspiron Chromebook 14" Save $200 + Free Gift
- 4K Drone Cameras 12% Off + Mail-in Rebate
- CrossFit Classes 20% Off + Free Parking | Windy City CrossFit

Meta Descriptions can follow the same strategy, sometimes using the same or similar incentives or benefits.

> Check out over 30 Dell computers including laptops, desktops, monitors, and workstations. Save Up To 30% + FREE 2-Day Shipping and Mail-in rebates on select products.

> Register for a FREE CrossFit class today and receive 20% off annual membership. Join Windy City CrossFit and become one of the family. Free Parking!

Browse 629 Tents including 2-Man, 4-Man, and 8-Man 3 season and 4 season tents for camping, family trips, and multi-day hikes. Up to 48% off plus Free Shipping Over $99.

Pro Tip: Always ensure the H1 tags are congruent with the Title Tags, but not duplicated.

Adding a **Product Count** function in the Title Tag of a list page may help improve your site's credibility. This is when "specific and unique" content matters.

Adding a **Savings** function in the Title Tag and corresponding H1 tag may improve click-through rate and perhaps conversion rate, as well. A person expects the landing page to be congruent with the ad copy from the SERPs. When they do, conversion rates typically increase.

If a developer creates a price function for product page Meta Descriptions, it could prompt a searcher to click on it, no doubt. Combine all three strategies and magic happens.

Buy Women's Shoes Up to 26% Off | Macy's

Browse through 1,348 pairs of women's shoes On Sale every day including discounts up to 26% off dress shoes, flats, high heels, and even running shoes in more than 26 colors.

*** The same template can be used for a different industry ***

Buy Computers Up to 18% Off | Micro Center

Browse through 328 laptop computers On Sale every day including discounts up to 18% off Chromebooks, MacBooks, Touchscreen, and even Convertible (2-in-1) laptops in more than 5 colors.

SEO SUPERPOWER #2 - Brand Links

You Only Need 1 Link to Your Brand Page.

Most e-commerce sites are happy to get a link from a brand website like Under Armour, Patagonia, Nikon, Dell, Kraft, Nike, and others.

If a site sells Nikon Binoculars, a link to your site from Nikon.com is a HUGE WIN! Google sees this as a very reputable backlink, in fact, the MOST reputable.

- Highest Authority
- Most Trustworthiness
- Extremely Relevant

Nikon.com is not going to link to just any site, however.

Almost any site that sells Nikon products can receive a link from some generic map application or dedicated page that lists resellers. Most brands have a "Where to Buy" feature on their site.

A link to your homepage offers very little competitive advantage.

The biggest reason to have BRAND PAGE Templates is to create the best possible chance to get the most trustworthy and relevant link to the **most congruent page** possible – and then internally link to YOUR MONEY PAGES.

A simple request to link to their dedicated brand page **on your site** is all it takes. After years of communications with brands and manufacturers, more than 70% have dedicated pages with Map applications or lists on "Where to Buy" pages. You just have to ask.

When the brands that you sell are aware that you have a special page that highlights their products, they are happy to add or change the link to their brand page on your site.

Request the Brand link to **THEIR BRAND PAGE** on your site.
(e.g., yoursite.com/brands/nikon.html)

> A link from Nikon.com to **your Nikon brand page** ON YOUR SITE is much better than just a link to your homepage. This type of link is the most reputable and trustworthy backlink possible. Then, link to your money pages within the captions.
>
> Win-Win-Win!

When Nikon links to the Nikon brand page on YOUR site, ensure you have the following:

- A description of the Nikon brand
- Internal links to related pages with text decoration
- A list of Nikon products, just like it was a category list page

This equals the **best of the best** link building strategy for **e-commerce organic search**. Guess what? No one else is doing this!

This has been tested and proven over the course of many years. It works!

I worked on an e-commerce site where the main link building strategy was to obtain links from the brand's website to THEIR brand page on our site. That company has been the leader for short and long-tail queries in part due to this strategy. The results were amazing and can be implemented by you, starting tomorrow.

Our competitors would have 4-8 times more backlinks to their site, but they made a mistake and had the big brand sites link to their homepage. Most didn't bother to have a brand page at all.

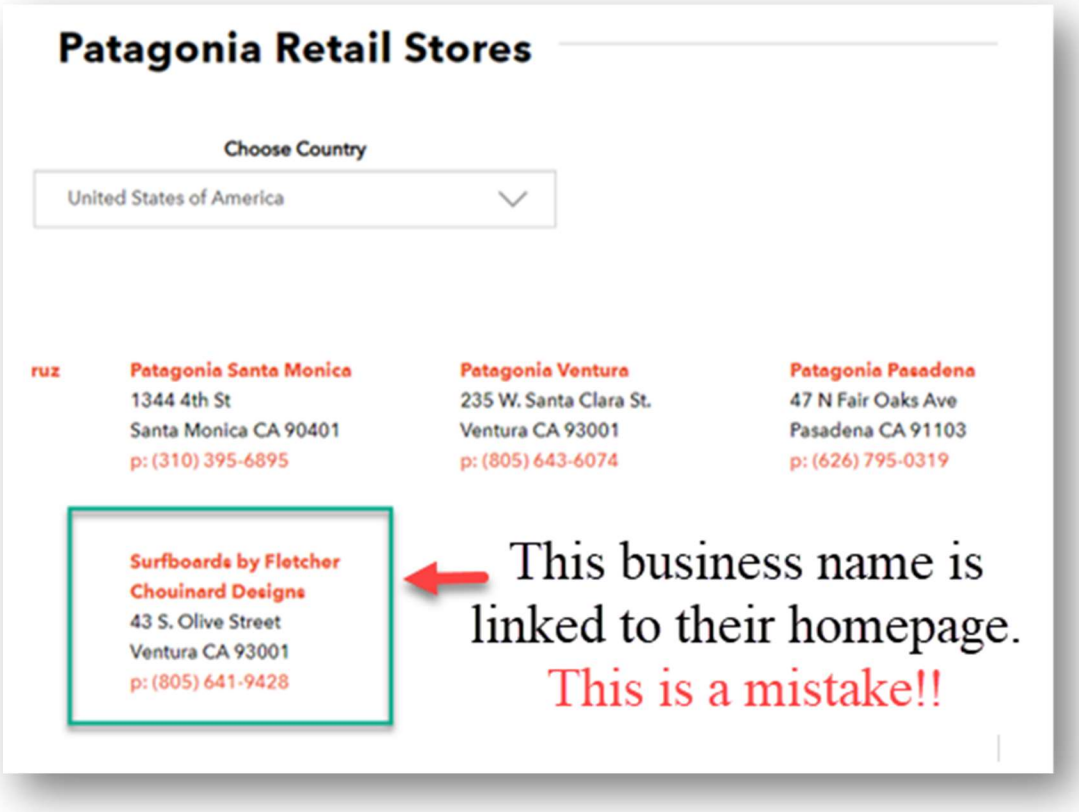
This mistake costs them millions every year, not to mention poor rankings.

After tracking our top 15 brands every month, our average position for each brand name was 2.4. Our competitors were between 15th-60th position. Brand + Category keywords also outranked our competition. I tracked this every month and would include this metric in monthly reports. It works.

If Google is looking for the most relevant and reputable links, a link from the brand company to your brand page about **their** company would certainly qualify as the most relevant and reputable.

Additional Results: Our internal linking strategy included putting html links to category and brand + category pages related to the brand, as well. This allowed those "money pages" to also rise in the rankings. If a brand page is getting the most relevant link possible and that page is linking to additional relevant pages, four pages improve, not just one.

One single link to the brand page from the actual brand rose organic search ranking for hundreds of high performing pages.



Again, the **next-level strategy** is to create content and create internal linking that leads to category pages and brand + category pages like Patagonia Winter Jackets, Patagonia Women's Coats, and Patagonia Down Insulated Men's Jackets.

This is a winning formula!

Without having specific brand pages on the site, this entire strategy is impossible. Make it possible! You'll have more congruent pages on the site and many brands, blogs, and bulletin boards will link to them.

Always remember to list **incentives** and **benefits in Ad Copy** to outperform your competition, as well. Billion-dollar e-commerce companies don't do this - you can beat them with function-driven content.

MAKE SURE BRANDS LINK TO **THEIR BRAND PAGE!**

Anchor Text, Internal Linking, & Link Equity Distribution

I worked on an SEO project for a small business a few years ago. This e-commerce site had been online for more than 15 years, but was underperforming due to its poor design, lack of content, and terrible information architecture.

This site provided the quintessential small business e-commerce experience with single-image product pages that were photographed with bad lighting, user-unfriendliness circa 2002, and everything else that would deter a person from making a purchase from that site. They earned revenue from catalogues, and they still did well. Yes, catalogues!

The navigation menu was organized by the owner's wife who had no prior knowledge of, or experience with, information architecture, usability, optimization, e-commerce technology, or best practices in online retail.

It seemed her guiding principle, when it came to navigation development and user-experience, was her internal voice and intuition. She tried to copy her competition but failed there as well.

Despite having an e-commerce site, the company's business model was quite literally dependent on sending product catalogs via the U.S. mail and then waiting for the phone to ring.

With a small marketing budget and full access to their site, I wrote Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags and Page Descriptions (Captions) with internal linking and text decoration for 100 list pages. These list pages included Department, Category, and SubCategory pages.

There were no Brand pages and we agreed that product page development might come later.

The total writing time to manually write 100 pages of content, as outlined above, was 50 hours.

Within six weeks after launching the pages, the total number of keyword phrases associated with the site rose 400% and online sales more than tripled, including calls due to organic search traffic. No new pages were created, just an improvement in ad copy and the addition of 200-300 words with internal linking and text decoration.

This site content began with manufacturers' descriptions, product images, prices, and whatever the default ad copy was from the random plug-in they used for SEO.

Using some of the techniques in this book, I completed the work in about 5 weeks. Each page took 30 minutes to update. Please remember, I was writing this content manually.

We had yet to establish function-driven content for this site.

I had to implement the principles of function-driven content manually in order to convince the client that my strategies worked.

When the owners saw a 400% increase in visibility and the phone began ringing with qualified customers, they expanded their optimization project and increased their budget to include ad copy using function-driven content.

Why Did This Work?

Google can only associate words with a site or a page if **words are used in copy** or keywords are used in image names, alt tags, image captions, and the like.

Words. Text. Writing.

When more useful words are added to the page, in a strategic manner, the site visibility, ranking, and traffic increases naturally. I cannot overstate the importance of internal links.

The most interesting graphs, charts, and images will never rank if there are no words surrounding them to provide context, descriptions, and benefits.

Internal linking is a huge part of helping Google understand the content and context between pages, categories, products, and more.

For the most part, **Google ignores boilerplate content** like navigation, headers, and footers. Linking content from one area of your site to the other (where appropriate) allows Google to make associations and assign appropriate words and phrases to each page. Your content will rank because there is a greater understanding of the site.

Anchor Text is the text used to create a site link - internally or externally.

Click Here

Google leadership has stated that internal linking and anchor text helps provide them, in part, with the data needed to associate words and phrases with websites and pages. In the mid-2000s, the most linked keyword phrase was CLICK HERE. When Google announced that the words used to link to a page were calculated into the ranking and visibility, people began to utilize more strategic phrases.

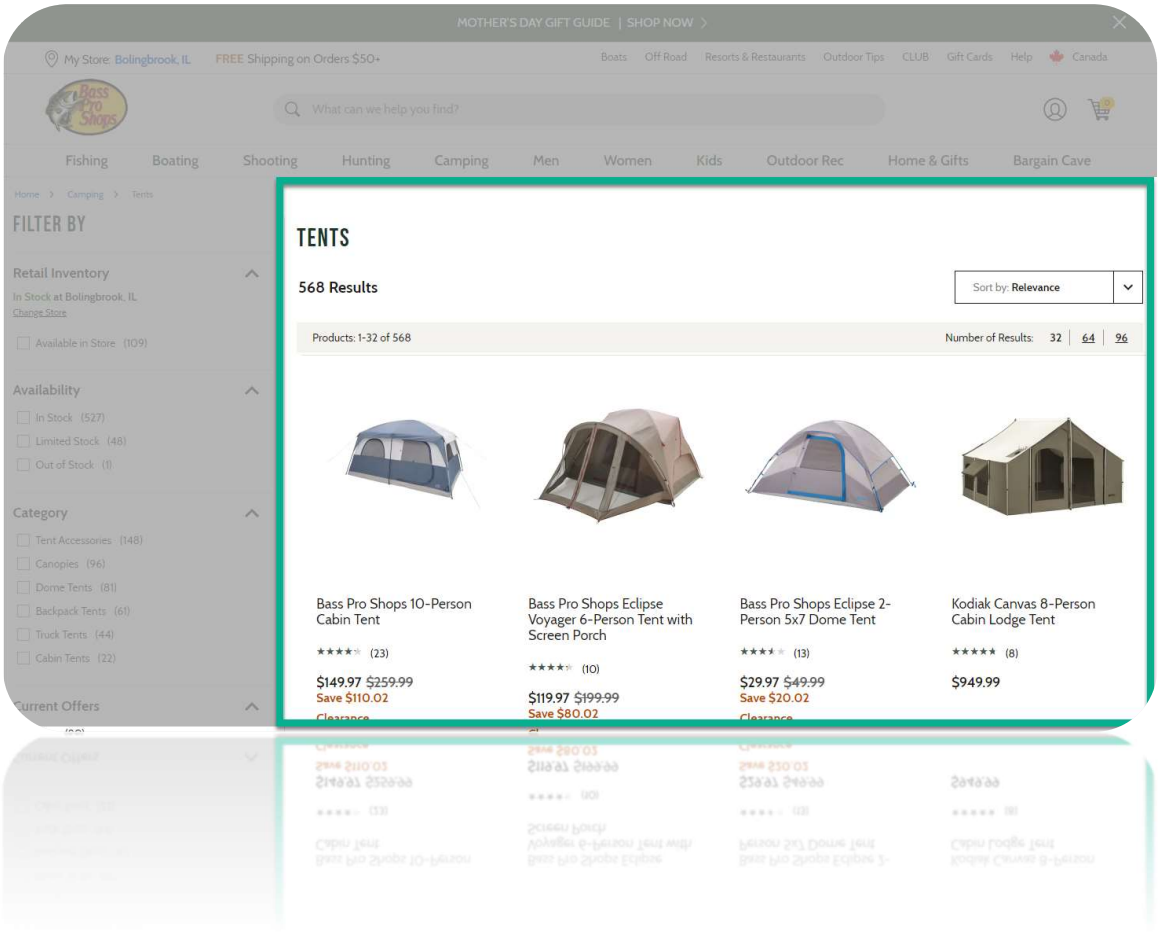
Used Ford F150 For Sale

Navigation mega menus don't help much. Again, all boilerplate areas of the site including headers, footers, and left and right columns, do not help much either, if at all.

Pro Tip: Website navigation is not considered internal linking!

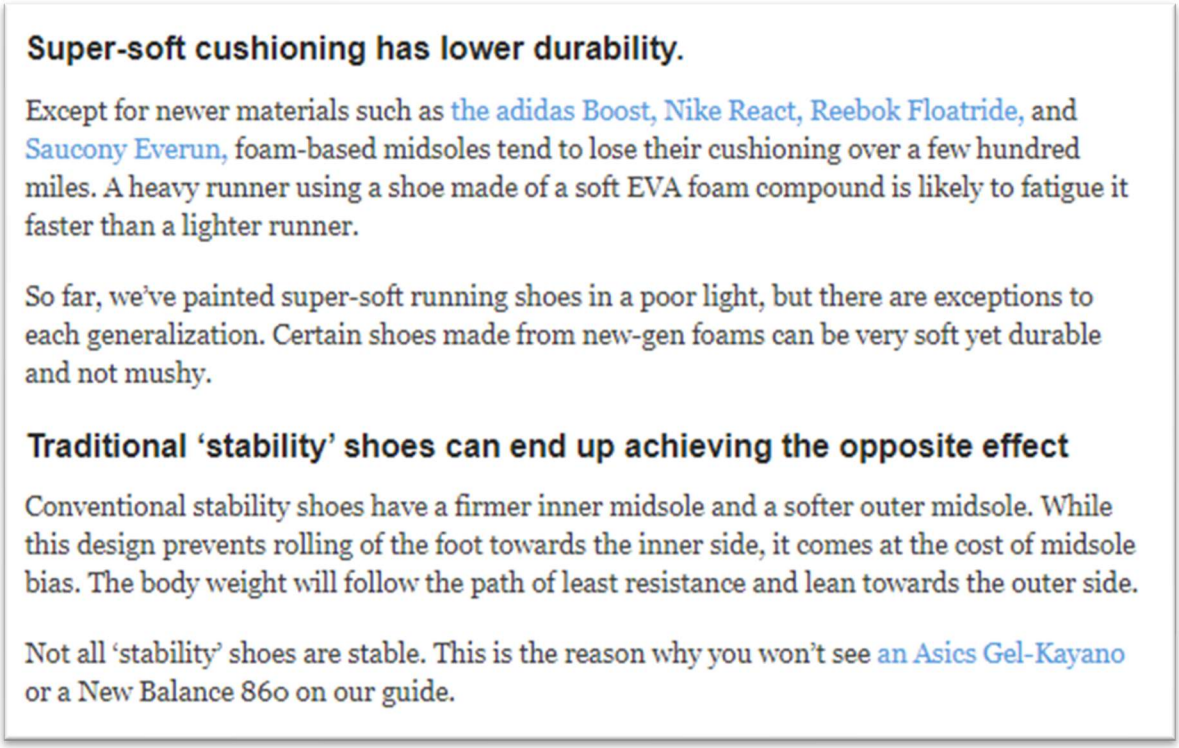
Please repeat that to yourself 100 times. It helps Google crawl the site, not add context.

The content of a site, as per Google, is outlined in green. This area represents **the page content (to Google)**. All **boilerplate content on a page is stripped away** when determining the page content quality, content, and context.



If you want to study internal linking and text decoration best practices, simply visit an **SEO affiliate site** for electronics, fashion, or apparel. Often these sites demonstrate the best practices taught by Google and reputable digital marketers that train top SEOs.

Affiliate websites typically have excellent, useful, and well-linked content. Notice the example below of a well-ranked affiliate site about men's running shoes. Notice all the places with internal links and text decoration.



Super-soft cushioning has lower durability.

Except for newer materials such as the adidas Boost, Nike React, Reebok Floatride, and Saucony Everun, foam-based midsoles tend to lose their cushioning over a few hundred miles. A heavy runner using a shoe made of a soft EVA foam compound is likely to fatigue it faster than a lighter runner.

So far, we've painted super-soft running shoes in a poor light, but there are exceptions to each generalization. Certain shoes made from new-gen foams can be very soft yet durable and not mushy.

Traditional 'stability' shoes can end up achieving the opposite effect

Conventional stability shoes have a firmer inner midsole and a softer outer midsole. While this design prevents rolling of the foot towards the inner side, it comes at the cost of midsole bias. The body weight will follow the path of least resistance and lean towards the outer side.

Not all 'stability' shoes are stable. This is the reason why you won't see an Asics Gel-Kayano or a New Balance 860 on our guide.

Source: https://www.solereview.com/best-running-shoes-for-heavy-runners/

The actual page listed above contains **16 internal links**, all with different styles of texts, including the name of the shoe brand + model of the shoe. The screenshot above shows five of those 16 links. Here are the sentences from that page that include internal linking and good anchor text:

- The Transcend was the first official stability shoe
- But the GTS 19 is a markedly different shoe than
- The Glycerin 17's midsole and upper design
- such as the adidas Boost, Nike React, Reebok Floatride

When I searched "running shoes for big guys," this site was ranked second in organic search. Internal links are a major ranking factor and should be integrated into function-driven captions.

If you are not strategically adding internal linking and text decoration to the top-of-page content, you are simply not optimizing your site.

Function-Driven Internal Linking Using an Array

Adding functions that produce links to relevant pages is extremely useful when displaying captions. If you remember the array section that displayed 2, 3, or 4 categories or subcategories, the addition of links to that information will help with internal linking and ensure there are no broken links to internal pages.

You can easily see the shortcodes below and how they produce useful content.

Template:

Take a look at our computer brands including **[urlBrands, 3]**.

Result

Take a look at our brands including Lenovo, HP, and Dell**.**

Template

We have [productCount] types of **[urlDepartment]** including **[urlCategories, 3]**.

Result

We have 254 types of fruit including apples, bananas, and blueberries.

Template

[Brand] sells multiple [department] products including **[urlCategories, 6]**.

Result

Dell sells multiple electronic products including Laptops**,** Desktops**,** Workstations**,** Monitors**,** Servers**,** and PC Accessories.

Template

We have [productCount] **[urlDepartment]** including **[urlCategories, 5]**.

Result

We have 4,895 Vehicles including sedans, coupes, sports cars, trucks, and minivans.

When templates include internal linking to categories, brands, department pages, subcategory pages, or review pages, your site will qualify for more phrases and rank higher in the SERPs.

Stacking arrays and **function-driven internal linking** is the secret weapon for the most powerful SEO technique for on-page optimization.

Conditional Statements = Useful Sentences

A simple example of using a conditional statement when the site policy is Free Shipping Above $49.99 is as follows:

If the item price is equal to or above $49, then display **FREE SHIPPING**, otherwise display **FREE SHIPPING over $49**.

When used on Title Tags and/or Meta Descriptions, the listing on search engines will read FREE SHIPPING on those items above $49 and it will be a major incentive for a searcher to click on that listing.

There are three reasons why using conditional statements will improve Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags, or Captions.

1. Maximize the Incentives and Benefits Available for Each Page
2. Provide Unique, Specific, and Updatable Content
3. Ensure Proper Sentence Flow

The planning and creation of each function should be discussed with the entire marketing team, programmers, and database professionals to ensure data is always accurate, up-to-date, and to ensure sentence flow and continuity are maintained.

Use-cases should be created, not JUST for people, but for page types and data availability. Create three or four writing variations and alternative content types for each SEO section, such as Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, and H1 Tags.

Worst case scenarios should be brainstormed, and contingencies should be created to ensure content integrity is maintained.

Strategic planning ensures the results show up correctly, the spacing is correct, and the phrases and sentences flow in a natural way.

Mistakes are made when conditional statements are disregarded.

Conditional statements help eliminate missing data errors.

Tents FOR SALE + | Outdoor Tents

Notice the missing number and the plus sign (+) placed next to the vertical pipe, this does not compel a person to click on that listing.

If there are no tent products that have a discount, the content does not show up in a user-friendly way. The savings and/or deal function creates an empty variable. This disrupts the auto-generated ad copy.

Conditional statements protect your content and ensure proper grammar and flow.

When hundreds or thousands of pages are being rendered, a few may slip through the cracks. This is preventable by using conditional statements.

Conditional formatting on the template side or conditional formatting within the actual FUNCTION can take care of many exceptions found while conducting use-cases.

Template

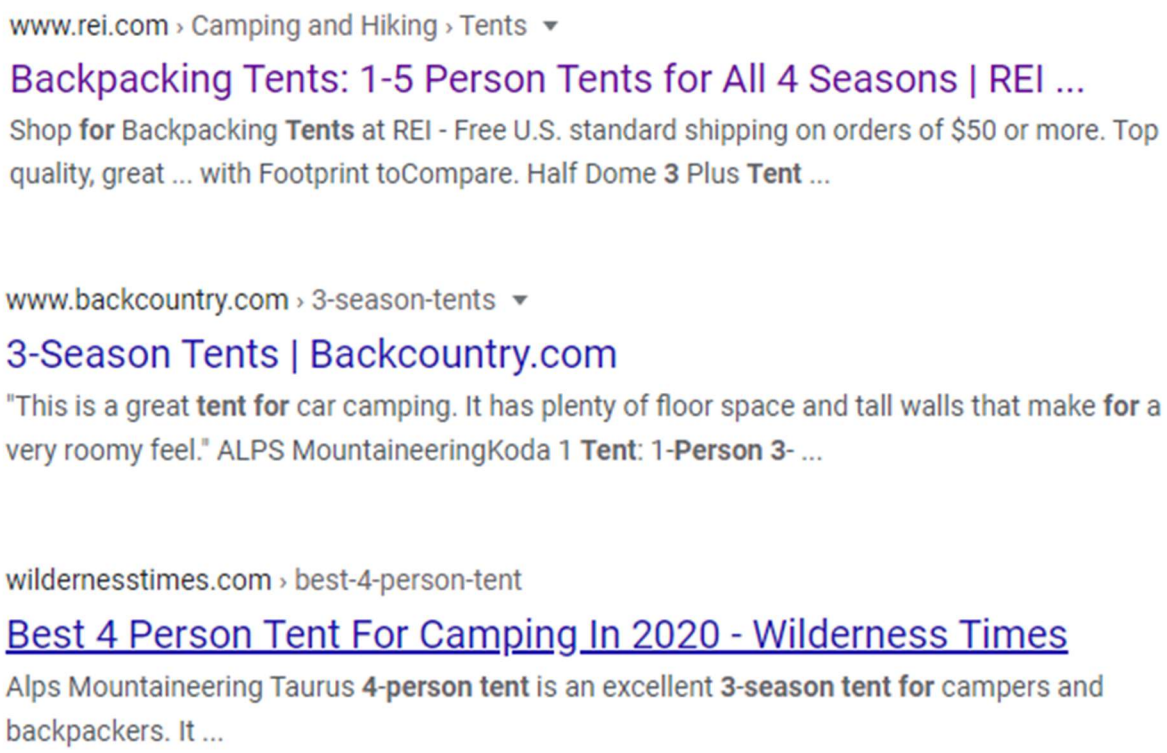
> [Category] For Sale [Savings] + [Deal] | Outdoor Tents

Result

> **No Savings:** 4-Man Tents For Sale + In-Store Coupon | Outdoor Tents
>
> **Savings:** 4-Man Tents Up To 32% Off + In-Store Coupon | Outdoor Tents

Even though this is not exactly a well-constructed sentence or phrase, the result is better than 99% of Title Tags, today. Both results are within the character limit of Title Tags, too.

Here are several examples of Google results for "**4-man tents 3 seasons**." Notice these results do not have any incentives or benefits even though there is plenty of space and room for more characters in at least two of the Title Tags.



Conditional statements can improve the output and results from Function-Driven Title Tags.

What if there is no DEAL, but there is a SAVINGS percentage?

Result: 4-Man Tents For Sale Up to 32% Off | Outdoor Tents

This is a great Title Tag!

That same function, on a product page, can produce **32% Off** or **Save 32%**, depending on how you design the output content.

Again, there should be several conditional statements within the function itself.

We discussed earlier that if a discount is less than 10%, it does not typically motivate a person to click on that listing or buy that item. In some cases, if the percentage is less than 10%, a strategy could be put in place to simply **show the dollar amount saved**.

- Save $30.00
- $18.00 Off
- $8.00 Discount

The output of the function changes depending on the page type. Those are conditional statements based on the marketing team's agreed-upon standards and thresholds.

With conditional statements in the template, we might code the Title Tag like this:

Template

> [Category] For Sale**<% ifExists.Savings%>** Up To [Savings]% off**<% endif %>** | My Store

Result

> If No Savings: **Tents For Sale | My Store**
>
> If Savings: **Tents For Sale Up To 32% Off | My Store**

The template works even if there is no incentive or benefit available. No one is **required to update that page**, or the thousands of pages that might exist on your site. The data changes in the database and the content changes on the site. When the content changes on the site, the content changes in the SERPS when Google recrawls the page. That's a win.

Adding a conditional statement allows flexibility in messaging and branding. Let's take a look:

Template

> [Subcategory]<% **ifExists.Savings**%>[Savings]<% elseIf %> For Sale**<% endif %>** [Deals]| My Store

Result

> **If Savings & No Deals:**
> 4-Man Tents Up To 32% Off | My Store
>
> **If No Savings & Deals Exists:**
> 4-Man Tents For Sale + Mail-In Rebate | My Store
>
> **If Savings & Deals:**
> 4-Man Tents Up To 32% Off + Mail-In Rebate | My Store
>
> **If No Savings & No Deal Exists**:
> 4-Man Tents For Sale | My Store

In this scenario, if there are no savings associated with a list or product page, the system will add the phrase **For Sale**. The result is **4 possible outcomes for a Title Tag.** With conditional statements, a message can read **Free Shipping,** if the product is over $49, otherwise **Free Shipping over $49**, would appear.

Savings Algorithm

Conditional Statements	Display
If Savings >= 10%:	**Up To X% Off**
If Savings Does Not Exist:	**<empty cell>**
If Savings <10% and > $1.00:	**Save $X.00**
If Savings <10% AND <$1.00:	**On Sale**

Many other options are available depending on the page-type and depending on the creativity of the template.

Beyond Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, & H1 Tags

The incentives that compel a person to select an organic or paid listing should be congruent with the actual landing page content. In other words, if the Title Tag has a **discount code**, there should be an obvious **discount code at the top of the page**, confirming that the incentive is real and available.

The first two seconds of a visitor's experience should affirm their choice in clicking on that listing. The captions should **almost guarantee** that the searcher will continue their investigation once they see that the benefit or incentive viewed on the SERP is real, otherwise they would not have selected the snippet.

When a searcher sees incentives or benefits that have specificity, they expect to see the same incentives and benefits listed on the landing page, above the fold. Paid search marketers know that adding detailed ad copy on paid listings should NEVER lead to the homepage of the site. Without that same information present, people bounce. Bouncing ruins the possibility of converting a searcher to a customer or buyer.

Landing page content, including images, sales graphics, icons, text decoration, and internal linking, should all be congruent with the Title Tags and Meta Descriptions that compelled the searcher to click in the first place.

Do Not List Products Alphabetically – This is Lazy Programming.

Products on a list page are typically ordered by keyword relevance or alphabetically. This is a mistake.

When a person reads an incentive or benefit on the search engine results page and then the landing page does not display the best of the best, the page seems bland.

To ensure a visitor stays on the page and investigates further, include monetary incentives or social proof.

Order the List Page by Monetary Incentives

- Highest Savings
- Priced Lowest to Highest
- Priced Highest to Lowest

Social Proof

- Most Reviewed
- Highest Rated
- Best Selling

If the Title Tag lists "Up to 32% Off," the first screen on the landing page should be ripe with savings, benefits, deals, 4-5 star-rated products and great shipping information.

Unfortunately, I have seen large e-commerce companies display products with missing images in the first several rows of a product list. Pitiful. The above-the-fold display should list the cream of the crop.

Review the top 3 rows of your list pages right now. Are they ordered by Highest Rated products first? Are they rated by Most Reviewed products first? Are they rated by Highest Savings products first?

They should be.

Captions (Page Descriptions)

Captions, in this context, does not mean the description of an image, but rather the **description of the page** and how it relates to the taxonomy of the site.

Think of a caption as a comprehensive Meta Description, except the caption **is placed at the top of the page.** We have referred to this many times in previous chapters, so let's dig in.

A page caption may include:

- 30-500 words
- 1-3 paragraphs
- Strategic Hierarchical Content
- Internal linking
- Text decoration

Captions can be the **most valuable content on a page**, especially for e-commerce pages. Most e-commerce companies do not have captions because SEOs and content writers think all captions must be **manually written**. This is not true.

If you were to review websites that land on the 1st, 2nd or 3rd page of Google for any popular category or search term, you will rarely find decent content, let alone a description above the fold. This does not mean it doesn't work, it means **everyone is too lazy to do it**. I know that seems like a harsh statement, but I stand by it. When you see sites with captions and internal linking, you'll notice they rank well and usually beat the competition.

The default, for the last 20 years, has been to simply list the products in a grid with product names, prices, and maybe the percentage off.

Again, Google has mentioned numerous times over the past 10 years that **internal linking** is an excellent way to help Google understand the site and the page. Internal linking increases visibility of your site. I recently ran a test on 25 pages and compared them to pages without captions on the same site, the results were more than an 800% improvement in visibility versus the pages without captions + internal linking and text decoration.

It is important to mention that internal linking has been a **known ranking factor** for more than 10 years. Google representatives like Gary Illyes, John Mueller, and even as far back as Matt Cutts, have recommended internal linking and captions to help Google understand a site.

The metrics that improve when captions are added to pages include:

- Visibility (your site appears for more keyword phrases)
- Ranking (your pages will likely rank higher)
- Bounce Rate Decreases
- Sessions (usually)
- Transactions
- Conversion Rate
- Organic Search Revenue
- Average Order Value

Without captions and internal linking, there is little known about the relationship between pages, categories, subcategories, brands, and review pages.

Without contextual information, by way of captions, Google computer programs and software algorithms are forced to try to associate meaning with minimal page content. When they fail, your pages remain unseen.

If there is no real page content outside of product listings, it is difficult to build those associations, context, and relevance. When that happens, websites will rank for fewer keyword phrases. Detailed captions with internal linking and text decoration fix this issue.

Function-Driven Content allows digital marketers to create useful, updatable, specific, and unique content without writing much at all.

Do you remember that small business client I discussed earlier? The one where I wrote 100 captions?

New data and information were added to the site – without the need for keyword research.

In other words, there was no keyword research conducted. There was not a single important keyword that was added to the site that did not already exist on the site or menu.

The increase was created by writing page descriptions with internal linking and text decoration to the department, category, subcategory, and brand pages.

Captions with internal linking and text decoration, above the fold, produce the best results.

Many sites place sentences at the bottom, just above the footer. This is a mistake often recommended by **usability specialists that do not follow optimization best practices**. They assume people do not want the information at the top of the page, but they fail to test their theories. Few people scroll to the bottom and Google has preferred above-the-fold content

since 2011, at least. If a person does not care about the content, they ignore it (banner blindness). There is no downside to adding captions with internal linking.

> "Important content should be at the top. If you put it at the bottom, we assume it is not important, so it is treated as such." ~ John Mueller

This is a perfect opportunity for SEO and UX to collaborate and find a solution to ensure the content of a caption is located on the first viewable screen of a landing page.

Placing content at the bottom of a page certainly is not optimal for man or machine. Afterall, you want people to read it, right? The content, link decoration, and bold-faced keywords help a person confirm this was the page they thought they would get when they clicked on the SERP.

Placing content at the bottom of a page is not helping the user and Google always says, write content for people, not algorithms. Therefore, placing captions at the top is a win-win strategy.

Not to mention, if a person were going to keyword load their pages, they would not load the pages with keywords at the top, they would do so at the bottom. The assumption from Google is that a site is trying to optimize for SEO not people; that is why it is not as effective.

5 Benefits of Placing Captions at the Top of a Page

1. People can **affirm the Title Tag and Meta Description was congruent** with the H1 Tag (page name) and captions.

2. Users can **read the best content** to help them decide to buy.

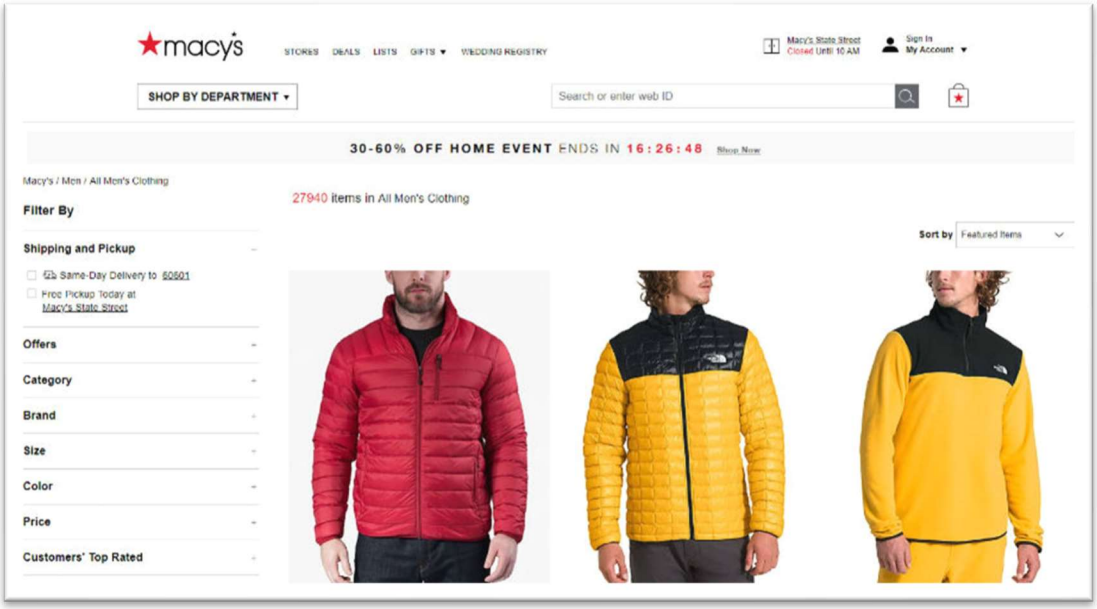
3. Site owners can display the best content that **entices a visitor to buy** – win/win.

4. Users **will always see the top of the page first** and make a judgement as to whether the page is useful or not. This is not true if the content is at the bottom.

5. A good **caption,** including incentives, benefits, coupons codes, product counts, and text decoration, **overwhelmingly influences a person to remain on the page, navigate further, and take the desired action.**

6. Bounce rates improve which **helps ranking, indirectly**.

If this page had a caption of even 70 words, including text decoration and internal linking including incentives and benefits, it would improve the visibility and likely the ranking of related pages, as well.



Add Internal Linking and Text Decoration Like This:

> Browse all of our **Men's Clothing products** including 27,940 items from 35 categories. **Save Up To 65%** on pants, shirts, jackets, and shoes from more than 200 **Top Brands** like Lucky Brand, Tommy Hilfiger, Van Heusen, Buffalo David Bitton and more.
>
> Visit a Macy's Store at State Street today or order online. Sign up for emails and get an extra 25% off with some restrictions. **Free Shipping over $75.00**. Order Today!

This unique, specific, and updatable content generates using function-driven content, which is what **Google and people** are craving - Useful content.

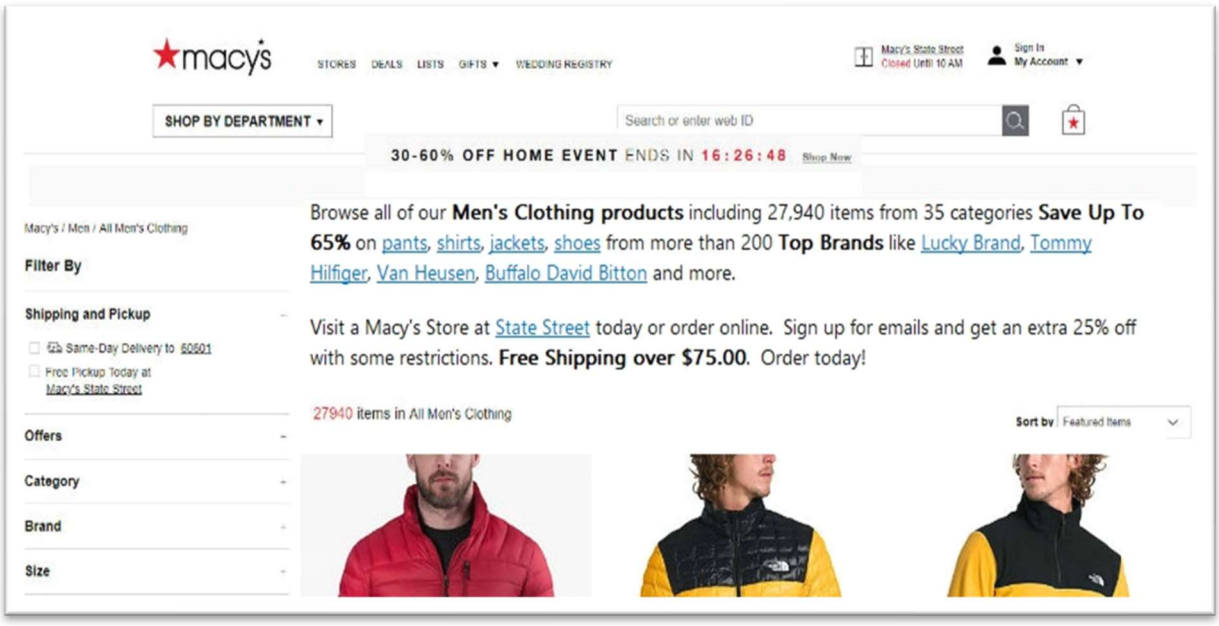
Implementing **function-driven content** on this site would raise visibility, ranking, conversions, transactions, and organic search revenue.

The template below can be used on all category pages on this site. Notice the action word in the beginning, specific information with the product category, product count, number of categories, and incentives & benefits.

Function-Driven Template

> Browse all of our **[Category]** products including **[ProductCount]** items from **[CategoryCount]** categories **[Savings]** on **[urlCategory, 4]** from more than **[brandCount]** like **[urlCategoryBrand, 4]** and more.
>
> Visit a **[Store]** at **[IPGeoLocation]** today or order online. Sign up for emails and **[deals]** with some restrictions. **[shippingDeals].** Order Today!

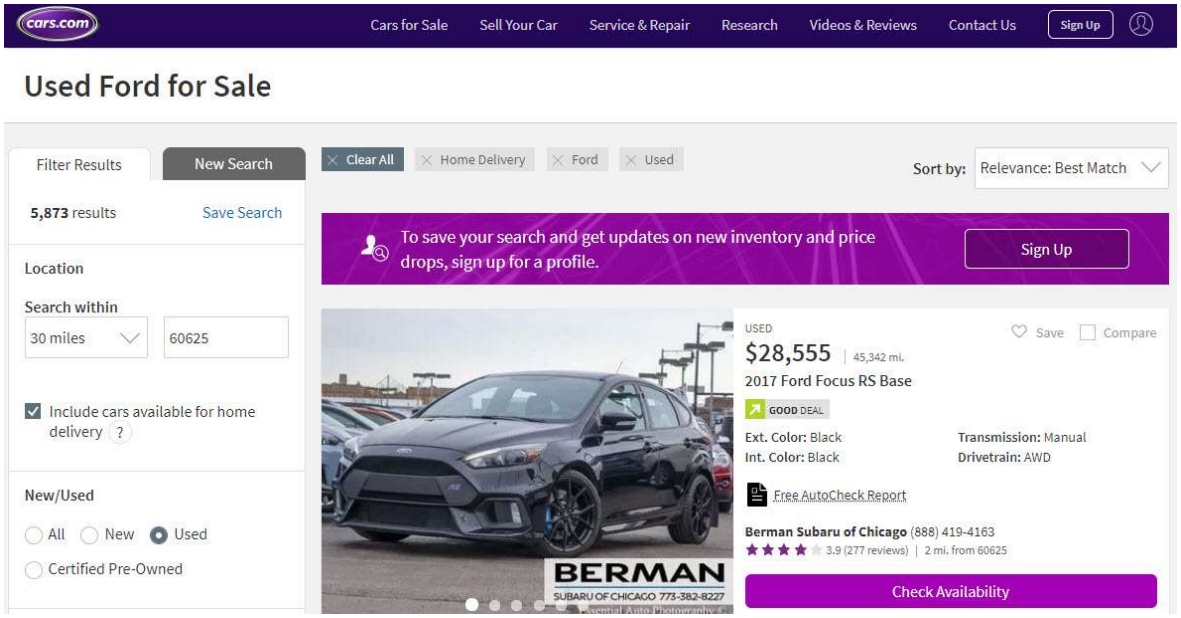
Notice the captions I added to this page in the **edited** image below.



Using a similar formula, Cars.com would benefit from using function-driven content by adding captions with internal linking and text decorations.

The image below shows the current page with no captions, page descriptions or other text outside of product cards.

This is the current page on Cars.com



There is a section on top between the filter and the beginning of the product display that has an email sign up. I'm sure the company loves the call to action, but it does not bring in new visitors and certainly does not help with visibility or rank.

We can move that small email sign up a bit higher on the page and use that space for captions, internal linking, and text decoration. This improvement will help the site appear more in search, qualify for more keyword phrases, and improve bounce rates, which in-turn helps traffic and conversions. All the pages should have this.

I have included the function-driven template below. View the actual words that could appear on the site on a modified version of the page. Take a look.

Function-Driven Template

> Browse all of our [productCount] [category] [geoLocation] including [Brand] [topQuality] [subcategories, 4]. Choose your favorite [category] using our Mega Filter with [filterNumber] options like [filterTypes, 5], and more.

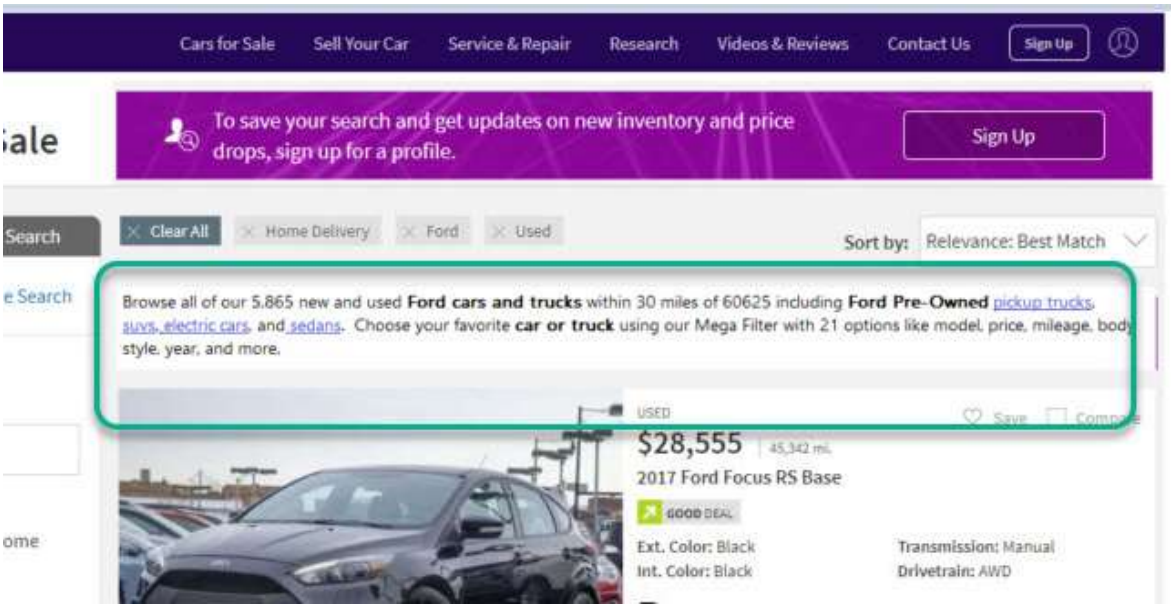
Actual Caption with Internal Linking and Text Decoration

Result

> Browse all of our 5,865 new and used **Ford cars and trucks** within 30 miles of 60625 including **Ford Pre-Owned** pickup trucks, SUVs, electric cars, and sedans.
>
> Choose your favorite **car or truck** using our Mega Filter with 21 options like model, price, mileage, body style, year, and more.

Optimized Page with Design Change and Function-Driven Content

On the screenshot below, view the edited paragraph with useful content, including internal linking and text decoration.



The captions above fit into the design perfectly. The captions add context, and the internal linking and text decoration draws the eye, allowing a person to confirm the page is congruent and useful.

The function-driven caption above qualifies for the following:

- Pickup trucks
- SUVs
- Electric cars
- Sedans
- Ford pickup trucks
- Ford trucks
- Ford subs
- Ford electric cars
- Ford sedans
- Ford pre-owned cars

The anchor text alone boosts the page for more keyword visibility. When this technique is propagated on the 1,650,000 pages indexed by Google, the results will be overwhelming.

Internal linking is a ranking factor, but since most people think physically writing over 1 million captions is required, they balk.

Function-driven content allows this powerful ranking factor to improve a site and eliminates the thousands of hours of writing time required.

The beauty of function-driven content is that hundreds or even thousands of pages can be edited by altering one template.

Imagine A/B testing captions using function-driven templates. Thousands of pages can be tested, tweaked, edited, and reverted easily.

In a case like Cars.com, if only 10% of the pages had captions, it would mean 160,000 pages with 200 words each and 3-6 internal links including incentives and benefits for each page.

How Does Function-Driven Content Improve SEO?

- 32 Million additional descriptive words
- 960,000 internal links
- 960,000-3.2 million anchor text words
- Up to 5 million incentives and benefits listed

Function-Driven content creates a powerful difference in site content, context, and optimization….and we haven't even counted the Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, or H1 Tags yet.

Title Tags and Meta Descriptions would have function-driven content as well. This creates higher keyword visibility, additional clicks, improved CTR, and additional transactions which leads to higher conversion rates and more organic search revenue.

Function-driven captions add specific, unique, updatable, and useful content without writing thousands of page descriptions.

World Class Backlink Strategy for E-commerce

Stacking Authority and Trust + Brand Page Internal Linking

We discussed this briefly in previous chapters, but here is the exact backlink strategy for e-commerce reseller websites (that's most of them).

The most important strategy of internal linking is linking to pages that have value – that produce results.

I define value in two ways: (Money Pages)

1. Transactional Pages (e-commerce list pages, NOT product pages typically)
2. Informational Pages (review page, how-to guides, etc.)

A Department page should link to 3 category pages.

- Department → Category

A Category page should link to 2-3 subcategory and/or brand + category pages.

- Category → Subcategory
- Category → Brand + Category

A Brand page should link to 2-3 Category or B+C pages.

- Brand → Category
- Brand → Brand + Category

Example: Your Nikon brand links to your binocular page because Nikon makes binoculars.

Google assigns a certain amount of credit to a site and page depending on the following:

- Trustworthiness
- Authority
- Popularity
- Page Quality (usefulness)
- Context

Experienced SEOs can guide page popularity by strategically creating internal links.

Old Indirect Linking (2.0)

One of the ineffective ways that **indirect content marketing** is supposed to work for SEO is to create a **How-To Guide** or comprehensive article about a particular subject. In the grocery industry they use recipes as their 10X content.

Outdoor companies use almost any popular product category or activity (backpacks, rappelling, hiking, tents). Running companies use race distances (How to train for your **first marathon**).

The idea behind excellent **How-To Guides** is to create content that is read, shared, and linked from reputable websites and blogs.

A How-To Guide should include "internal links" to important pages such as:

- Brand Pages
- Category Pages
- Brand + Category Pages
- SubCategory Pages
- Specialty Pages or Product Pages (rarely)

In the example about the grocery industry, content might be a great recipe or a series of recipes for a target market (KETO). The recipe should have links to the following pages:

- List Pages (e.g., butcher shop, meat department)
- Product Pages (e.g., keto beef broth)

Years ago, I was able to write a skyscraper guide to help backpackers choose the right backpack for them. After that 12-page content piece began to rank well, I added internal links to the backpack category page. The backpack category page rank improved from an average position of 12th to 7th. The gross revenue for that page was low until I added internal links. The organic search revenue grew by 23% simply by adding internal links - not just for that article, but for the pages in which I linked. Total Editing Time: 10 minutes.

Internal linking is a proven, approved, white-hat strategy that will produce results.

Add Internal Links to Captions

When writing page descriptions, also known as captions, it is good to have 50-150 words that describe the actual page content. If you can pull for 300 words, even better. Usability professional balk at 300 words for fear that too much content on mobile will distract the visitor from viewing the products listed on the page. 30-100 words seems to be a great hybrid of good SEO and Usability.

The content must be useful and NOT obstruct a searcher from viewing other areas of the page that are of interest. However, what good is having a page if it does not rank well?

In this example, I'll use department pages.

When writing content for a Department page, I always include links to the following:

- Top 3 Categories
- Top 3 Brands
- Department Review Page

Result

> Browse 1,200 Computer products including laptops, desktops, and tablets from Top Companies like Apple, Dell, HP and more. We have Mail-in Rebates, In-store coupons, and daily deals including **Up To 45%** off select computers. Check out more than 500 computer reviews at Microcenter.com.

Linking to the **Mail-in Rebates** and **In-store coupons** page is also possible, but that would have been a bit much from a readability standpoint.

On a Department page for a grocery store the meat Department would have internal links to the following category pages:

- Steaks
- Chicken
- Seafood
- Pork
- Lamb

It does not make sense, nor does it read well to list every category under a Department. That would be keyword stuffing.

An Office supply store department, to list another example, might include categories such as:

- Pencils
- Pens
- Paper
- Folders

Again, I would add 3-4 top brands for readability purposes. An example, using the **same template** as above, might look like this:

> Browse 1,200 **Office Supply product**s including Pencils, Pens, and Paper from Top Companies like Bic, Smead, Avery and more. We have Mail-in **Rebates**, In-store **coupons**, and **daily deals** including **Up To 32%** off select copy paper. Check out more than 500 Office Supply reviews at Microcenter.com.

Again, in this example, linking to the top three categories, top three brands, and the department review page under that Department, is an excellent strategy.

The **category page template** is slightly different because linking downward in the hierarchy is not the only strategy.

Link DOWN the hierarchy to subcategory pages. Link UP to the category and department pages.

Using a similar template, as the one above, you can create captions like this:

> Browse 35 **Road Bikes** including Triathlon, Touring, and Sport/Performance Bikes from **Top Brands** like Cannondale, Specialized, Giant, and more. **Save Up To 32% on select** Bikes in stock.
>
> Check out more than 120 Road Bike Reviews or sign up for our **monthly newsletter** below to learn all about the local races and new bike technology.

The department and category page strategy are almost identical.

Neither programmers nor most digital marketers understand this strategy well.

These highly skilled professionals remain unaware that **internal linking is one of the most powerful search engine optimization techniques known to man and endorsed by Google**, but it is.

I would argue that the entire purpose of having function-driven content as captions is to be able to link internally to related pages without the requirement of writing or updating those links.

Each individual caption should be **unique and special** to that particular page.

The captions should be **useful** to a person. A strategy that ignores usefulness is equivalent to spamming your own site.

Create value for your customers and visitors by adding internal linking strategically and it will work in the long term.

- **Google endorses this technique**
- **Google almost NEVER endorses SEO strategies**

Internal linking is a win-win-win strategy. Your company wins, Google wins, and your customers win.

Google has stated specifically that the navigation menu **does not help them determine context**, which is hugely important.

The strategy outlined above works because it adds value, and it allows Google to understand the context of each site. This creates higher visibility, distributes link equity, raises page ranking, reduces bounce rate, and more.

Specification-Driven Product Names

In 2015, marketers probed the edges of the 2.0 paradigm by optimizing product names. Digital marketers realized they could **create specification-driven product names**. Specifications like gender, size, color, quantity, container, and others were added to product names.

This small breakthrough improved organic search and product list advertisements (PLAs) for innovative companies. Some product names even have more than 10 words.

The biggest benefit to specification-driven product names is ranking for **long-tail search queries**.

The more words people use to describe the product or service, the closer those product pages match a user's query, which means specified products rank higher, experience higher CTR and better conversion rates.

T-shirts

Men's Black XL Short Sleeve 100% Cotton T-shirt

This is a perfect example of an optimized product name that uses almost all the general terms used by searchers when looking for t-shirts. Don't forget about the brand name!

- Brand Name
- Color (Black)
- Gender (Men's)
- Size (XL)
- Type/Subcategory (Short Sleeve)
- Material (100% Cotton)
- Category (T shirt)

Adidas Men's Black XL Short Sleeve 100% Cotton T shirt

Any product on the market can be optimized by adding detailed information like this to the product name. Good marketing researchers will find the most **commonly searched specifications for each product type** and include those in new product names to improve ranking and gain visibility.

Every product type has their own specifications that people use when searching. The first priority is to discover which specifications are used to find that particular type of product and then use those specifications to improve the product name.

If we're talking about cars, it's very obvious what some of these specifications should be.

- New or Used
- The Brand
- Make
- Model
- Year
- Mileage
- Engine Size
- Transmission Type
- 2 Door or 4 Door
- Color

2005 Used Red Ford F150 XLT 4x4 6 cyl 125k Miles

This also makes all the product pages unique. No two cars will be the same year, same color, same mileage.

A furniture company might have kitchen tables that have the following specifications:

- Length
- Width
- Height
- Number of Chairs
- Leaf
- Material
- Brand
- Style
- Shape
- Color

Besteneer 4 Chair Dark Gray Rectangle Oak Dining Table w/ Leaf 36X72

Bicycles have become extremely specialized and now include a lot of specifications and options. Specifications may include:

- Brand
- Year
- Model
- Gender
- Category (triathlon)
- Size
- Color
- Frame Material
- Rider Age

Result

2022 Black/Silver Specialized Shiv Elite Medium Female Triathlon Bike

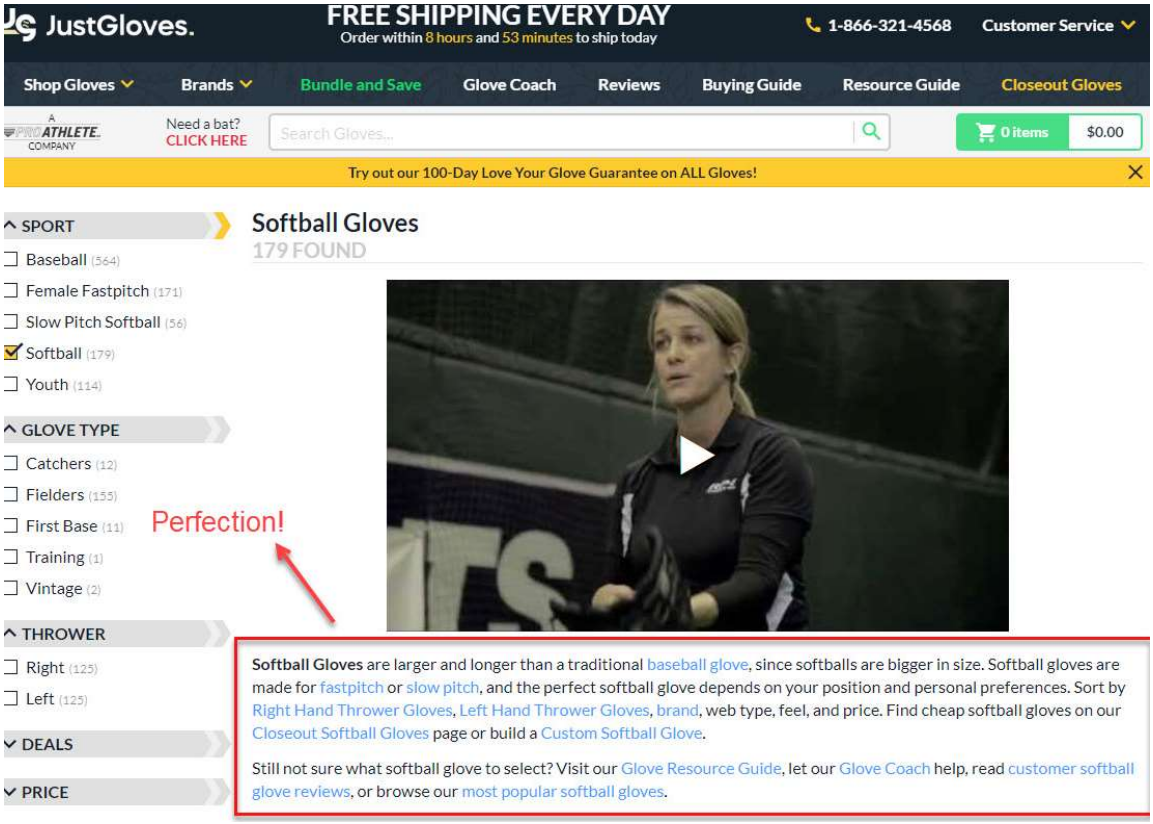
These are just a few examples of some of the specifications that you can include in a product name.

Remember, if you have not changed your product names in the last five years, determine if you can add commonly searched specifications to improve the visibility, ranking, and conversions.

You can do this now.

Some SEOs recommend changing the **product page URLs** to include many of the phrases, too. You will have to make that determination with your team, but if you do, make sure to implement 301 redirects from the old URL to the new optimized URL. The age of a URL is also a ranking factor. If you change your URLs, understand that there will be a temporary dip in visibility and ranking – it will pay off in the long-term, however.

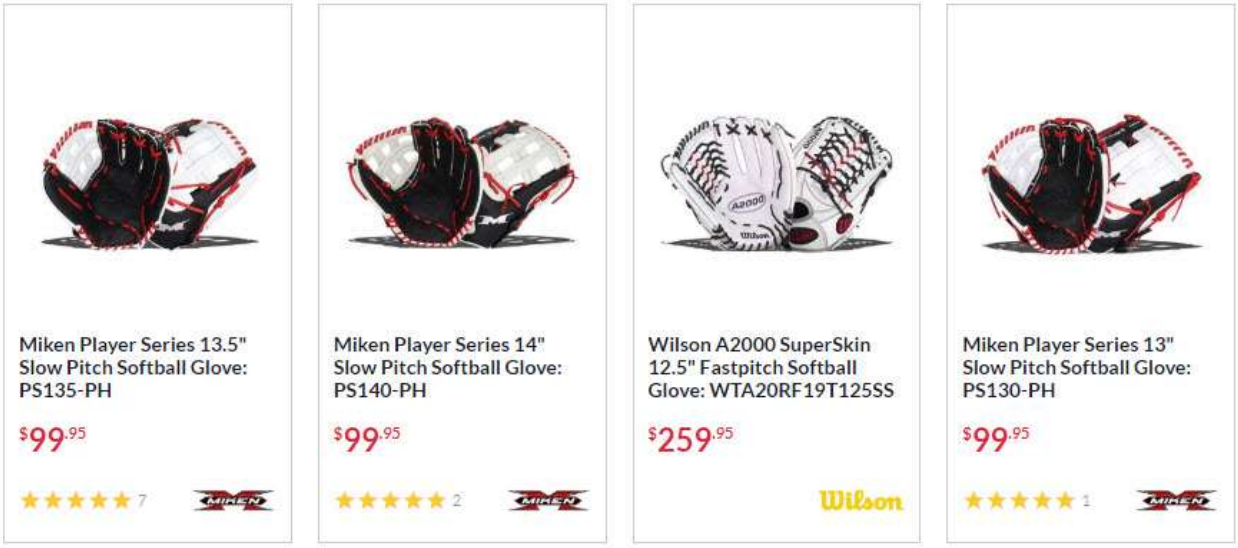
Just Gloves is one of the greatest unknown websites. Notice the captions with internal linking and text decoration. Beautiful!



At this date, Just Gloves comes up 4th when searching "**Softball Gloves**" and beats Amazon, Walmart, Wilson, Rawlings, Target, eBay, Nike, and many others.

Just another shout-out to this company for having useful product names that have the following specifications in the product name:

- Brand
- Model
- Size
- Game Type
- SKU



JustBallGloves.com has **6,000 keyword phrases that land on the first page** of Google, including short-tail phrases that create revenue.

This is a site you have never heard of yet beats billion-dollar companies in the SERPs for many short and long tail keyword phrases.

When I search for **baseball** gloves, Justballgloves.com comes up 4th again and beats many other e-commerce sites and big-box brands with dozens of brick-and-mortar stores.

Excellent product names, fantastic captions, internal linking, and text decoration are the reasons for great ranking for short-tail keyword phrases.

Product Descriptions

One product description is not the most difficult type of content writing. 100 nearly identical product descriptions are almost impossible to differentiate and the most difficult for copywriters.

I recently visited the toy department at Target looking for board games when I noticed three versions of the popular game, **Trivial Pursuit**.

Imagine writing three different product descriptions for a game with the exact same name and rules. The only difference was the target audience.

The site copy would likely have to accentuate the age range of the players, the activities, and the genre of questions (Politics vs. Pop Culture). This is difficult writing.

If you are up for the challenge, then take a gander at Macy's site and look at Women's Shoes again.

I challenge any sane, creative person to write 5,000 product descriptions for each of the **women's shoes** available**.**

Often, e-commerce sites simply import the manufacturer's description for each product and display that content for the user. Rarely do website developers or marketers develop additional content for the page, even if it was proven to make a difference. It is too much work, they say.

Google has announced several times that displaying a manufacturer's description on a product page is not an example of duplicate content – until recently. Beginning in 2023, manufacturers' descriptions are not good enough.

Google considered the manufacturer's description to be a necessary part of a product page and did not thwart or throttle sites for NOT writing unique content. To date, I have not seen or heard of a site that was dinged for it YET.

However, if one gets dinged, millions will get dinged.

This is optimization inflation in reverse. If all sites that use manufacturers' descriptions get hit with a duplicate content penalty (and it will likely be a penalty), millions of sites will decline – **back to baseline.** This means you have an opportunity to beat these stores.

YOU CAN DO BETTER!

7 Ways to Write/Improve Product Descriptions

There are many ways to develop product descriptions to beat online competition.

- Rewrites
- Punch-Ups
- Content additions
- User-generated content
- Integrated reviews
- Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT)
- Q&A

Rewrites

One of my tricks to creating unique content is to rewrite content that has already been developed by the manufacturer. That is, rewriting it in your own words, which is why it becomes unique.

In 2016, a client tasked me to write a glossary of terms for the outdoors industry.

I took the process of 10X content and applied it to this task. I reviewed all definitions from more than five sources and created an amalgamation for my glossary. My final list consisted of about 400 definitions.

Even though there were already a half dozen well-ranking glossary sites, I set out to write each definition in my own voice, while still maintaining the true definition. In most cases, it was fun and creative. Many hobbyists posted specific delight on some of my definitions since it wasn't the same ol' boring information.

Rewrites can be fun, but it is important to **NEVER steal content**. Stealing content would be unethical, and it creates "duplicate content" issues, not to mention legal issues.

I do not recommend stealing content!

Punching-Up

You may be familiar with the phrase "punching-up a script," which means to improve it or polish it up. Often, there are writers that specialize in punching-up material that has already been written and sold.

M. Night Shyamalan was a **script doctor** and became known for his ability to punch-up a script prior to writing his famous movie script, ***The Sixth Sense***.

Punching-up a pre-written manufacturer's description could include adding new and interesting information like:

- Product use examples (new and alternative uses)
- Features of the product that might apply to your business specifically
- Seasonal activities
- Adding discounts and deals
- Return policy information inside the text of the description
- Writing for a particular target audience
- Types of activities in which the product can be used

Punching-up a product description may depend on the time of year or season.

The famous eyewear brand, Ray Ban, may have product page information about Spring Break in March and April. They may discuss the use of sunglasses while driving in snow in Winter.

A store like Macy's might include information in April and May about certain suits being fantastic for the **new college graduate** in preparation for a slew of upcoming job interviews.

In late July and early August, Target and Walmart may adjust many of their product descriptions to include information about "going back to school." This is better than just a banner ad.

In one product description, while writing for the outdoors industry, I included a personal story about how I used the product for a successful camping trip. It makes a difference to people and search engines. Google looks for Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness (EEAT). The first E stands for Experience. AI content does not produce this. It takes a person to communicate their experience and to demonstrate expertise.

Content Additions

Generic product descriptions are easy to improve. Add statistics from reputable sources about the product, category, or subcategory.

Include the Who, What, Where, Why, and How questions that might apply to your target audience. Elaborate how the product does the following:

- Solves or prevents a problem
- Improves quality of life issues
- Improves the customer's status or reputation
- Saves time

User-Generated Content

User-generated content means people visit your site and leave detailed reviews or commentary (Think: Trip Advisor). Having a Q&A section for customers to ask questions about products is an excellent way to enhance your page content and provide an opportunity to interact with your customers.

You can create an entire internal message board (PHPBB or Vbulletin) that discusses products and product compatibility. Include feeds from social media when others are tagging your brand or create the ability for a customer to post photos while using your product. These are all being done today, but rarely used on small and medium sites. You only have to be 10% better to be great.

One of the ways to improve a manufacturer's description is to **conduct research** on every site that discusses the product and learn the product benefits from actual users that wrote reviews. Do not steal the content, but **reviews can be your muse** to spark ideas for additional content.

An e-commerce site specializing in grocery home delivery might discover that some customers have groceries delivered to their office for special events like birthdays, retirements, and holidays. This provides additional ideas for content when writing about the bakery and cake department, for example.

Reviewing user-generated content, to gain further understanding of the product benefits, is an excellent way to get ideas to improve manufacturer's product descriptions.

Reviews as a Muse

Sites have been utilizing ratings and reviews sections on product pages for more than 15 years. Google recently (April 2022) released an algorithm that specifically analyzes the quality of product reviews and upgraded that algorithm to analyze all review content, changing the name from *product reviews algorithm* to **reviews algorithm** (April 2023).

User-generated social proof (ratings and reviews) can be displayed within the product page description, not just in its own REVIEWS SECTION.

Integrate this type of information into the descriptions by cherry picking interesting information from external review comments and using that information to spice up the content on your site. **Do not steal content!**

If a software product had issues with their version 1.0 release and those issues were evident by reading online bulletin boards and forums, it might be useful to address that YOUR product is the 2.0 version that has over 6,000 reviews with an average rating of 4.8.

This technique helps save potential customers time in research and helps differentiate between the two versions. A good content writer might also include an amalgamation of commonly asked questions and answers.

There are hundreds of content ideas that become evident when researching reviews across the internet. Never steal content.

Q&A Sections

Question and Answer sections can be created on your site, easily. You already see this on Amazon and hundreds of optimized e-commerce sites.

A section dedicated to potential customer questions is a terrific way to create linkable content, as well. Q&A sections are often the best way to make your site a reliable source for user-generated content, mixed with expert commentary. Q&A sections provide the following:

- Products
- Brands
- Price
- Quality
- Value
- Specifications
- Compatibility
- Accessories

Since Google often displays user-generated content in search engine results pages, if another person asks that same question, your site may appear in the TOP results.

Pro Tip: Pre-populate Q&A sections with useful questions and expert answers to get the ball rolling. This strategy invites new users to participate early. There are few things worse on an e-commerce site than a blank Q&A page.

Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT & Others)

If original content that is useful, unique, specific, and updatable is how Google determines quality, then **how does rehashed content generated from a machine** that gets its information

from sites already publishing that content qualify as useful, unique, specific, or updatable? AI content is great for research, but it takes customization to make it useful.

I have used and tested AI writing tools (Jasper) beginning in February 2022 and ChatGPT since the first week it was released. I tested ChatGPT dozens of times with customized and hybrid content and then ran them through more than 5 AI detectors. AI detector tools are very accurate. If there are free AI detectors, rest assured, Google will have even more advanced algorithms in the coming months and year.

Only with customizations and personal stories did hybrid content measure greater than 90% original. Soon Google and other engines will penalize AI generated pages that are not within their acceptable threshold. My prediction is > 80% original content will be the standard. That content will be measured using their new algorithm (yet to be named or released) and **Google's RankBrain algorithm** will be used to measure usefulness.

Never use Artificial Intelligence as a replacement for a human being with data-driven content that is specific, unique, and updatable. **Manually customize all AI content** and integrate **function-driven content**, where appropriate, to be sure that content meets an acceptable threshold and is useful.

Specification-Driven Content

One of the most difficult pieces of content to create is a paragraph related to product specifications. Why? Specifications are different for every type of product.

A 2-man or 4-man tent is a common product type on camping websites. However, tent-related specifications are only applicable to tents, not underwear or hiking boots, food, cars, or air conditioners. Each product type must be customized. This means database work, research, and data-entry.

Binoculars have more than 20 different specifications including:

- Variable zoom
- Color
- Coating
- Level of waterproofing
- Fog proofing

A manufacturer MAY provide some of these specifications, but I can attest that **brands do not provide all specifications** for all models of their own products. In fact, sometimes they do not even provide the specifications **that people use the most while searching.** Resellers often create this content on their own as a form of competitive advantage over other online retailers.

Specifications can range from gender, size, weight, volume, capacity, material, color, and more. There are literally thousands of specifications that account for all of the different product types available. A list and description of all specifications could be its own book.

Which Specifications Do Searchers Use the Most?

One of the most important things to remember about specifications is not writing, it is discovering which specifications are used most by searchers for each product type and then gathering as much of that data as possible. Over time, constantly improve the quality and quality of specifications for every product type. This often takes 1-3 years.

Writing up to 3 full sentences that utilize the most common specifications helps rank your product pages. People often use specifications in their search queries, so discover which ones are used and then include them in your product names, ad copy, and content.

Experienced SEOs understand that optimized product pages result in exceedingly high click-through rates and higher conversion rates for long-tail queries.

Specification-driven content is meant to help product pages appear on the first page of search engines, which results in the highest number of clicks.

A searcher is more likely to use [Men's stretchy jeans 34x32], than [men's jeans].

A multi-variant product page (A page with multiple products that are similar) might qualify to be on the first page of a search engine since the content is congruent. However, your variant pages may be so specific and such an exact match, they place in the coveted top three spots.

A searcher's query like **[Men's dark blue stretchy jeans size 34/32]** produces high ranking results if those **specifications are added to the product name, ad copy, and page content of a variant product page.** Imagine if all the jeans had specifications like this.

Click-through rates and conversions are usually very high with these types of pages. Personally, I have seen CTRs above 80% on variant product pages with less than 20% bounce rates. That is a high performing page. Conversion rates are between 40%-60% as well.

The higher demand and competition for a product, the more important it is to have specification-driven content.

Big-box stores with millions of dollars to spend on page content, site development, site buildout, information architects, and database development still do not have adequate page content. Those big-box stores may rank well simply because the site has a high reputation and trust. Smaller competitors with more specific content where it matters, can beat those big stores.

Big-box stores have become complacent when it comes to digital marketing. Smaller companies can use this weakness and create a more useful, optimized site to beat them in the SERPs.

5 Step Process for Specification-Driven Content

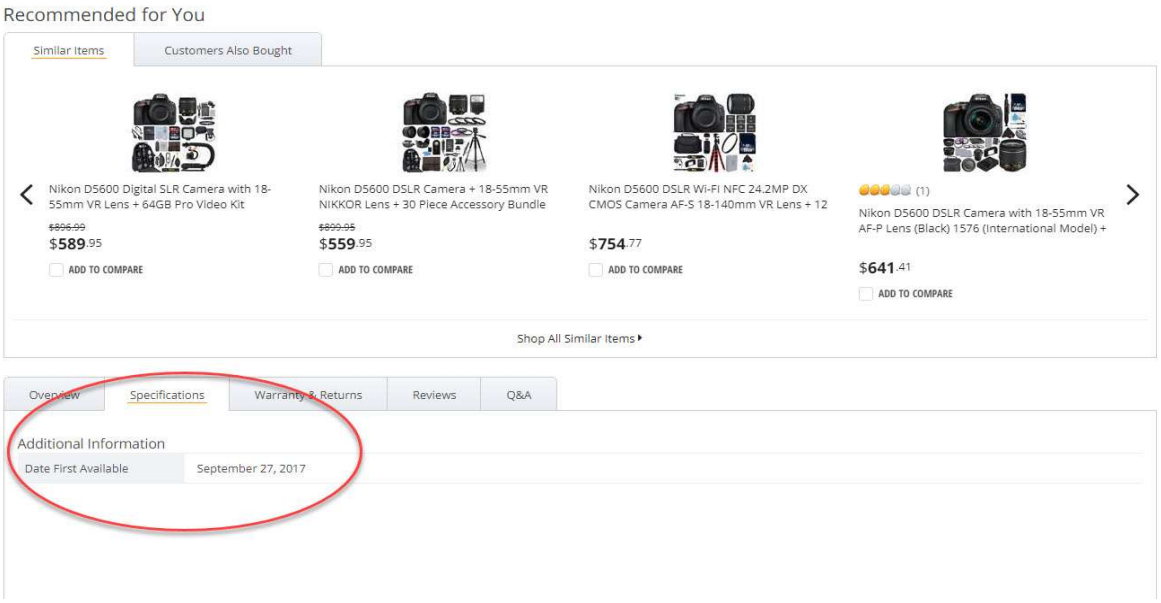
1. Identify all the specifications that can be used for each product type
2. Discover which specifications are used most (benchmarking)
3. List & Rank the Top 4-6 Specifications in order of importance
4. Enter that data for each product and product type
5. Create function-driven product names and sentences using specifications

Create an ongoing project of continuous improvement and data-entry for every product type on your site.

Writing Sentences Using Specifications

Before we begin discussing how to create sentences, let's take a look at how the online competition displays specifications.

This is an example of a page on NewEgg.com. I searched for "electronics." Newegg.com was ranked number 3. I chose a product randomly to review the specifications. As you can see, the only specification listed is the product's "Date First Available."



On the other hand, **Best Buy** has an **excellent website with specifications** listed in great detail including:

- Key Specifications
- General
- Dimension
- Compatibility
- Display
- Connectivity
- Included
- Performance
- Warranty
- Imaging

Inside of the key specifications section, the category includes:

- Effective Megapixels
- Image Sensor Type
- Wi-Fi Enabled
- Waterproof
- Video Resolution

This is a screenshot of part of the specifications listed on Best Buy's site. I used this content to create the examples seen below.

Specifications

Key Specs	Effective Megapixels	20.0 megapixels
	Image Sensor Type	CCD
	Wi-Fi Enabled	No
	Waterproof	No
	Video Resolution	1280 x 720
	Maximum Aperture	3.2 f/
General	Product Name	PowerShot ELPH 180 20.0-Megapixel Digital Camera
	Brand	Canon
	Model Number	1093C001
	Color	Silver
	Color Category	Silver
	Additional Accessories Included	Wrist strap (WS-800)
Dimension	Product Width	3.7 inches
	Product Height	2.1 inches
	Product Depth	0.9 inches
	Product Weight	0.28 pounds
	Camera Body Weight	0.24 pounds

If we put these **specifications** together in a short, templated sentence, it can read well once the actual data is put in place.

This information is already listed on the site, but we can use this information in a new and better way. This is not a replacement of content, but can be used as additional content, in sentence form, at the top of the page.

Here is a simple specification sentence with a conditional statement:

Template

> The [product-name] has [megapixels] and <%If Wifi-Enabled==yes%>is Wi-Fi Enabled<%endIf%> with [Video Resolution] resolution.

This template can produce multiple sentences for every digital camera on the site.

Sentences Using Specifications and Conditional Statements

1. The Canon PowerShot G7 has 20.1 megapixels and is Wi-Fi Enabled with 1920x1080 resolution.

2. The Fujifilm - X-Series X100V has 26.1 megapixels and is Wi-Fi Enabled with 2160 (4K) resolution.

3. The Canon - PowerShot ELPH 180 has 20.0 megapixels with 1280 x 720 resolution.

Notice example #3 **did not mention Wi-Fi Enabled**.

The template only checks if the Wifi-Enabled specification is equal to yes.

There is no ELSE statement...yet.

Since the 3rd camera **DOES NOT** have Wifi, the actual sentence does not list anything related to Wi-Fi. The template is only producing a **basic specification-driven sentence**.

Let's add an ELSE statement to the template:

Template

> The [product-name] has [megapixels]<%If Wifi-Enabled==yes%>, is Wi-Fi Enabled and has**<%elseIf%>, is not Wi-Fi enabled, but does have<%endIf%>**[Video Resolution] resolution.

Here are the results:

> **No Wi-Fi**
> The Canon - PowerShot ELPH 180 has 20.0 megapixels, **is not Wi-Fi enabled, but does have** 1280 x 720 resolution.
>
> **Wi-Fi Enabled**
> The Canon - PowerShot ELPH 180 has 20.0 megapixels, **is Wi-Fi Enabled, and has** 1280 x 720 resolution.

Remember that Google wants unique and specific information that can be used in Meta Descriptions, On-Page Captions, and even perhaps H1 and H2 Tags.

This template can be used on all cameras (product types). With a simple nip and tuck…Boom, you can edit for many different product types, thereby creating excellent content that your competition does NOT have available.

It is devastating to an email marketing campaign when emails are sent using **Dear [first-name]** instead of the person's actual first name. This is a case where the data doesn't exist in the mail-merge file and there is no conditional statement.

Specification-driven content must be reviewed thoroughly, and **conditional statements are an absolute requirement** for proper sentence flow, spacing, and grammar.

Likely, my next book will be all about specification-driven content and how to create sentences and paragraphs with detailed information. For now, however, we'll leave you with a nugget so you can experiment on your own. I'm anxious to hear how you implemented this and all the results including higher visibility, ranking, conversions, and organic search revenue.

Let's take a look at segmenting product types to form excellent content.

Segmentation (Product Types)

Product-types are not all the same. A template that works for digital cameras will not work for backpacks, groceries, or automobiles. However, they can be easily edited and then positively affect hundreds or thousands of pages.

Creating a specification-driven sentence in a caption should begin by segmenting the site by product type.

Again, we are only discussing **specification-driven content** in this section, not function-driven content, though both should be used on a page.

In **specification-driven content**, T-shirts and Shoes cannot share the same natural language templates because the specifications for each of these products are different.

The function-driven content can be the same (Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags, and Captions). However, if there are sentences that include specifications, then a bit more care is required.

Size Matters

Size might be a shared specification, but t-shirt sizes range from small to 3XL while shoe sizes are completely different. T-shirts do not have width as an important and searchable specification either, but that is not true of shoes.

Tents and Backpacks do not have the same specifications. Tent specifications might include capacity (how many people can comfortably sleep in the tent).

Tent Capacity would include 2-man, 4-man, or 8-man choices for specification data.

People regularly search for 2-man or 4-man tents. They also search for a specification called "seasons." A common specification for seasons might be 3-season or 4-season.

Backpacks are different. You can load a backpack from the top, but there is no need for top-loading specifications for a tent.

Even with just a few examples like this, you can easily see that specification-driven content should be unique for each product type. What are the specification differences for your e-commerce site?

Remember: Google is looking for useful content, which is unique, specific, and updated often.

Doing the Work

> Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.
>
> ~ Thomas Edison

Everything sounds easy until a person has to do the work. The work involved in actual site optimization, content marketing, function-driven content and specification-driven content is what separates opportunity from profit.

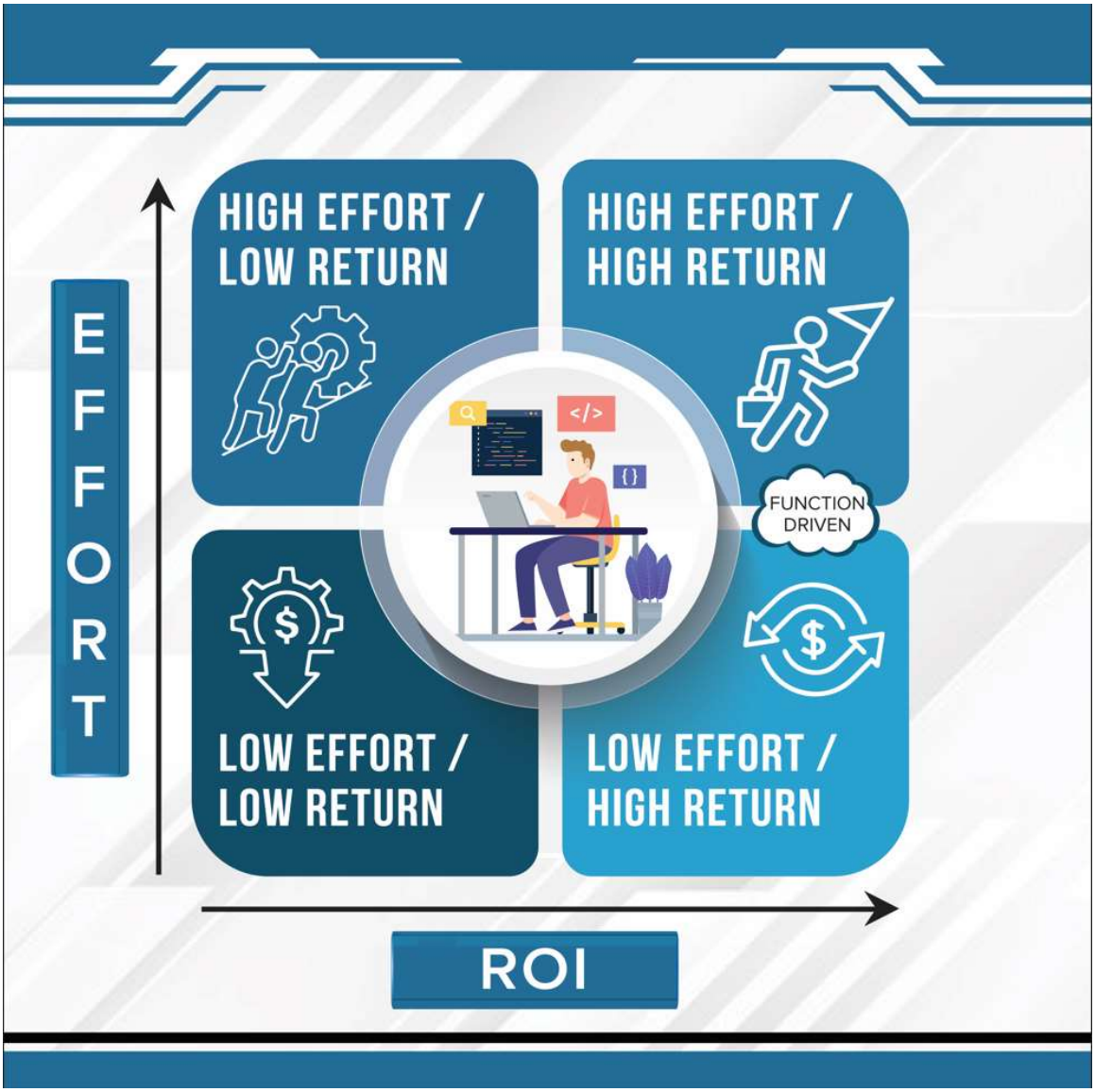
Most of the work is not difficult. Any programmer can create a function and a variable to show custom data. Even specification-driven content, which looks the most intimidating, is already on the page typically, it just hasn't been harnessed and presented in a useful manner.

E-commerce companies with no brick-and-mortar businesses are already starting to experiment. Even sports related companies are beginning to show player profiles instead of tables of data. These companies are creating paragraphs with the same data, expertly written with conditional statements and alternatives.

Natural language processing is not difficult. The programming and marketing teams, with a bit of technology knowledge, would be thrilled to take on such an endeavor. It is fun!

Marketing executives are the ones with the bad habit of asking about "low hanging fruit" or compulsively trying to identify the top 3 tasks ordered by easiest to most difficult. Your competitors have already done that… low hanging fruit is not a marketing strategy; it is a requirement, like taking out the garbage or washing the dishes. It should all have been done by now. If it hasn't, begin now. Do not stop.

Function-Driven Content Lives Here



The easiest SEO tasks rarely result in the highest return on investment, in fact, they usually provide ZERO return on investment.

The notion that high returns can be gained from quick and easy tasks violates the rule of **optimization inflation**. Competitors, especially on a national level, have already implemented the quick and easy strategies and tactics. The best outcome of low effort, at this stage, is that your site may climb to last place. Hey, it's better than not showing up at all!

The work must be done to receive the benefits of higher visibility, more impressions, higher click-through rates, improved conversion rates, and more revenue. Get to work.

Tracking Results

Visibility

The first level of effective search is visibility.

A New Definition of Visibility

"The number of keyword phrases that rank in the top 100 results for your site" is a good place to start. Then let's concentrate on top results, first page results, moving phrases and pages further to the top. Too many agencies want to focus on keywords that convert. This is because they have no idea how to explode a site to popularity and increase visibility by 200%-2,000%.

An even better metric for visibility is the number of NON-BRANDED keyword phrases that rank well.

The metric of optimization begins with **non-branded traffic**. I gave a presentation to a group of Fortune 500 digital marketing executives while at Ahold-Delhaize (The parent company of several premium brand grocery retailers in the U.S.) back in 2021. I searched for one of the company's brand names (Hannaford) and a product type that would never be associated with the grocery e-commerce store (Computers). The Hannaford site ranked #1, #2, and #3 for "Hannaford Computers." Google does not get everything right, but I think they have mastered showing a site if a searcher uses the store name in their query.

A great number to track is the percentage of **branded vs. non-branded keyword phrases**. Usually 20-25% branded and 75-80% non-branded is an excellent ratio.

Google hides data from site owners, so third party tools provide better information about keyword visibility.

SEMRUSH and Ahrefs are the best tools to find that information, in my opinion. Their keyword repositories are in the billions. These tools document which keyword phrases are ranking in the top 3, 4-10, 11-20 and so on. They also provide information about how much those phrases are actually used by searchers in a given month, among thousands of other details that can help a site owner understand their site's performance. Search volumes are only estimates, but everything has proven to me to be spot-on.

Keywords and phrases begin the journey toward useful content including:

- Title Tags
- Meta Descriptions
- H1 Tags
- Anchor Text
- Product Names
- ALT text
- Image Names
- H2 Tags
- Navigation Labels
- Descriptions
- Stories
- Hours of Operation
- User-generated content

Function-driven content allows **more qualified and congruent keywords** to be placed on the page in a meaningful and useful way for search engines and ultimately people.

Qualifying for more keyword phrases equals higher visibility, and higher visibility attracts more visitors. Eventually, that leads to more newsletter sign-ups, registrations, calls, online purchases, and more.

Impressions

When visibility rises, Impressions will also increase. Impressions are the number of times a person has an opportunity to see your listing in the search engine result pages. Just because your listing appears does not mean someone will click on it.

Impressions will increase with visibility but not in equal proportion. If your site visibility increases by 500%, your impressions may increase by 80%-150%. This is normal. Why? All those keyword phrases will not show up in the top spots right off the bat. Many will begin toward the bottom 50 results. If your search result lands at the bottom of the page and a person clicks on a higher result, you gain an impression, but don't get the click. Again, this is normal.

After increasing the visibility of a popular grocery store website by 1,500% within a few months, the impressions were about 150% higher than previous months. Those are still exceptionally good numbers, but there was a large amount of work that still needed to be done to the site to push those keywords to the top three pages.

Clicks and Click-Through Rates

One of the best ways to differentiate between a good SEO and a poor one is to ask the following question:

"Can you tell me a circumstance where it is **not bad** to have a drop in click-through rate?"

An experienced SEO will know that if thousands of new pages are launched, the number of impressions usually increase, but clicks seldom increase **at the same rate**, leaving the inexperienced marketing executive to think there may be a problem.

The increase in clicks could be 50% higher, but since the impressions increased 150%, then the click-through rate will be much lower. Nothing is wrong!

All good things are happening, but one of your stats (CTR) decreases. It is still a huge win.

I worked with a client years ago and they made an awful mistake by focusing only on the click-through rate when their site was migrated to a new platform. Every statistic improved by double digit percentages, including the number of clicks, but impressions outpaced the number of clicks. Watch out for this and do not make the same mistake this client made. He eventually realized his folly, but it is the overall improvement that counts the most.

The item to work on when impressions outperform clicks is Ad Copy. Make sure those incentives and benefits are displayed properly and give it 2-3 months for Google to further adjust the rankings for quality content.

Ranking

A mixture of algorithms helps create higher ranking keyword phrases. Most SEOs argue that the **RankBrain** algorithm, among other purposes, calculates user behavior to discover if the listing result was useful to the visitor given that particular keyword phrase.

When a person is seeing useful ad copy and congruent content on the landing pages, they will stay on the site. That is particularly important for ranking.

The most telling data about page content, and its usefulness, is if users return back to the SERPs after visiting a page and then **choose a different result, or they return back and change their query**.

After a sizable number of "returns" occur, the page could drop in rank for that keyword phrase. No one knows the exact rate that will trigger a decline, but I use 25% as an example when leading training sessions, just to provide a commonsense metric. (I am not claiming the actual number is 25%, but it does make sense).

After that unknown threshold is met, visitors stay on the site, even perform an action (e.g., registration, purchase), and ranking will continue to improve.

That is how artificial intelligence is used by search engines to determine if the page is useful for that keyword phrase. That is, among many other ways, I'm sure.

I saw results like this during the unforgettable COVID-19 searching behavior for several billion-dollar grocery store chains. Five out of six of the grocery store sites had double-digit percentage improvements from March to June 2020.

This improvement was due to many searches being conducted for popular products like toilet paper, bleach, and grocery delivery. A large percentage of searchers clicked on the listing, stayed on the site, and either registered or made purchases online. Rank improved greatly until August 2020, then promptly returned to normal levels.

The same behavior happens when **function-driven content** is implemented. Site pages begin to rank for many more phrases due to the addition of unique, specific, and updatable content. More visibility results in more clicks and since the ad copy content is congruent with the function-driven content on the page, **ranking improves drastically** over the first few months.

Analyzing rank changes is an important part of tracking progress. If a site begins ranking 10,000 new keyword phrases but 8,000 of them are between the 50th and 100th position, the next phase is to move those phrases to the top 30, and then top 20, and so on.

A professional SEO or business owner should be tracking those ranking changes on a weekly or monthly basis, depending on the size of the site.

Pro Tip: Tracking page types is important and could cut your work in half after an algorithm update or new algorithm is introduced. It helps to know what types of pages improved or declined.

If Department pages can collectively be tracked separately from Category pages, Brand pages, and even Product pages, it is easier to decipher what needs to improve and how.

If an algorithm update happens and your Product pages reduce in rank, you have effectively isolated the issue and get to work on improving those pages instead of spending weeks doing research.

If suddenly most of the Department pages decline in ranking, you've likely eliminated 98% of your entire site from requiring work. Those Department pages can be reviewed and improved.

Without the segmentation by Page type, a decline in average ranking can be mysterious and potentially overwhelming.

If we did not segment out the page types, we would not have produced a plan to improve those pages. We tracked the results for over a year and when they finally added content to the pages, the improvements were as follows:

- +825% visibility
- +450% impressions
- +145% clicks
- +225% organic revenue (from those pages)

Without page segmentation we would not have known where to start improving page content even though everyone knew the department pages were anemic.

Always include segmentation when it comes to tracking ranking.

CTR

Function-driven content is extremely important when improving statistics like click-through rate.

Specific information should be listed in organic search Ad Copy (Title Tags and Meta Descriptions). By now you should already be aware that nothing is worse than fill-in-the-blank SEO. Plain text with no unique, specific, or updatable incentives or benefits will rarely help CTR improve. **Add those incentives, benefits, and social proof to your ad copy**, measure the improvements in CTR, and track how it ultimately affects conversions and organic search revenue.

Always remember to ensure congruency between the ad copy and the page name (H1) and captions with internal linking and text decoration.

4-Part Formula

1. Create compelling Title Tags by including incentives & benefits
2. Write Meta Descriptions with specific information about the content, activities and brands listed on the page with incentives, benefits, social proof, and a call to action
3. H1 Tags/Page Names that are congruent with the information in Title Tags and Meta Descriptions
4. Captions that include at least 4 ancillary pieces of information related to the page including category, subcategory, brand, activities, target audience, product count, or unique specifications, plus internal linking, and text decoration

When this **4-part formula** exists on all of the landing pages, people will find your listing to be more congruent with their intent, stay on the site longer and go deeper into the architecture of the site. A higher percentage of visitors will make a purchase.

The benefit of improved click-through rates with congruent page information is a greater number of transactions (purchases), sign-ups, registrations, calls, or visits to brick-and-mortar business locations.

Function-driven content creates specific information that addresses the user's intent and compels action.

Bounce Rates

Bounce rate can INDIRECTLY affect ranking and visibility, but Google does not care about this number directly.

The following will hurt ranking, eventually:

1. A searcher enters a query and clicks on a listing
2. Conducts a visual review of the page
3. Quickly returns to the search result page (usually via back button)
4. The searcher chooses a different result from the original SERP

This pattern of behavior informs Google that your landing page was unhelpful for the query that was entered.

The interesting thing here is that most of the time, it wasn't the Ad Copy that was the issue, **it was the incongruence between the ad copy and the page content.** Specifically, the lack of useful page names and page descriptions (H1 and Captions).

As stated before, once a threshold of negative interaction is reached, Google may drop the ranking a bit for that keyword phrase.

The following will not likely hurt ranking:

1. A searcher enters a query and clicks on a listing
2. Conducts a visual review of the page
3. Quickly returns to the search result page (usually via back button)
4. **Changes the original query entered**
5. A result is chosen from the new SERP result

This pattern likely doesn't affect the ranking of the site or page for the original query. It is very likely that a person was simply not satisfied with the result because they chose the incorrect search query.

There are many more metrics that can be measured on a website, but these are a few that are most important to determine if your site is doing well. Organic Search Revenue, Transactions, and E-Commerce Conversion Rates will all be reflected upon these initial metrics.

How To Convince Stakeholders and Programmers

Nothing gets done without stakeholder approval and backing. That should be the first lesson for all business professionals.

Management 101 classes should begin with this immutable truth.

A high-level consultant told me the story about an interaction between his boss and one of his co-workers.

Scott had a project that was going to help the company make a few million dollars, but Scott's boss also had a project that required the same consultant to complete HIS project. There was an issue with prioritization.

During a meeting Scott was not sure how to resolve the issue, so he asked.

"I am not sure what the best way to solve the prioritization issue is on the Kennedy account. I know that Tom will be available for 3 weeks next month, how do you want to resolve it?"

Scott's boss smiled.

"I've already solved the priority issue. First Tom will work on MY project and then he will work on YOUR project."

Scott's boss smiled again and that was how it was resolved.

Stakeholders prioritize based on whatever suits them the most. Scott's boss put his work above others because he can. There was no meeting or presentation on ROI, total resources, long-term goals, or any of the other things we were taught in school.

Stakeholders have their own incentives, goals, and preferences, but ultimately they do what they want. Your job is to **make them want to do what you want**.

Stakeholders must be convinced, beyond any doubt, that **function-driven content** will produce results within a short, measurable time period. If not function-driven content, then whatever strategy or tactic you a proposing at the time.

That might include proving the results by manually writing this type of content on a small scale, measuring it, and then presenting the results, along with projected results, if that strategy was implemented site-wide or scaled.

This happened for more than 6 months at the beginning of my time at a national outdoors gear store. Before introducing function-driven savings, ratings and reviews, product count, deals, and SKUs, I made these changes manually. I used the results to prove the strategy worked and present the idea of implementing functions to create the incentives.

The evidence was there and had been reviewed by upper-level management and the owner more than a dozen times. When making the request to scale the strategy to the entire site, the answer from the owner was an easy "yes."

TEST everything, then test again. Gather data like it is a pharmaceutical drug getting ready for FDA approval. Test each strategy, then combine them against a control group – a set of pages similar to the ones you have tested. Compare timeframes, including month vs. month and year over year. Ensure algorithm updates, special events, and holidays do not coincide with or influence the results.

I recently did such an experiment with unbelievable results. I added 30-60 words to more than 25 pages within a department. Each page had 3-5 internal links and text decoration. I compared those optimized pages to similar pages with results that exceeded 2,000% visibility improvement as per SEMRUSH on some of the pages and more than 600% improvements on others. I compared 4 pages with my content versus 4 pages without content. The average improvement was 842% increase, which was 20X more visibility than the pages without content.

The presentation went well, but they still decided to half-ass the strategy in the short-term. Some companies take longer to change than others. Be patient and keep testing and acquiring data.

Programmers must also see how their contribution will directly produce positive results including online traffic, transactions, and revenue. Getting buy-in from stakeholders and programmers alike is the closest thing to workplace utopia as I've seen in e-commerce.

Without stakeholders, there will never be intentionality and commitment, a requirement to **harness the team's effort.**

During a training session I asked the team, "What is the most important part of getting your support?" I received answers like this:

"I don't speak for all programmers; I can only speak for myself, but I can tell you that ensuring that the entire project has been planned well so that we don't have to **redo our programming** once we're done with all of the requirements, would be helpful. By the time requirements reach the level of programmer review, everything should have been brainstormed, reviewed, and approved... including programmers in the brainstorming sessions as well."

"For me it's up to the marketing department to determine return on investment and I trust that they've already done that work. We always have to make choices as far as priority because we have a limited number of people with an unlimited amount of work. I would say doing work like this should ensure return on investment and that we are not better off choosing another project."

"We like our bonuses and if we are re-working a strategy for a month or two, it cuts into our productivity, and often that is reflected in our bonuses. We like doing good work and getting paid for it."

When programmers are not 100% committed to the implementation, the following occurs:

- Deliverables will be lackluster
- Deadlines will be delayed or staggered
- Implementation will be fraught with errors and bugs

When programmers are 100% committed, requirements are executed in an efficient manner. There is an element of strategic brainstorming and synergistic conversation that is unleashed when programmers are involved. Suddenly things become possible and deadlines are met.

Programmers will help craft a better result when they are 100% convinced that a new strategy, feature, or tool will contribute to their resume and the company. Appealing to the individual and the company is best.

Business owners and stakeholders often forget that programmers have a stake in the outcome as well. Most people want to be able to say they made a difference. If making a difference in life is not their goal, then certainly being able to list 3-5 accomplishments on their resume is important to them, not to mention their raises and bonuses.

Being a member of a team that raises organic search revenue by 40% is important for the next client or the next job interview. Raising revenue by 4% is not. In this respect, everyone wants to produce positive results.

Anyone that has worked with programmers knows how innovative they can be when they are on board. Brainstorming with programmers that are committed to producing results, is the closest thing to magic that I have seen in business.

Content Writers and Designers Reported the Following:

"For the most part we view ourselves as artists. We want our work to be seen. Oh, of course we want to make a difference, but we want to work to make the site better and to make the site look like a work of art. To us, our work matters because after the aesthetics, we want people to smile when they read what we wrote."

"I want to compel a person to click on what I wrote. I want to know that the way I constructed a sentence made a difference and can be measured. For me, I want to know that what I did produced a measurable result. To me that makes all the difference."

"I definitely want people to walk away with a pleasant experience and with a smile like others mentioned earlier, but I would rather have them make a purchase with a smile on their face. I want a person, because of something that I did, to make a purchase and be happy about their decision."

"I like to measure my work without waiting three to six months to find out if what I wrote made a difference. When I write or edit, as little as four words, I want to know if it worked and how much it mattered to the bottom-line. Faster feedback leads to documenting and applying best practices."

Tracking results is important to everyone involved. Track results aggressively and ensure everyone can see them. This improves morale and makes a happy workplace as well.

User Experience Professionals Reported:

"When I finish conducting usability studies and comparing two distinctive designs or two different styles, I want to know what evidence will be presented when decisions are made. I know usability, and although it's not a science, per se, we do have specific measurable results. When those results indicate that the majority of the people tested prefer a certain typeface or a certain graphic or a certain technology to display the information, it should be implemented or a plan should be set in place to implement it to-scale."

"There is a lot of work that goes into creating questions, setting up tests, recruiting volunteers, especially educated volunteers, tallying and documenting results, and then finally the end result being implementation and improvements. I want to know that all of that work is taken seriously."

"I want to know that when a website is making more money it's making money with the help of usability not in spite of it. That motivates me."

"What motivates me is knowing that all the work that's being done behind the scenes, the books that I've read, the forums that I read, the usability videos that I watch, and the conversations that I have with other professionals will make a difference."

Testing and documenting improvements matter to everyone, especially usability professionals. Very few usability features get tested after a strategy is live on a site. Weekly or monthly feedback helps prove this work matters. It helps convince executive teams to trust the professionals.

What Happens When a Motivated Programmer Gets to Work?

During a project that required single sign-on (SSO) capability we needed 3 different systems to connect under one login. We discussed the possibility of having SSO implemented by the contracted consulting company that licensed the portal software to us, but it was denied. This was in 2007 before SSO was as common as it is today.

The consulting company that licensed and serviced the Aqualogic Portal contract lacked the programmer experience needed for the job, but still wanted a hefty fee to implement SSO ($30,000). Our past experience with this consulting company proved they could not program efficiently and we did not want to pay to be their guinea pigs.

Without single sign-on capability our user-experience for the site and portal would be lackluster, despite improvements to the site. Needless to say, it was an important feature.

I wanted to ask our programmer if she could do anything herself to aid in producing single sign-on but did not want to ask her to do anything illegal or unethical. I really was looking for more research to help guide the consulting company to implement single sign-on.

"Would you mind doing some research, perhaps reviewing their documentation to find out if we can guide them in some way to implement SSO on the portal? If we are able to give them a plan or some sort of knowledge base that would make them re-evaluate how much it would cost, I think it would provide a good starting point for us," I said.

"I wasn't planning on doing anything this weekend anyways, so I'll take a look and see what I can find," she replied.

Our programmer took the initiative and implemented flawless SSO in less than 4 hours. SSO was effectively working between our site, the user database, and the portal by Monday.

The next Friday, we celebrated with tacos and drinks after work. On the day that I asked her to provide me with some information, we were already celebrating the implementation. I have

been singing her praises ever since. THAT was the thing that set her apart from every other programmer.

Sometimes programmers want the challenge, sometimes people in any particular job want to be challenged, they want to stretch their limits, they want to implement something that is beyond the daily routine.

This is the type of buy-in EVERYONE wants from every employee, but programmers have an ability to make things happen beyond the requirements of a project or constraints of a system.

This happened because she knew it would make a dramatic difference for the usability of the site and she had the knowledge and skills to do it. Usability was a team effort, and she was fully invested in making a great final product.

One of the things I learned while running this project was to never underestimate the power of bragging rights. All her friends were high-level programmers and I'm sure she reminded them how a $300M company had programmers that couldn't accomplish what she was able to implement in 4 hours.

Since 2007, I was the project manager on several SSO website migrations and site overhauls. The time it took to implement systems that were **pre-designed for SSO** was between 20-30 hours including meetings, paperwork, and implementation.

No one ever believed me when I said it could be done in less than a day. Not by me mind you, but rather, by a motivated programmer. Show a programmer how their work matters – with irrefutable evidence and data and they may just pull off a minor miracle.

Functions are not required to prove function-driven content works.

To prove the viability and profitability of function-driven content, simply write the content manually. What?!

You might be saying, "I thought the entire point of function-driven content was NOT to write all the content?" Yes, but to prove it works, you may need to write it manually on several pages, track results, and provide evidence to the C-suite executives for final approval.

One of the repeated assignments given to me while working as an SEO at a large e-commerce company, was to optimize the top 20-25 pages under a given category or brand. I would optimize the Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Tags and Captions.

We took statistical measurements of the impressions, avg rank, clicks, click-through rate, users, new users, bounce rates, conversion rates, and organic search revenue for each page.

We tracked the traffic, conversion rates, and organic revenue monthly and ran statistical analysis with year-over-year comparisons to determine efficacy.

Every few weeks or a month, I would receive a new batch of pages, until I was fully integrated into the team, and they knew I could produce results.

The technique I used to produce results was everything written here about adding incentives and benefits to ad copy and page content.

The information was already listed on the page or with information provided by the various filters like "highest savings," "lowest price," "best ratings," and the like. These produced positive results more than 80% of the time.

No statistic ever decreased in any metric from ranking to conversion, impressions, clicks, ctr, or revenue - EVER!

After more than 6 months of evidence and proof that the strategy was working, we changed the savings information from a manual entry to a function and implemented that across all categories, subcategories, brands, and brand + category page templates. "Up to X% Off" was posted on more than 30,000 list pages within 48 hours.

Once the savings function proved to be an overwhelming success, we immediately added Deals, Ratings and Reviews, and so on down the line. When testing vigorously, with multiple data points, it is difficult to make a bad decision. Executives never want to be responsible for a decline in traffic or revenue, so their default answer is usually, "no." Make it impossible for them to make a bad decision.

Before overhauling more than 100,000 H1 tags, I spent a month analyzing our competitors' H1 tags for more than 6 different page types. I copied them in multiple excel sheets, converted them to a template and reviewed them in relation to their Title tags to determine their strategy and compared the strategy with the company's ranking.

After all this documentation, the evidence was clear; none of our competitors spent much time strategizing their H1 tags. They implemented "fill-in-the-blank SEO."

After several weeks, we implemented 10X content for H1 tags. We took what worked for all the high-performing pages with the best H1 tags and created an amalgamation of the best techniques while using function-driven content to produce the content.

The first implementation was limited to about 100 pages. We began with lower performing brand, brand + category, and subcategory pages that still produced a decent amount of traffic, but were underperforming as far as conversions, bounce rate, ranking, and the like.

It worked!!

Bounce rates improved, which means there was congruence between the ad copy and page copy. People landed on exactly what they thought would appear on the page. Visitors stayed on the page and went deeper into the architecture of the site. Customers made purchases more often, which raised transactions, e-commerce conversion rates, and organic search revenue.

When this strategy is implemented en masse; 10,000 pages, 50,000 pages, even 500,000 pages - your entire digital strategy improves.

This happened over the course of the next 6 months. More than 4 years later, the site is truly one of the highest performing e-commerce sites for outdoor gear and they don't even have a single brick and mortar store.

This store beats Amazon, Walmart, Bass Pro Shop, Cabela's, Dick's Sporting Goods, and many other sites for tens of thousands of keyword phrases and they almost doubled their organic search revenue in 18 months.

In my most recent SEMRUSH keyword download, Cabela's beat this company on 5,400 shared non-branded keyword phrases but this company beat Cabela's for more than 44,500 of the top 50,000 shared keyword phrases. Imagine being a billion-dollar company like Cabela's and getting spanked on more than 88% of the keyword phrases by a company without even one single brick and mortar store!

We tested and optimized the templates, built the functions, and then scaled those functions across the appropriate page types.

We watched, tracked, and tweaked the templates to outperform our competition. After years of reviewing the results and building on those successes, anyone with a calculator can tell function-driven content works.

The question is, will you implement E-commerce 3.0? Will you move on to the next paradigm of content generation including function-driven content. Personally, I hope you do, and I hope you report back on the results. Be the first in your industry and profit. Make the billion-dollar companies that have been resting on their laurels, wonder how you surpassed them.

Win!