



# How to improve SEO of Laurea University of Applied Sciences and make Laurea known abroad?

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2021 Laurea



**Laurea University of Applied Sciences**

**How to improve SEO of Laurea University of Applied Sciences  
and make Laurea known abroad?**

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This thesis project is a case study about Search Engine Optimization in the international website of Laurea University of Applied Sciences, which is a higher education institution in Finland. This study aims to improve the rankings of Laurea's websites in the Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs), to expand the school's reach and increase prospective students' awareness of the academy. Specifically, it investigates the factors that influence the school's online visibility and ranking positions in the SERPs on Google. In this context, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a process of getting both the quality and quantity of website traffic from free, organic or natural search results on Google.

An analysis of the website was conducted using quantitative method through numeric data on Google Analytics and qualitative method through interviews with Laurea's marketing manager and students to understand what factors needed to be improved in the SEO strategy. The results showed that quality content of the website should be developed based on the target searcher's behavior and keywords relevant to them. The results suggested that other elements also contribute to build trust and credibility of the website including title and meta tags, URLs, heading tags, images file name and alternative text, as well as backlinks.

Technology, human behavior, media, machine and mindset is changing the future business of SEO and online marketing. However, it is certain that SEO strategy will always be human-centric and to understand the user's intent and the deeper levels of wants and desires that drive behaviors.

Keywords: SEO, Search Engine Optimization, On-page SEO, website traffic, organic search result

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## 1 Introduction

With the developing of the digital era, not only can people get their answers in the twinkling of an eye but also with the most accurate results on search engines. In order to get more opportunities to convert prospects to customers, marketers need to understand what people are searching for online, what answer they are looking for and what contents they wish to see. By analyzing thoroughly, marketers can improve their Search Engine Optimization (SEO) plan so that they are able to deliver their best content to the right target audience on search engines. Besides, as a result of being on top 5 suggestions in the Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs), it can boost brand authenticity, decrease the advertising cost effectively and build relationships with prospects. This thesis begins by defining what Search Engine and Search Engine Result Pages are, analyzing the current SEO plan and SWOT strategy of Laurea University of Applied Sciences. It then describes the target audience and conducts an On-page Search Engine Optimization Plan for the institution. Subsequently, the author will measure the result and performance in case study and give her suggestions for further research.

### 1.1 Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Laurea University of Applied Sciences, a higher-education institution, is located in six different campuses in Uusimaa region in Finland including Tikkurila, Porvoo, Otaniemi, Lohja, Leppävaara and Hyvinkää. Laurea education offers six different bachelor's programmes, and three master's degree programmes entirely in English (Laurea 2021a).

The landing page of Laurea University of Applied Sciences in English is <https://www.laurea.fi/en>, which provides information for international students to keep track with the curriculum and latest news. The mission of the website is to introduce general ideas of the school such as information about entrance exams, up-to-date instructions during the pandemic, degree programmes, international guidance, research and development, and about the institution.

According to Laurea (2021b), foreign students coming from outside the EU/EEA will be liable to annual tuition fees in terms of bachelor's and master's degrees in English language, which are EUR 8,000 and EUR 10,000, respectively. With 650 out of 7,800 total students being taught in English, which accounts for only 8% of the total (Laurea 2021a), it is important to attract more international students to improve campus diversity and cultural competency.

## 1.2 Research Problem

Nowadays, one of the most influential search engines for international students to seek for information about Finnish universities is Google. Most people around the world can ask questions, receive the best possible results, and get as much information as possible by typing their queries on Google's search box. However, the algorithms of search engines are constantly updated every year. According to Meyers (2019), there are 350-400 times Google updates its algorithms per year. Some changes are insignificant - they could be new features or UI changes while some changes will create a huge impact on the ranking factors such as RankBrain, Hummingbird, Panda, Pay Layout Algorithm and so on.

The research problem was defined when the school's English websites were found in low-rank positions in the Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs), in contrast to its competitors, which slowed down brand awareness, site visibility and usability. Moreover, it is reported that the number of applications applying to Laurea University of Applied Sciences has dropped in recent years. Besides, Laurea does not have any Search Engine Optimization plan for international students. Therefore, if the institution's websites can achieve higher rankings in the Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs), it is a great way to expand the school's reach and increase prospects' awareness of the academy. The aim of this study is to provide a general knowledge of how on-page SEO performs, how to create a good target audience through statistical analysis of demographic and psychographic. It then investigates the current on-page SEO plan of Laurea UAS, identifies the issues and gives recommended steps to implement an effective on-page SEO strategy for a higher education institution.

The research question of this study is: How to improve Laurea's On-page Search Engine Optimization (SEO) design to help the school's webpages gain more traffic, and get on top of Google SERPs?

## 1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into 8 parts. The first section introduces Laurea background, describes the research problem, and explains glossary of terms for later use in next chapters.

Chapter two explores the literature review of Search Engine, including Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs), Search Engine Algorithm and Rankings, and finally, Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

In chapter three, the author explains the research method used in this study to approach these goals. The ideas, methods, and techniques are discussed during this, including describing approaches to theory development, research methodology, as well as observation methods.

The current SEO situation for Laurea's websites outlined in chapter four identifies the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in terms of Search Engine Optimization as a digital platform to attract international students, as well as its related terms, concepts and advantages.

Followed that, target audience and on-page SEO plan are conducted in chapters five and six. These chapters concentrate on important ranking factors which make a successful SEO strategy.

After implementing SEO, the discussion, which will include suggestions for measuring and monitoring performance, as well as the conclusion and limitations, are analyzed in chapters 7 and 8.

#### 1.4 Glossary of Terms

In order to understand some academic terms used in this research, it is recommended to view Glossary of Terms in Appendix 1 at the end of the thesis.

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

## 2 Literature review for search engine

According to Enge, Spencer & Stricchiola (2015), search engines are answer machines. They crawl through billions of pieces of content and analyze thousands of variables to figure out which ones are most likely to answer users' questions. When a user types a keyword or phrase in a search query box, search engines will analyze the requests, command and return the most relevant results with the least amount of time. As the result, search engines become one of the most indispensable parts in our life. This chapter will reveal the definition Search Engine, Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs), as well as Search Engine Algorithm and Ranking.

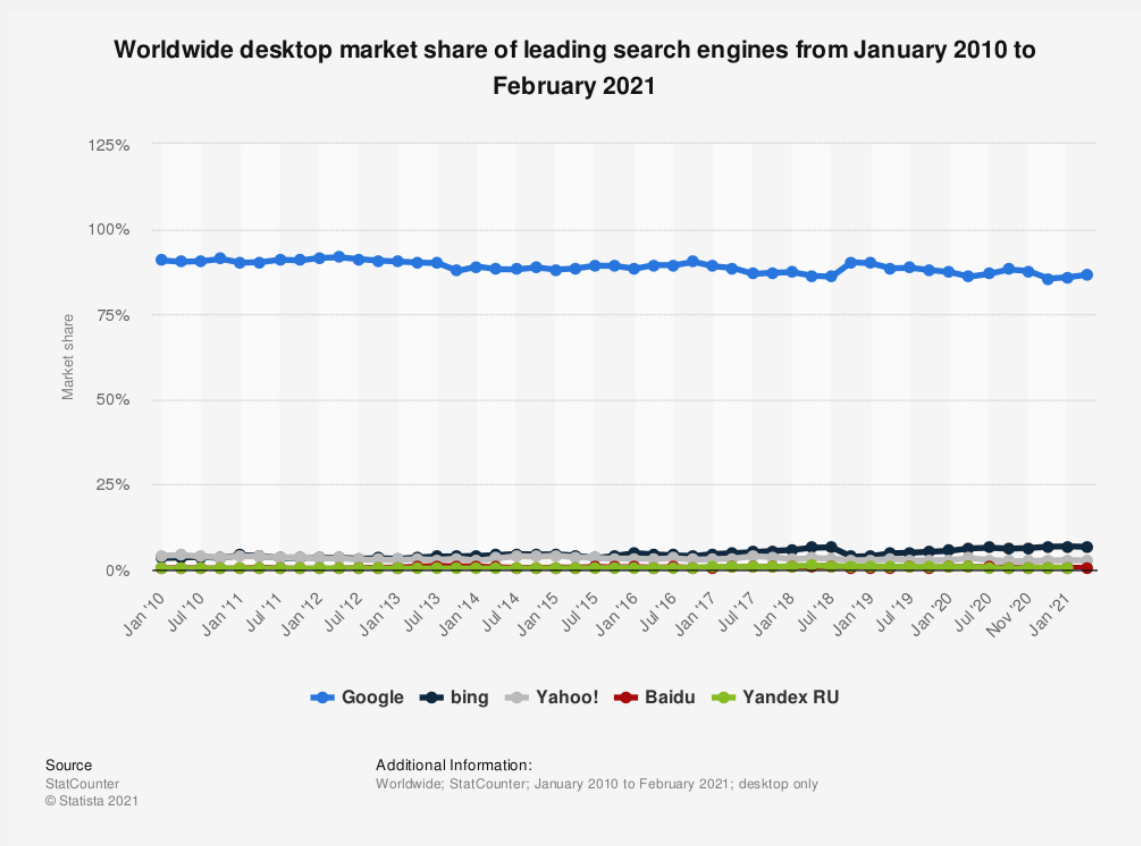


Figure 1: Worldwide desktop market share of leading search engines from January 2010 to February 2021 (Johnson 2021)

Even though Google occupied the most market shares in the mainstream from 2010 to 2021 all over the world, in some other countries, Google is not dominant. For instance, according to Capala (2018), Baidu had 70.26% the market share in China while Google was only 1.47% as the 4<sup>th</sup> highest. Another example is Yandex RU in Russia, which held 51.08% while Google ranked as the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest which was 45.27%. In this thesis, the author used Google as the main search engine to analyze current SEO situations and produce an effective SEO plan for Laurea UAS.

## 2.1 Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs)

Search Engine Result Pages are the results when a search engine responds to a user's request via keywords. Nowadays, search engines tend to customize its users' experience based on their locations, browsing histories and social settings. Therefore, even though the same keyword is used on the same search engine, the result will contain subtle differences (Enge, Spencer & Stricchiola 2015).

Appendix 2: An example of a Search Engine Results Page on Google

- Search query box (1)
- Vertical navigation (2)
- Results information (3)
- PPC advertising (4)
- Organic Search Results (5)
- People also ask (6)
- Query refinement options (7)

The first one is Search query box, where the user can type keywords, phrases or any questions. As they type in, the search query box will display Google's suggestions or recently typed words simultaneously.

The second one is Vertical navigation, in this section, it allows people to choose a specific area depending on their needs. For instance, Images, Maps, Videos or even News.

The third one is Results information which shows how many total results Google has found on the Internet.

There are two different types of search results when the search engine responses to a request, namely Paid per Click advertising (4) and Organic Search Results (5). Depending on what types of keywords a user type in the search query box, it will appear with or without the paid ad. PPC advertising is an internet marketing model in which marketers pay a fee each time one of their advertisements is clicked. Essentially, it is a way of purchasing website traffic rather than trying to gain it organically. Meanwhile, Organic Search Results, which are usually displayed under PPC advertising, are earned via effective SEO and not through paid advertisements (Enge, Spencer & Stricchiola 2015).

A Google SERP feature known as "People Also Ask" (PAA) box (6) addresses questions relevant to the user's search query. Each response has a clickable link to a webpage.

The last one is Query refinement suggestions, which are offered by Google to let customers choose a more specific topic or keyword.

## 2.2 Search Engine Algorithm and Ranking

According to Google Search (2021a), the most crucial aspect of SEO is that in order to appear in search result, the material must first be visible to search engines. That means if the website cannot be found, there is no chance it will ever appear in the SERPs. There are three steps of how search engines work including crawling, which is the process of discovery; indexing, which is the filing stage; and ranking, which is the retrieval stage.

The first step is crawling. Search engines send out web crawlers, also known as “spiders” or “robots” to discover new web pages that exist, and to verify the information on pages they have previously visited to see if it has changed or been updated on a regular basis. The indexing process is the next stage. When a search engine determines whether or not to use the content it has crawled, it is said to be indexing. After a crawling web page is judged worthy, it is filed and kept in a database from which it can be retrieved at a later time. And this index is utilized at the end of the ranking process. However, if a web page's content is regarded duplicate, low value or spammy, cannot be crawled, and lacked inbound links, it will not be included in the index. The final and the most important step is ranking. After crawling and indexing processes are complete, it is time to rank the page. In order to be ranked high in the SERPs, a website needs to fulfill some signals such as keyword presence in the title tag, loading speed of the web page, and website reputation.

### 2.3 Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization is a process of increasing traffic from free, organic or natural search results on Google. While SEO changes on a regular basis, its core values remain constant. There are three elements that contribute to a full SEO which include Technical Optimization, On-page Optimization and Off-page Optimization. In general, Technical Optimization is the method of finishing activities on the platform that are not linked to content but are intended to enhance SEO behind the scenes. On the other hand, the process of ensuring that the content on the website is meaningful and offers a positive user experience is known as on-page optimization. It involves using a content management system to target the right keywords within the content. Finally, Off-page Optimization is the method of improving the site's ranking by engaging in activities that take place outside of it. This is primarily due to backlinks, which aid in the development of the site's credibility (Digital Marketing Institution 2018).

When international students want to study in Finland, they have a list of criteria such as location, size, and their majors. Some students consider the tuition fees at their first priorities, some look for the school's reputation. In Finland, there are 13 universities and 22 universities of applied sciences (studyinfinland n.d) while 12 out of total are located in Helsinki alone, that provides a lot of opportunities for potential students to choose from. If a higher educational institution fails to get their prospects' attention, there is a good chance that those students will never consider the school as their final study destination. Search engine optimization is the only way to ensure that they do.

There are some common mistakes that if the school commits any of these while developing an SEO plan, it can be harmful to the website reputation. The first thing to keep in mind is that targeting wrong audience can waste a lot of time and resources since it does not lead to a

positive result nor improve conversion rate. For example, if the institution wants to have more international students, they have to target those who are interest in study abroad or in Finland. If they keep continuously targeting those who have no intention to apply, it can cause the audiences to feel negative emotions with the school or even make them feel frustration and annoyance. In order to genuinely connect with the target market, it is time to make a target audience plan before developing an SEO strategy which will be discussed in Target Audience chapter.

Second, according to Google Search Central (2021c), if a content is stuffed with a keyword too many times, it can cause the website to be removed from search listings entirely. Keyword stuffing was a successful strategy in SEO in the past but with today's algorithms, it is considered as a spammy method to deceive bots into bringing the content to their users. As a result, repeating the keyword over and over without actually writing for human readers will knock the content out of the SERPs forever. An efficient practice to build a quality content without using keyword cannibalization is to develop keyword synonym and long-tail variations which will be discussed in the Keyword Research section later.

Finally, as stated by Google Search Central (2021a), duplicate content is content that pops up on the Internet more than one website or is considered as similar content. Without a doubt, this is an issue that causes difficulty for Google to index a web page. Because there are multiple pieces of similar contents appearing on SERPs, Google will be confused which versions to index or eliminate. Besides, instead of linking to one content only, all inbound links will connect to multiple pieces of the duplicates, impacting the search visibility and credibility of the content on the SERPs. This can be avoided by checking the <head> tag of all duplicate versions, redirect everyone there.

Concerning all the crucial benefits of SEO, using them in a misleading way can harm the school's reputation, cause bad user experience and decrease search engine rankings. Busche (2017) states that many experts consider 15 factors that contribute to improve search engine rankings are divided into 3 main categories including Reputation, Relevance, Readability.

Table 1: 15 elements of Reputation, Relevance and Readability (Busche 2017)

Category	Meaning	Main Factors
<b>Reputation</b>	These factors relate to the level of authority that search engines assign to the website's domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inbound links (Backlinks)</li> <li>• Outbound or external links</li> <li>• Internal linking</li> <li>• Domain reputation</li> <li>• Visitor engagement and traffic</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social metrics</li> </ul>
<b>Relevance</b>	The way search engines connect searchers' queries with the website's content to ensure that it is appropriate to satisfy their need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-page keyword and semantic keyword usage</li> <li>• Heading usage</li> <li>• Title and "meta description" optimization</li> <li>• URL structure</li> <li>• Content freshness</li> <li>• Image and media optimization</li> </ul>
<b>Readability</b>	This group of SEO relates to the user's experience after they have landed in a particular content piece.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page speed</li> <li>• Content quality and length</li> <li>• Responsive design and user experience</li> </ul>

Those factors listed above cover all the information that a useful SEO strategy should have. The three main categories can be easily to memorize if the organization just think in term of "whether the content is reputation", "whether it is relevance to the searcher's intent" and "whether it is readable and provides a quality experience" (Busche 2017).

### 3 Research method

#### 3.1 Different types of approaches

There are two main research approaches, namely deductive and inductive reasoning.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) states that one way of differentiating deductive from inductive approach is that deductive reasoning focuses on testing an existing theory while the aim of inductive reasoning is to develop a theory. Deductive method starts with existing theory, often related to the academic literature and then applies that theory to a specific case. Data can be collected through quantitative method to test the hypothesis as one of the most important characteristics of deduction is that facts need to be measurable. After that, conclusion about the case, which can be true or untrue, is based on those premises above. On the other hand, inductive method, which is in contrast to deductive method, starts from observing a situation, then observing a sample and finally developing a theory. Inductive reasoning is used when there is little to no existing theory to test. Besides,

the conclusion of inductive, which does not follow the logically from the premises, can be false.

In this study, the SEO factors and methods are defined through researching the material. It is then used to analyze the current SEO situation of the institution. Therefore, the research approach of this study is deductive reasoning, which moves from a more general level to a specific one.

### 3.2 Research methodology

There are three types of methodological choices including quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research design.

In general, quantitative method, which is often used for expressing numerical data, collects data analysis procedure such as graphs and statistics or by surveys and even questionnaire. In contrast, qualitative data, which is often used for non-numerical data, expresses in words, images, video clips or similar material. Besides, not only does qualitative approach provide an in-depth perspective of “what”, “where”, and “when” questions, but also contributes to the understanding of “why” and “how” questions to existing data. Qualitative data can be collected from a variety of sources such as interview, categorizing data, case study, and ethnography. In reality, a huge number of businesses combine quantitative and qualitative elements, known as mixed method. This technique is used when the business needs to analyze a more complete and synergistic utilization of data rather than separate quantitative and qualitative research. An example here is when doing a survey or questionnaire, the respondents may sometimes prefer to express their opinions and ideas in words than ticking in a multiple-choice section as it may not contain the answer options the respondents want to give (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016). Therefore, depending on what type of data the researcher wishes to achieve, he/she will consider which methodological choice is the right one for their research procedure.

According to the research objectives, the author conducted research into an on-page SEO plan in Laurea UAS, using a mixed methods research design.

First, an initial discussion was held with Juha Niemi, a marketing manager at Laurea UAS, which combined the agreement of giving the permission to access the Google Analytics account, and the scope of essential marketing campaign. A short interview, about 15 minutes, was also conducted to gain insights into existing problems within the institution.

Second, since one of the main aims of this thesis is to find out how to improve the website’s content, an individual in-depth interview was held with Thu Nguyen - a student at Laurea. The participant belonged to the target group age from 24 to 30 years old. The interview

lasted approximately 10 minutes and answers were recorded by note-taking. These data were also analyzed qualitatively to understand what she struggled with the most when browsing on the school's website.

Next, existing data were retrieved from traditional quantitative analytics tools like Google Analytics to track the audience data. For example, the researcher was able to collect information from user demographics such as age and gender or the language that most users used. And from that, the researcher could identify issues and opportunities for improvement.

Finally, the author used participant observation and internet-mediated observation as qualitative methods to collect data through viewing, recording, description, analysis and note-taking behaviors. In general, participant observation allows the researcher to enter into a social world where their target audience is participating and attempt to become a member of the community. Meanwhile Internet-mediated observation, including netnography, webethnography and online ethnography, involves the researcher in studying people who share a same interest online. The interest could be brand, product, service, or lifestyle, whose platforms can operate through social media groups, forums, discussion boards, customer supports or websites (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016).

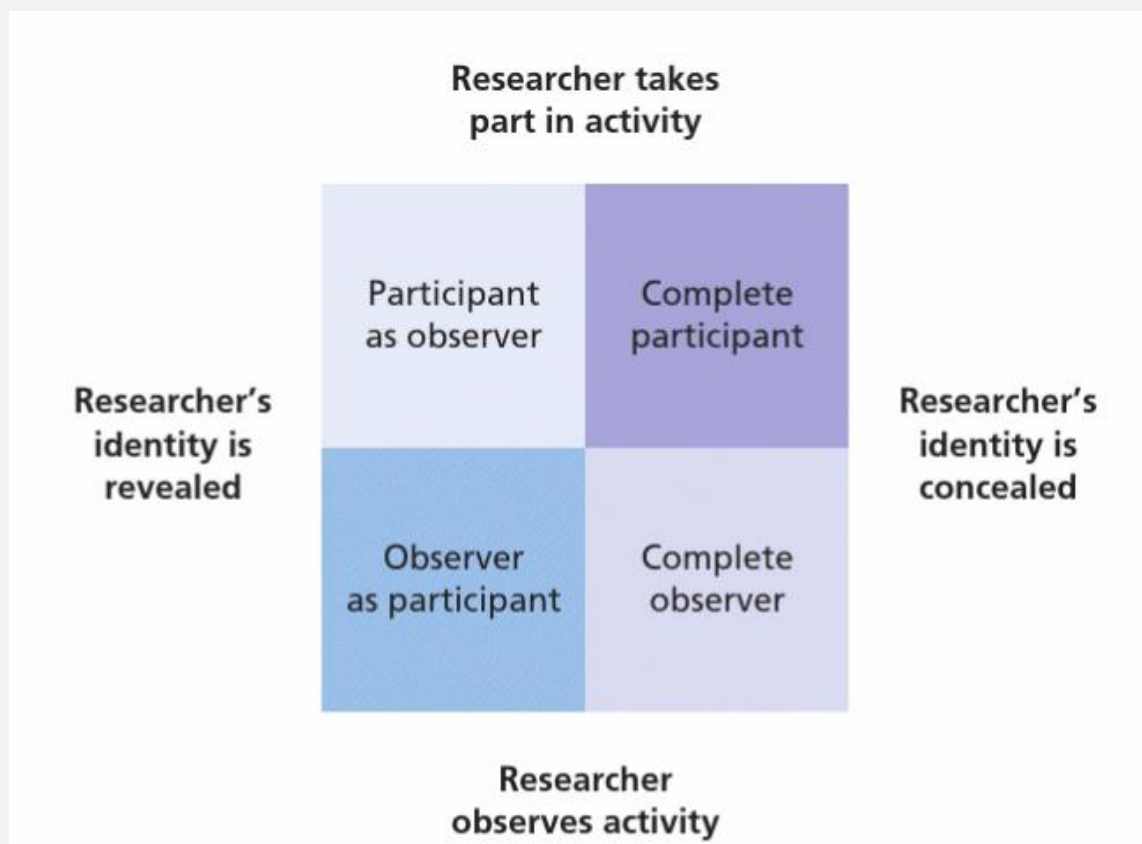


Figure 2: Typology of participant observation researcher roles (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016)

There are four types of participant observation including complete participant, complete observer, participant as observer and observer as participant. Complete participant means the researcher has the ability to fully join the group in which they are searching without revealing their true purpose, almost like a spy. Complete observer means the researcher observes the situations, group members' behaviors without being seen or noticed by whom they are studying. The role of observer as participant will primarily involve the researcher in observing but limited interaction while their goals are being known by participants. Finally, as a participant as observer, the researcher will both engage with the participants and also reveal their purpose as a researcher (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016).

The author experienced as a participant-as-observer, in which she spent weeks observing and participating in a Vietnamese community in Finland group on Facebook. The author showed her purpose of joining the group was to immerse herself in a context of what factors and frequent problems that influence international students' choice of university in Finland. To achieve this, it is important to gain the trust of those involved by also sharing the author's experience and communicating with the members of the group.

In conclusion, depending on the goals, timeframe, working access and ethical considerations, the researcher will conduct the method to which they feel suited to the research procedure that helps avoid error, bias and misunderstanding.

#### 4 Situation analysis for Laurea's websites

Even though quality content plays an important role in building a strong foundation for a website with a clean and effective user experience, there are other elements also contributing to build trust and credibility of a website such as title and meta tags, URLs, heading tags, images file name and alternative text, and so on. Therefore, an in-depth SEO analysis should include an examination of the website's content, code and structure, and also off-site factors. Besides, SEO will be nothing if the institution fails to convert prospects into something value. In this case, we want the visitors not only raise awareness of the website, but also consider the institution as their study destination.

##### 4.1 Current SEO analysis

According to table 2, there are 15 factors that contribute to Reputation, Relevance, and Readability. These factors are considered as benchmarks for the author to analyze Laurea's current situation below.

#### 4.1.1 Reputation

When it comes to reputation, which is a factor related to websites' authority that Google assigns to the school's domain, all the data below were retrieved on Google Analytics. Overall, from 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019 to 15<sup>th</sup> May 2021, 89.75 percent of active users were from Finland while only 10.25 percent of Laurea's website users were from foreign countries. It is possible that small amounts of international students are aware of Laurea University of Applied Sciences and its degrees.

Country	Users	Users
	1,552,305 % of Total: 100.00% (1,552,305)	1,552,305 % of Total: 100.00% (1,552,305)
1. Finland	1,404,143	89.75%
2. United States	22,596	1.44%
3. Netherlands	15,424	0.99%
4. Germany	12,375	0.79%
5. France	8,479	0.54%
6. Austria	7,287	0.47%
7. Sweden	7,243	0.46%
8. Spain	6,184	0.40%
9. United Kingdom	5,788	0.37%
10. Russia	4,463	0.29%

Figure 3: 89.75% of the www.laurea.fi domain's users were in Finland (14th May 2019 to 15th May 2021)

Google Analytics Language report is a report to see how activity might vary across different languages. Google collects this data from the user's browser via the language codes, for example, English language can be broken down into "en" for English or added a specific region via the second part such as "en-bg" for English (United Kingdom) and "en-us" for English (United States). The data does not always represent the readers' native languages, it is just the language they are browsing on the internet (Lewis 2013). On the same period, Finnish was the most popular browser language on the website, representing 76.97 percent of internet users. English was ranked second with an 18 percent share. The large share of Finnish language access to the website is due to the fact that Finnish students are by far the main sources of the school. This is by no means the school should neglect the English-language content but the other way around, all the information available should be presented in English as much as possible for prospects to find it easily.

Language	Users	Users
	1,552,305 % of Total: 100.00% (1,552,305)	1,552,305 % of Total: 100.00% (1,552,305)
1. fi-fi	998,637	62.90%
2. fi	223,431	14.07%
3. en-us	192,497	12.12%
4. en-gb	80,649	5.08%
5. ru-ru	9,261	0.58%
6. en-fi	7,330	0.46%
7. sv-se	7,193	0.45%
8. zh-cn	6,291	0.40%
9. de-de	5,437	0.34%
10. en	5,436	0.34%

Figure 4: 76.97% of the www.laurea.fi domain’s users were using Finnish-language default on their browser while only 18% were using English (14th May 2019 to 15th May 2021)

Session Duration Bucket is the report showing the average amount of time a group of visitors spend on a website within a session. A single session can include several page views, event, social interactions, or even commercial transactions (Analytics Help n.d a). It provides great insights to deeply understand the users’ behaviors and the journey they take. According to the information retrieved on Google Analytics, in the 0-10 seconds, there were the highest number of visits and pageviews compared to the other rows.

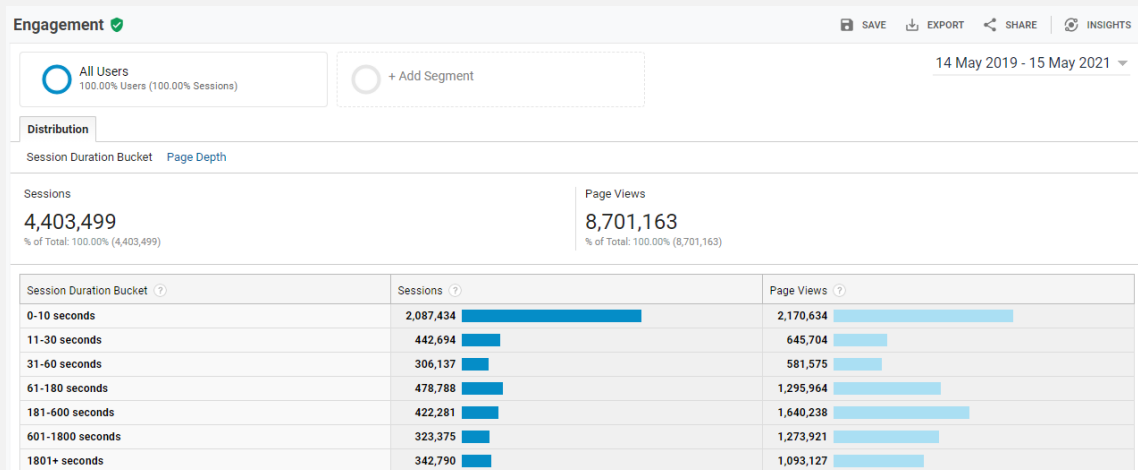


Figure 5: User Engagement (14th May 2019 to 15th May 2021)

This could mean either the visitors scanned through multiple pages under 10 seconds, or the visitors viewed only one page before exiting, which is known as bounce visits. This will be proven by looking at the data below:

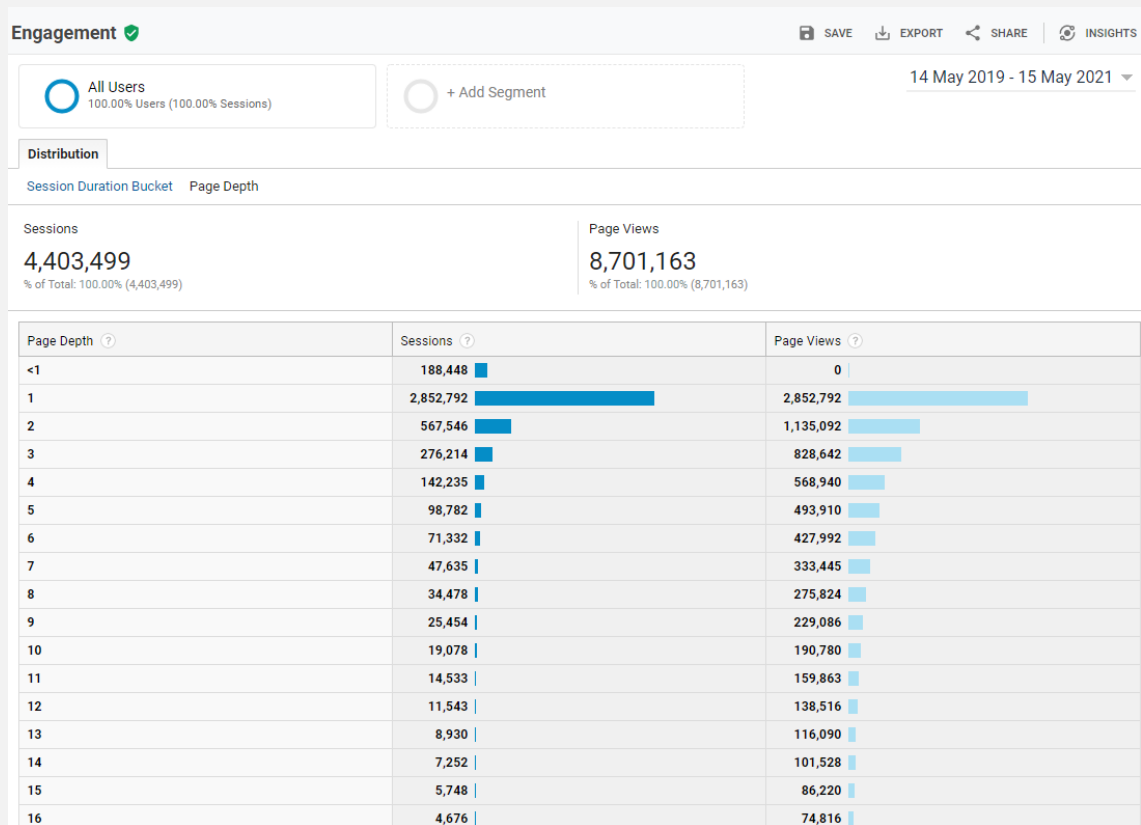


Figure 6: Page Depth (14th May 2019 to 15th May 2021)

This report is all about how many pages the users viewed in a single session, for example, how many users saw one page view and how many pageviews did that in total. Overall, almost one-third of the visitors viewed one page within a session, followed by one-ninth on the same portion accounted for two pages. This might be a signal that the visitors were either unable to find the content they were searching for or facing loading problems.

According to Moz (2021b), Linking Domains or referral domains represent the number of unique root domains linking to a site. More than two links from the same root domain will be counted as one. Meanwhile, Inbound Links, also known as Backlinks, are links from pages on another website pointing to the institution’s websites. It is reported that pages with a high number of inbound links receive higher organic search engine rankings. The information below was gathered on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021 on Moz.com, an all-in-one software suite providing tools to analyze and improve SEO performance.

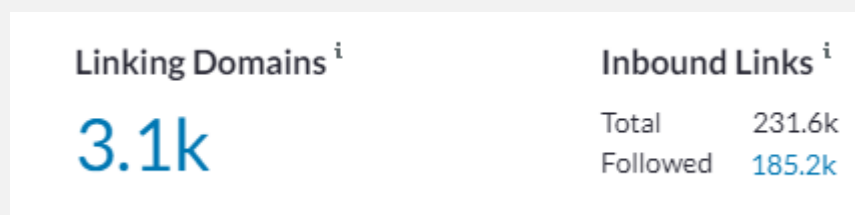


Figure 7: Linking Domains at Laurea.fi (retrieved on 16th May 2021)

In comparison to Haaga-Helia and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, which are the other two universities of applied sciences in Helsinki, Laurea had the lowest number in linking domains even though it was ranked as the second highest inbound links after Metropolia UAS.

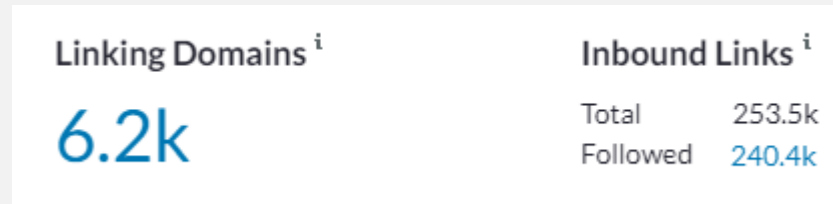


Figure 8: Linking Domains at Metropolia.fi (retrieved on 16th May 2021)

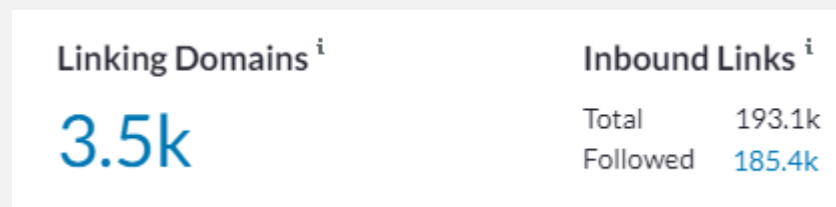


Figure 9: Linking Domains at Haaga-helia.fi (retrieved on 16th May 2021)

Regardless of being behind at linking domains, Laurea can still improve the rankings on Google by generating quality contents from high domain authority websites. The higher the domain authority is, the more trustworthy the backlinks for the websites will be.

#### 4.1.2 Relevance

When it comes to relevance, it is when Google ensures that its users will satisfy with the content of the website.

As mentioned in section 3.2, when a searcher types their query on Google, they will not see the content immediately but instead, a list of results will be displayed in the SERPs. It is when the SEO specialists make sure they utilize each snippet element including title tags, meta descriptions and URLs. According to Moz (2021c), a title tag is an HTML element displayed on Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) as the clickable headline for a given result. The title tag which is the first thing the searcher will see in a SERP should be an accurate and concise description of a page's content. If the user finds out that the key phrases in the SEO title match their query, they are more likely to click on it. Besides, the more the title matches the search terms of the user, the higher the page will generally be ranked.

During the website inspection, it was discovered that Laurea was using the school's Finnish name on every English website's title tag as shown in the picture below.

```

<head>
  <meta charset="utf-8" />
  <link href="/Static/dist/css/style.css?v=f1de59dc16e85e6d6596d8fa3610b868" rel="stylesheet">
  <meta http-equiv="x-ua-compatible" content="ie=edge">
  <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0 shrink-to-fit=no">
  <meta name="facebook-domain-verification" content="y3wnvgcumax3u43jnxsqjlfarsgkk0"/>
  <title>Front page - Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu</title>
  <meta content="width=device-width" name="viewport">

```

Figure 10: Title Tag on Laurea's Front Page

The brand name which is an important piece to build customer trust should be easy to recognize from both physical and digital platforms. Including the school's name in Finnish on an English page will avoid the international students from recognizing the institution. Therefore, it is recommended to change the name to Laurea University of Applied Sciences or be shorten as Laurea UAS.

It was found that many English-language pages contained Meta-keywords, as demonstrated by the following picture:

```

<title>Front page - Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu</title>
<meta content="width=device-width" name="viewport">
<link rel="apple-touch-icon" sizes="160x160" href="/Static/dist/assets/favicons/apple-touch-icon.png?v=ae043b2...">
<link href="/Static/dist/assets/favicons/favicon-32x32.png?v=daacd99..." rel="icon" sizes="32x32" type="image/png">
<link href="/Static/dist/assets/favicons/favicon-16x16.png?v=9220c32..." rel="icon" sizes="16x16" type="image/png">
<link href="/Static/dist/assets/favicons/favicon.ico?v=e055f55..." rel="shortcut icon">
<!-- <link rel="stylesheet" href="https://use.typekit.net/vsp0cjsx.css" -->
<link href="https://fonts.googleapis.com/css?family=Lato:300,400,700,900" rel="stylesheet">
<link rel="stylesheet" href="https://use.typekit.net/xal0jok.css">
<meta content="nursing degree,social services degree,business information technology,service business,business management,safety, security and risk management,security,restaurant entrepreneurship,bachelor's degree,master's degree, service innovation and design,global health and crisis management,leading transformational change" name="keywords">
<meta content="Front page" property="og:title">
<meta content="website" property="og:type">

```

Figure 11: Meta Keywords on Laurea's Front Page

As stated by Cutts (2009), meta keywords, a part of the meta tag hidden the Page Source (<meta name="keywords" content="">), provides Google with data and information that are not visible in the content itself. However, no longer does Google use the keywords meta tag in web rankings because some webmasters took advantages of the meta keywords tag as a place to do keyword stuffing with irrelevant terms. As a result, using the meta keywords nowadays are considered to bring spam to the websites and not worth the time worrying about it.

#### 4.1.3 Readability

Concerning content quality and length, which is an element of Readability category, in order to check what keywords that the institution and competitors are already ranking for, Moz.com is a perfect tool for it.

Site	Ranking Keywords	Top Positions
● laurea.fi	128	6 keywords in #1-3 12 keywords in #4-10
● metropolia.fi	901	33 keywords in #1-3 99 keywords in #4-10
● haaga-helia.fi	507	12 keywords in #1-3 47 keywords in #4-10

Figure 12: Ranking Keywords (retrieved on 20th May 2021)

In Keyword explorer report, the keywords ranked by Laurea UAS were generally far less than that of the other schools, 128 ranking keywords. In contrast, Metropolia and Haaga Helia had 901 and 507 ranking keywords, respectively. Still, only 6 Laurea's keywords were ranked in top 1 to 3, half of Haaga Helia's and one-sixth of Metropolia's. Even though more keywords were ranked in top 4 to 10, Laurea still had the smallest numbers among three institutions. From the analysis above, it is no wonder why only a few international students are aware of Laurea UAS. As a result, the need to create a SEO plan for the school's website is reinforced.

According to Busche (2017), Google has publicly announced that page speed became a ranking factor since 2010. Six years later, they declared that mobile ranking factors would also be affected by mobile page speed. Therefore, optimizing web experiences will not only improve user engagement, and rankings, but also increase conversion rates. PageSpeed Insights is a free tool developed by Google to check the performance of a web page on both mobile and desktop devices. The metric scores are colored based on these ranges, a red warning triangle (0 to 49) indicates poor, a yellow circle (50-89) is a sign that needs improvement, and a green circle (90-100) considers good (PageSpeed Insight 2020). From the picture below, Laurea's homepage scored at 61 which needed improvement.

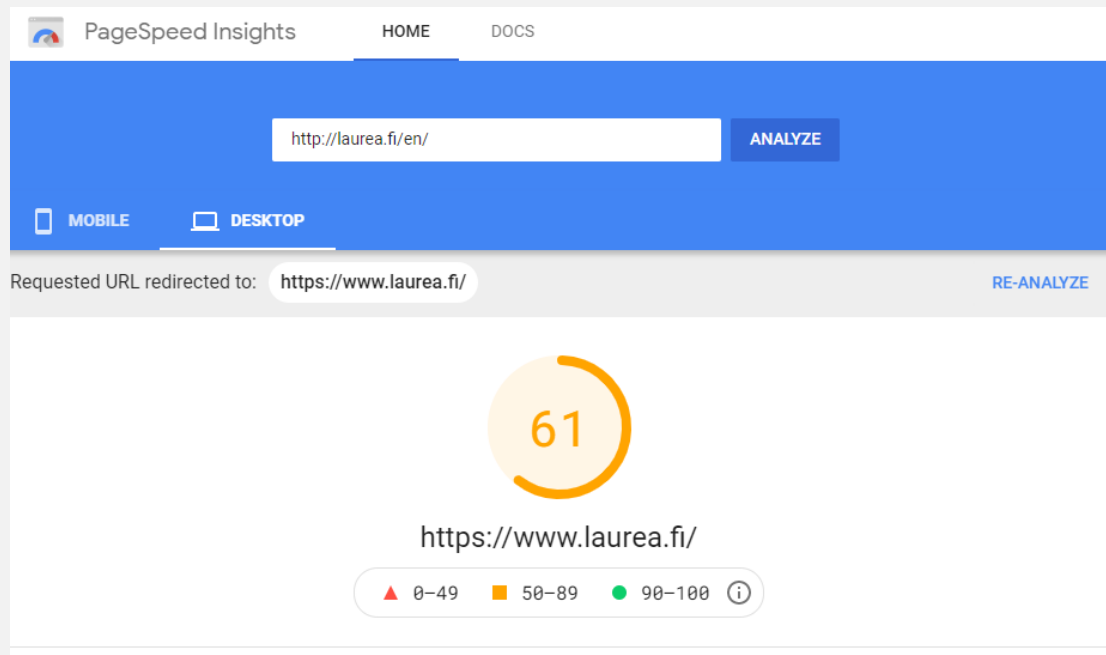


Figure 13: PageSpeed Insights retrieved on 19th May 2021 at 12:30am

There are some suggestions from the analysis to help the page load faster. The institution can decrease initial server response time or optimize the code structure by removing unused JavaScript. Besides, they can check the format of images such as JPGs for photographs, PNGs for smaller graphics, and among many other things. All in all, it is clear that not only keywords, snippet elements but also speed site have a great impact in building a good user experience and ranking (Busche 2017).

The type of devices the audience uses to access the website also influence their user experience. Mobile experience is totally different than that of the desktop since the screen sizes are smaller, and there are no mouse available but only tappable screens. Furthermore, having smaller-size web pages helps boost the connection bandwidth on any devices, especially on a smartphone (Enge, Spencer & Stricchiola 2015). From the data collected at Google Analytics, mobile usages were generally higher among all of devices at Laurea sites, reaching over 50% of total. Therefore, it is extremely important to constantly check the mobile optimization for every page in order to avoid being negatively impacted for the rankings from smart phones.


Secondary dimension		Sort Type: Default	Q advanced	Grid	Table	Filter	Chart
Device Category	Users	Users					
	1,554,634 % of Total: 100.00% (1,554,634)	1,554,634 % of Total: 100.00% (1,554,634)					
1. mobile	833,287	53.26%					
2. desktop	688,070	43.98%					
3. tablet	43,165	2.76%					

Figure 14: Device Category (18th May 2019 to 19th May 2021)

To help the institution determine the mobile friendliness of their sites, the author used Google Mobile-Friendly Test (<https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>) to detect errors or how easily the searcher can access a page on a mobile device. An example will be demonstrated by the picture below.

Tested on: 20 May 2021 at 16:37

**Page is mobile friendly**  
This page is easy to use on a mobile device



Additional resources

- Open site-wide mobile usability report
- Find out more about mobile-friendly pages
- Post comments or questions to our discussion group

Privacy Terms




Figure 15: Mobile Friendliness Test for <http://laurea.fi/>, retrieved on 20th May 2021

The experiment provides a new insight into the relationship between Google's ranking positions and user experience across the entire site. Therefore, creating a content that is useful and friendly to humans is probably the safest way to appeal to bots, too.

#### 4.2 SWOT goals

Before developing a Search Engine Optimization plan, it is important to conduct a situation analysis to analyze the internal and external factors of the business. It provides an opportunity to examine the institution's strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) and its impact on the organization.

All the data were analyzed on Google Analytics from 18<sup>th</sup> May 2019 to 19<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal Website characteristics	<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decent domain name (laurea.fi).</li> <li>• 48.2% sources of traffic are from Organic Search followed by Direct Traffic (23.2%).</li> <li>• High numbers of referrals (220,257 links).</li> <li>• Strong social network on Facebook (78.61%), Instagram (14.13%).</li> <li>• Low bounce rates (from 20% to 24%).</li> <li>• Effective URLs</li> <li>• Appropriate heading tags</li> <li>• Mobile-friendly</li> </ul>	<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No English target keywords in the top 20 Organic Keywords.</li> <li>• Need improvement on site speed (61 scores in PageSpeed Insights).</li> <li>• The school's name in Finnish in the titles of some English pages.</li> <li>• Low linking domains compared to Metropolia and Haaga Helia.</li> <li>• Include meta keywords.</li> <li>• Poor ranking for primary commercial keywords.</li> <li>• No SEO Plan for international students.</li> <li>• Using many academic words in the content.</li> </ul>
External Environment characteristics	<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a campaign for English target keywords.</li> <li>• Fix site speed by checking the code structure, images format, web hosting or data issue.</li> <li>• Change the school's name to English in the titles of some pages.</li> <li>• Improve link domains by linking from high domain reputation.</li> <li>• Invest budget in on-page, off-page SEO and keyword optimization to decrease PPC prices on Google.</li> <li>• the writing could be more student-friendly using more</li> </ul>	<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitors with higher page rankings and higher domain authority.</li> <li>• Competitors having high organic traffic and organic keywords.</li> <li>• Algorithmic updates.</li> <li>• Competitors spending high budget in SEO.</li> </ul>

Figure 16: SWOT analysis (based on data from 18th May 2019 to 19th May 2021)

This simple analysis provides an opportunity to develop an on-page SEO plan with focus areas for Laurea going forward. We just need to get the basic optimization dialed in creating a target audience, advancing the keyword research, improving on-page SEO and snippet elements in the SERPs.

## 5 Target audience

According to Busche (2017), it is dangerous to assume that potential students will be impressed by the same interests as SEO specialists even though the specialists are also a part of the community. Since everyone has their own belief, opinion and lifestyle, it is worth the time to invest in target audience for the school. Developing an effective on-page SEO strategy requires narrowing down the focus on a core audience. Therefore, utilizing the target audience analysis can help the institution find a group of audiences that has a same interest in the academy, improve conversion rates and have a more cost-effective content marketing strategy.

There are several ways to gather the information for target audience. These steps below are an illustration of how the author collected and analyzed target audience for Laurea university of Applied Sciences.

### 5.1 Start with existing data

The first step is to look at existing quantitative data on Google Analytics, demographics play an important role in defining who the students are, while psychographics explain why they apply to an institution. In general, demographics contain basic information such as age, gender, occupation, and location are the unique identities and identifiers of users. On the other hand, psychographics is based on lifestyle, habit, behavior, and interest (Meredith 2019).

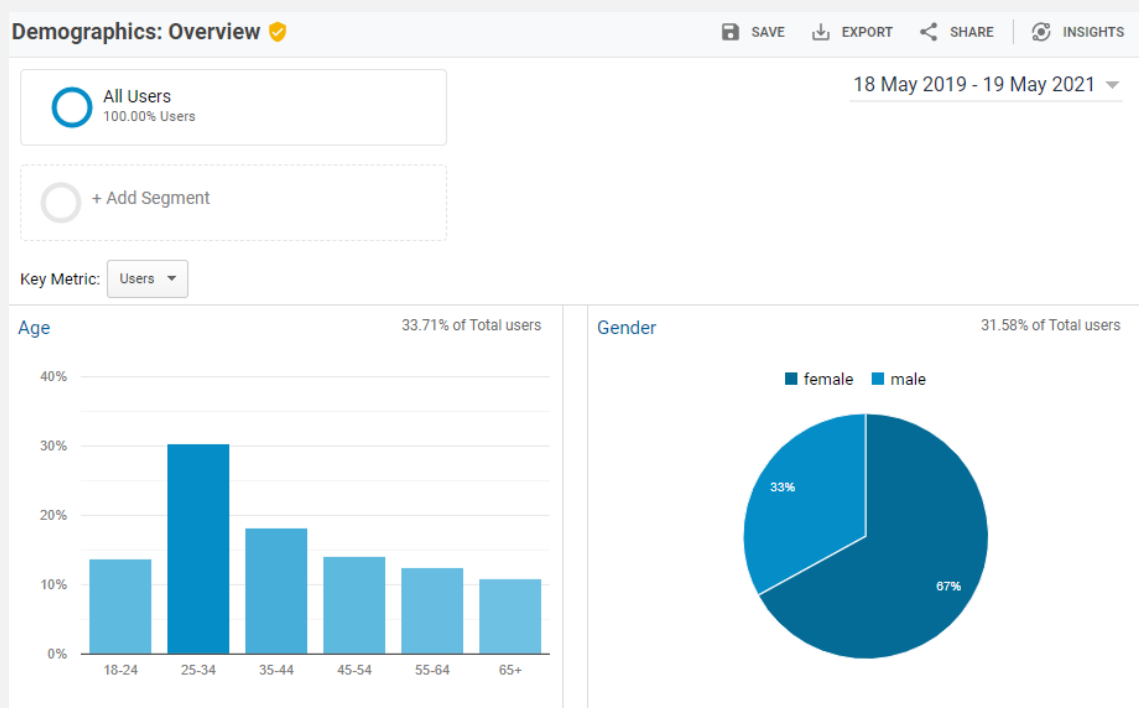


Figure 17: User demographics (18th May 2019 to 19th May 2021)

Overall, it is clear that the largest number of users accessed the websites were at the age of 25 to 34 years old, accounting for 30.30% of total users. Besides, out of all internet users, 67% was women, and 33% was men. Therefore, our target audience will be female prospective students at the age of 25 to 34.

According to Analytics Help (n.d b), Google Analytics’ Interests report show what our website audiences are interested in. There are three categories in the Interests Overview including Affinity Category, In-Market Segment and Other Category. In general, Affinity Categories are often used at the beginning of the process to make potential users aware of the institution. Meanwhile, users in In-Market Segment are ready to apply for the application in a specified category. Finally, Other Categories are more specific details than Affinity or In-Market, in which users based on what else they are browsing. Using advanced segment for the best converting demographic, “Women 25-34” is demonstrated below.

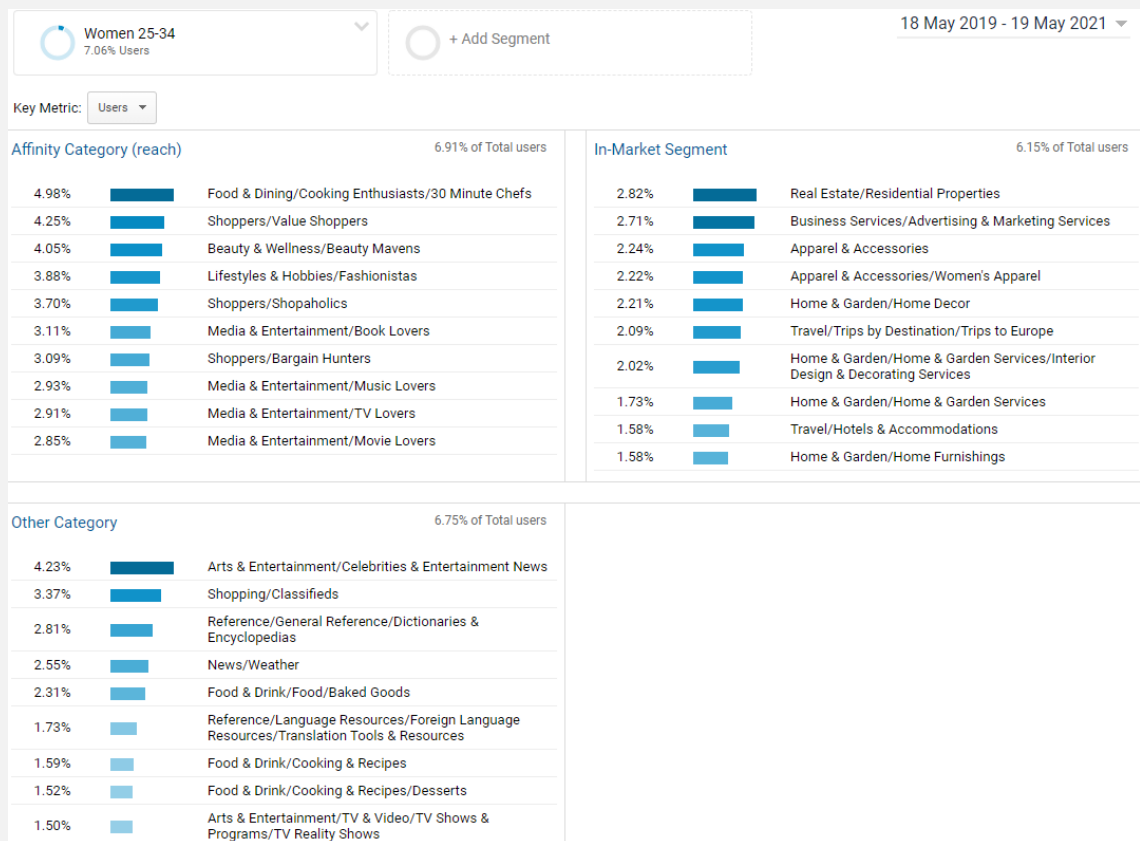


Figure 18: Women 25-34 Interests (18th May 2019 to 19th May 2021)

This data may be assumed that the best interests to target are those looking at the in-market segment “Real Estate/Residential Properties”, enjoy foods and cooking channels, and love entertainment news.

## 5.2 Search Intent

The next step is to join social media or any online platforms in order to know what our ideal prospects' behaviors and struggles are. This data source helps specialists to have a clear look about frequent problems and common expressions that foreign students usually struggle with. In this case, the author observed a private group on Facebook where participants can post their questions about Finland and receive feedbacks. If the SEO specialists understand who is the audience for a particular content piece, keyword research in the next chapter will be much easier to target.

First, informational queries appear at the earlier awareness stage of the buying cycle. At this stage, searchers are looking for general information that solve their problems, their goals might not be searching for any universities but asking for the environment. This type of query has the biggest number of joiners and largest numbers of posts. For example, a potential student would ask what other people's opinions about the Finnish education systems or what typical lifestyles would be in this country. Besides, the keywords for this audience are going to be the foremost numerous and should support the university's specifics. This includes courses offered by the university, life and work after graduation, and after all multi-campus locations. In addition, tuition fees play an important role in international students' decision-making process, and therefore, using keywords like tuitions, scholarships, and so on might also be useful. Finally, after having narrowed down their choices to a few universities, the prospective students could be comparing campus amenities or curriculums between universities which could be also considered as value keywords in the future.

Second, navigational queries indicate intent to find a particular website or webpage. At this stage, the queries are often brand-related keywords. These queries tend to happen at all stages of the buyer's journey. If the searcher has done their research and decided to apply to a particular university, they will quite often finish on a brand term. Therefore, it is difficult to target navigational search intent unless the school owns the websites the searcher wants to apply.

Finally, transactional queries are search queries entered with the intent of completing a transaction. These queries are more likely to convert and happen in the last stage of the buyer's journey, when the students are ready to fill in applications.

In conclusion, with a clearly defined target audience, every detail of degree programmes can be perfectly tailored to the potential students' needs and desires. This will result in extremely satisfied user experience and overwhelmingly positive feedbacks in the SEO performance.

## 6 On-page Search Engine Optimization Plan

### 6.1 Keyword Research

Keyword Research, a process of discovering the keywords used by prospects to find the institution's programmes, is one of the most important and complex aspects in the search engine marketing field. In order to succeed in this process, it is a must to choose the most focused keywords that are within the school's reach and have a good search volume. The benefits of Keyword Research are to help the higher institution estimate the relevance of the keywords to the industry and discover those keywords that have sufficiently high search volume and are rankable (Digital Marketing Institution 2020).

#### 6.1.1 Types of keywords

There are mainly two types of keywords including short-tail and long-tail keywords. Short-tail keywords, which are either single word phrases or 2-3 words phrases and account for 30% of all search traffic, are less specific and generic keywords in the industry. Terms such as "university", or "Finland education" have high search volume but also high competition and low conversion. On the other hand, long-tail keywords, which tend to be longer in length and more specific as well, occupy around 70% of all search traffic. So "study in Helsinki in English", or "how to apply to Laurea University of Applied Sciences" has less search volume but accounts for a great amount of the search traffic (Backlinko 2021b).

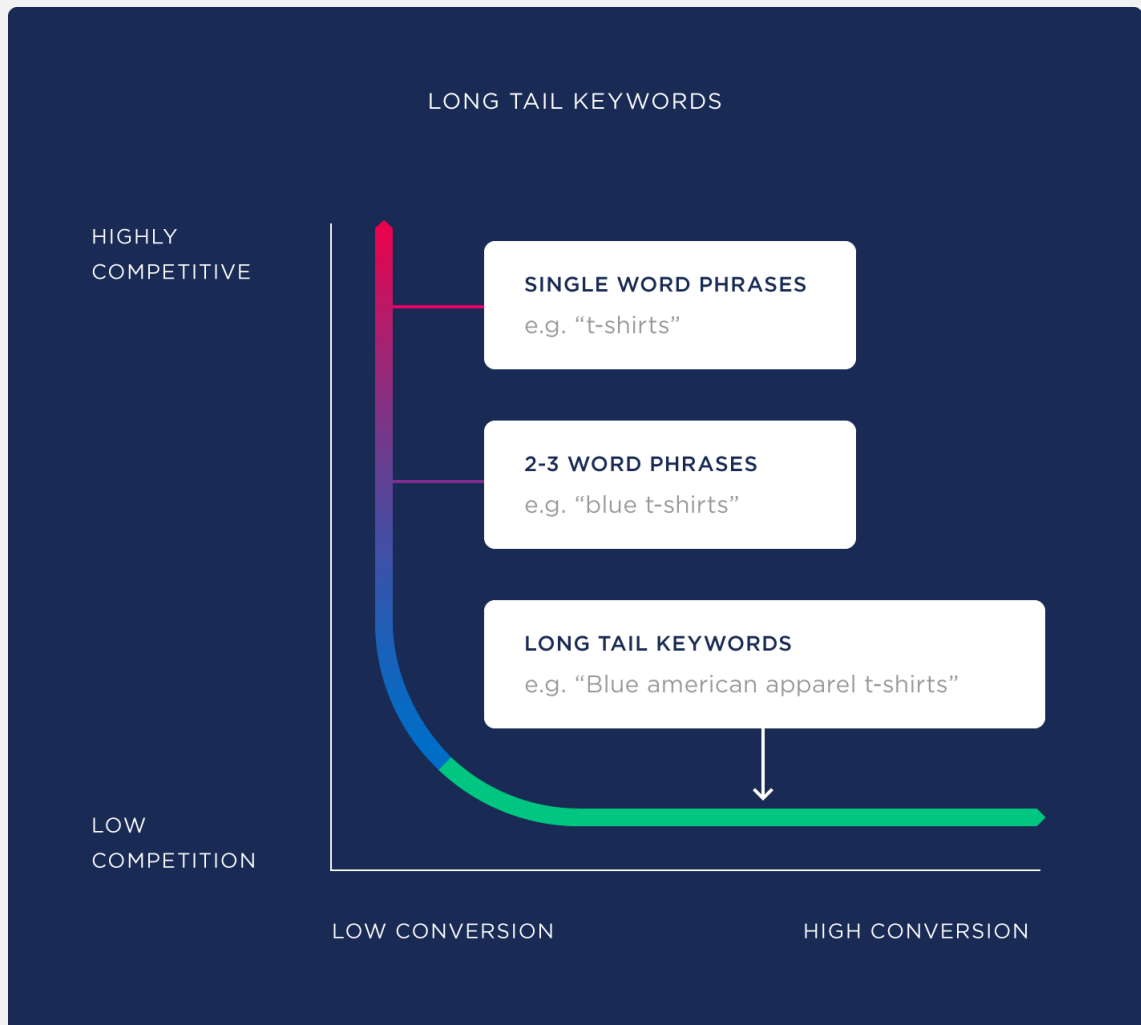


Figure 19: Long tail keywords (Backlinko 2021b)

According to Francis (n.d), the differences between long-tail and short-tail keywords are the user intent, search volume, conversion, the ranking position, and the content. In short-tail keywords, it is difficult to know what content a user wants to search. For example, with only a phrase "Degree Programmes", even though it has a higher individual search volume, the user intent is ambiguous and lower collective keyword search volume. Because there are a lot of universities in Finland, it is hard to convert when it comes to conversion. The SEO specialists are confused which specific city the user wishes to stay or which study level they are searching for. Somebody may prefer a university with a good reputation with good facilities at a good location, whereas others may want to apply for a university with cheaper cost fees or a higher percentage of scholarship. There are a numerous of things that the user is searching for and it is also harder to rank because it is obvious that everyone is ranking for that keyword.

In comparison to long-tail keywords, which are unambiguous and more specific. For example, a user may look for studying in a bachelor's degree in Helsinki in English, in this case, the

user has decided the exact level they wish to apply to, the city they have an interest in and even the language they want to learn, then that is going to be easier to convert. When it comes to volume, even though long-tail keywords are lower individual keyword search volume, it has a higher collective keyword search volume (Francis n.d). Besides, ranking with long-tail keywords is much easier because there is less competition but requires more in-depth and a large amount of content to analyze. Regardless of time-consuming, investing in long-tail keywords provides a great opportunity for the university since it is possible that the competitors fail to investigate further in necessary research.

#### 6.1.2 Conduct keyword research

According to Busche (2017), in order to conduct a keyword research, the entire process will be: Persona -> Intent -> Topics -> Qualified Keywords -> Related Keywords -> Content. We will dip deeper into each step to understand the whole process. Before starting the process, there is a question that can be asked to help the SEO specialist brainstorm: Why are they searching in the first place?

Step 1, the university needs to define what persona to target and their search intent. These two aspects were already analyzed in chapter 5.

Step 2, after knowing the university's persona and search intent, create a list of topics that would fulfill the needs of the searcher. It is recommended to analyze one topic or theme at a time. Besides, the topic should be specific and avoids using short-tail keywords that are not relevant enough for Google to rank. For example, the phrase "university" which is too generic will confuse the search engine to choose (Busche 2017).

Step 3, when the topic has been chosen, it is time to narrow down the topic to specific terms that will be our future keywords. All the synonyms as well as plural and singular keywords are also considered as potential keywords we can rank for. However, going too far off topic should be avoided during this process (Busche 2017).

There are several tools to brainstorm keywords. One of them is Google Keyword Planner, which is a part of Google Ads, helps SEO specialists get a list of keywords suggestions. After logging to Google Ads, in Keyword plan section, the main keywords can be typed in and it will appear a list of suggestions related to those keywords as well as average monthly searchers, competition and so on.

study in finland in english, postgraduate studies in finland, masters university of

Germany, + 2 more English Google May 2019 - Apr 2021

Broaden your search: + postgraduate studies + studies in finland + universities + universities finland + universities english + bachelors + education [REFINE KEYWORDS](#)

[Exclude adult ideas](#) ADD FILTER 62 keyword ideas available COLUMNS Keyword view

<input type="checkbox"/> Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Competition	Ad impression share	Top of page bid (low range)	Top of page bid (high range)	Competition (indexed value)
Keywords that you provided						
<input type="checkbox"/> study in finland in english	10 - 100	Low	-	-	-	7
<input type="checkbox"/> postgraduate studies in finland	10 - 100	Medium	-	€0.37	€1.85	57
<input type="checkbox"/> masters university of helsinki	10 - 100	Low	-	-	-	0
<input type="checkbox"/> study in finland mba	10 - 100	-	-	-	-	-
<input type="checkbox"/> bachelors in finland	10 - 100	-	-	-	-	-
<input type="checkbox"/> finland mba	10 - 100	Medium	-	€2.08	€19.70	48
<input type="checkbox"/> finland bachelor degree	10 - 100	Medium	-	-	-	43
<input type="checkbox"/> universities in finland that teach in english	10 - 100	Low	-	-	-	1
<input type="checkbox"/> degree programmes in finland in english	0 - 10	-	-	-	-	-
Keyword Ideas						
<input type="checkbox"/> university of helsinki masters	10 - 100	Low	-	-	-	1
<input type="checkbox"/> helsinki university masters	10 - 100	Low	-	-	-	2

Figure 20: Google Keyword Planner

While brainstorming keywords, we can look at our competitors' keywords to receive some inspiration of what has been doing, what has been done in the industry and what could be done differently. The author used Semrush.com to analyze other universities by clicking to Keyword Research section and chose Keyword Overview. A root domain (or subdomain/exact URL) could be entered in the search box, such as metropolia.fi to analyze their keyword ranking, and monthly volume. It is a great tool to provide Laurea with a list of competitors' most valuable keywords on their websites.

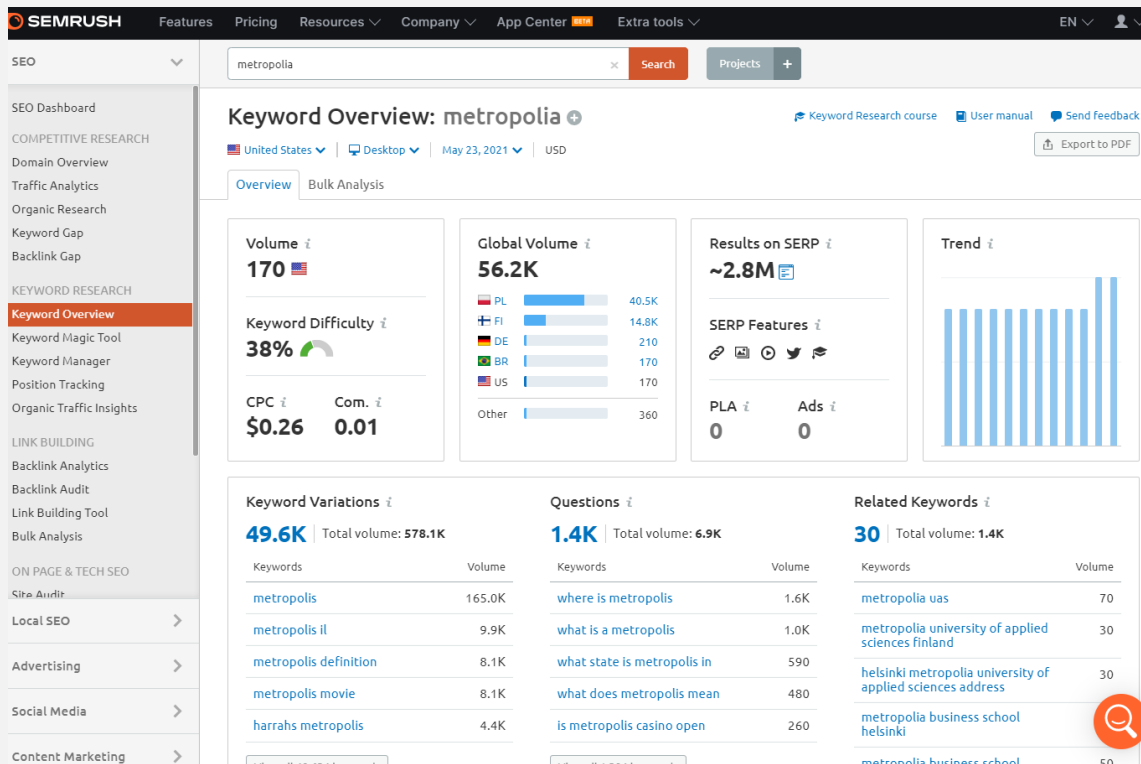


Figure 21: Semrush's Keyword Overview (23rd May 2021)

Step 5, it is important to review values of those keywords in step 4 to see if they are worthwhile. Looking at Google's Keyword Planner will provide the commissioner with plenty of useful information. For example, average monthly searches tell how many times people have searched for the same keywords based on the most relevant country. Meanwhile, competition shows how much the keyword difficulty is (high, medium, low). Even though certain keywords are becoming more common, they cannot represent well. The reason is because the data stored at Google only goes back a certain amount of time, so it might not be up to date enough to present certain trending topics (Busche 2017). One important to keep in mind that the greater the competition and effort needed to achieve organic ranking performance, the higher the search volume it is. If the institution sets it too low, they risk not attracting any searchers to their site. In certain cases, targeting highly relevant, low-competition search words might be the best option, also known as long-tail keywords in section 6.1.1.

Step 6 is to develop related keywords by searching for more similar concepts and variants. Busche (2017) states that over the past few years, Google has been no longer targeting those shameless keyword stuffing but instead, it approaches closer to human in term of understanding the content in depth. Semantics search, which is the idea of understanding a user's intent through contextual meaning instead of matching keywords, also find other related terms that the searcher would think of when browsing in a search box. Due to the

difficulty of listing accurate semantic keywords, there are several methods to understand better the terms which will be proven by looking at keywords like “bachelor’s degree in Finland” on Google. Not only does Google return the searched articles but also include the “People also ask” section in the middle of SERPs and a list of related searches at the end of the page. Google tries to connect its searchers to many relevant articles in a variety of ways, from pinpoints related questions that the searcher may ask to return a list that can be helpful to them.

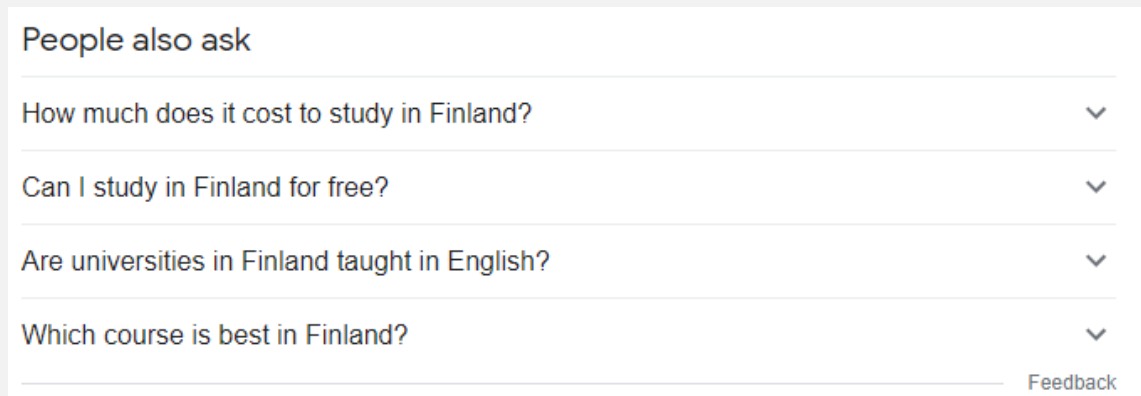


Figure 22: People also ask in the SERPs

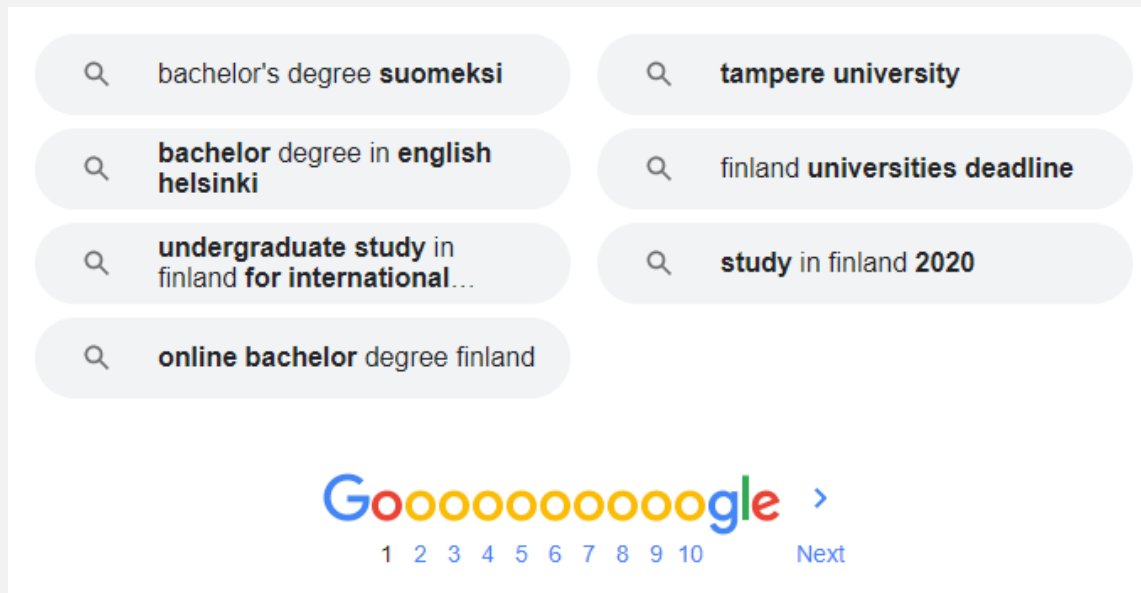


Figure 23: Google’s suggestions

By including semantically related keywords in the content, the webpages prove that its contents provide meaningful and contextual background. After categorizing and knowing what keywords the commissioner would like to rank in the SERPs, it is time to produce relevant contents from those above which will be detailed in the next topic “Content Development”.

## 6.2 Content Development

Content development, which should first and foremost base on the topic the specialist wants to optimize, must solve the users' questions or queries. The aim of an organization may be to boost Google rankings and increase web traffic, but if their content is purely concentrated on SEO and ignores the needs of the reader, it is likely to receive higher bounce rate, which will have a negative effect on the website's ranking.

When it comes to content quality and length, there is no standard for an ideal length. Most studies report that top-ranking content pieces are between 1,500 to 2,500 words with regard to social shares, backlinks, and search positions. As mentioned in section 2.3, it is necessary to avoid keyword stuffing or keyword spamming, which make it difficult for the audience as well as the search engines to determine which page is the most relevant content.

Furthermore, keywords are not the only factor that influences the content on Google ranking, other factors that affect rankings include shareability, time one page, and linking improving with long-form content (Busche 2017).

According to Thu Nguyen, an interviewee the author had contacted with, stated that whenever she was looking for information on Laurea's website, she was expecting to have a Frequently asked questions (FAQ) section below every page. It is important for her to see other students' questions as well because the content sometimes did not cover enough information and her struggles could have been similar to the others. She also said that by looking at the FAQ, it could save her a lot of time because she did not need to contact the student affair office and it instantly gave her an overall idea of the process. Furthermore, she also suggested that the website should include podcast or videos about the degrees of the school or Finland-related topics to bring new traffic and new perspective to the environment. Finally, the writing could be more student-friendly using more casual vocabulary.

## 6.3 Heading tags

After having narrowed down a list of relevant keywords that will work for the planning content, it is time for creating heading tags.

According to Alderson (2020), headings make text easier to read and understand for both users and search engines. They serve as signposts for readers, for example, making it easier for readers to find out what a post or page is about. Headings often show how the content is linked and identify which sections are relevant. Besides, readers are likely to review material first in order to get a sense of what the text is about and to determine which parts to read. They can do this with the aid of headings. If there are no headings in the text, it is much more difficult for the readers to scan it.

Busche (2017) stated that there is always a basic source code that defines what is seen behind every content page being posted, no matter how text-intensive it is. According to Alderson (2020), for starters, each page can only have one <h1> heading. The name or title of the page should be the <h1> heading just like thinking of a book title. Then, when writing the material, the commissioner could use <h2> and <h3> subheadings to add various sections. For example, consider <h2> headings as chapters of a book while from <h3> to <h6> will be hierarchal subheading way. However, unless the writer is writing extremely long and technical material, it is uncommon for most content to require the use of <h4> tags and beyond.

It is widely accepted that the usage of headings has no bearing on the SEO and making small changes to individual headings is unlikely to improve the performance. However, there are certain unintended advantages, such as the use of headings results in higher-quality texts that are also easier to read. Great text is better for consumers, and better text is better for SEO (Alderson 2020).

#### 6.4 Title and Meta Description tags

Title tags, which are the first part of the listing that users see after they run a search on Google, have a great impact in relevancy and ranking. After the body copy, title tags play an important role in attracting searchers' attention and decision on whether or not they should click on the link.

It is recommended that title tags should describe the page using keywords at the front and brand name placed at the end. SEO specialist should use individual keywords rather than a description phrase and separate different keywords with hyphens (-). An illustration here is <head><title>Primary Keyword - Secondary Keyword | Brand Name</title></head> (Moz 2021c).

Major brands may want to place their brand name first to leverage branding and improve higher click through rates. Meanwhile, small brands should keep their brand names at the end of the title tag so that targeting keywords at the front can help site rankings better in the SERPs. In this case, Laurea has done a good job in keeping the order of the title tag.

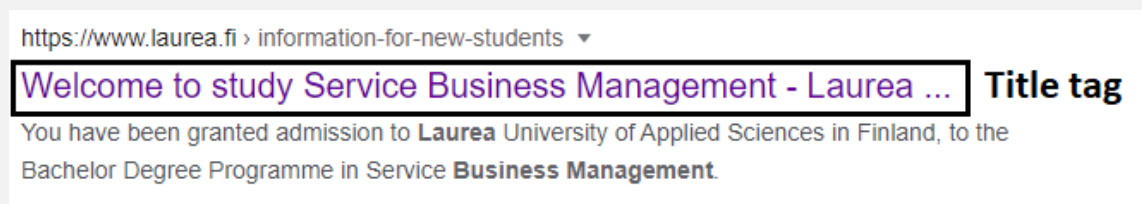


Figure 24: Laurea's title tag in the SERPs

Title tags can be viewed in the head section of an HTML document by right-clicking to a web page and selecting “Page Source” or simply pressing Ctrl + U on the keyboard.

```
<head>
  <meta charset="utf-8" />
  <link href="/Static/dist/css/style.css?v=f1de59dc16e85e6d6596d8fa3610b868" rel="stylesheet">
  <meta http-equiv="x-ua-compatible" content="ie=edge">
  <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0 shrink-to-fit=no">
  <meta name="facebook-domain-verification" content="y3wnvgcumax3u43jnxsqjlfarsgk0"/>
  <title>Front page - Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu</title>
  <meta content="width=device-width" name="viewport">
```

**Title tag**

Figure 25: Laurea’s title tag in the Page Source

Besides, using a unique and easily recognizable title helps searchers differentiate between each tab on web browsers so they are easily to keep track with each content.

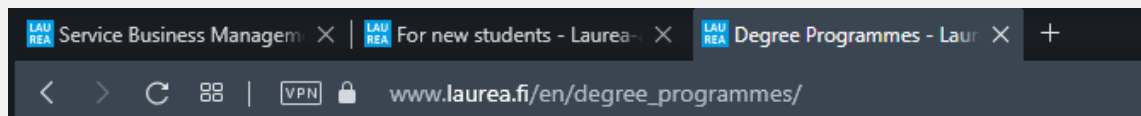


Figure 26: Title tags in a web browser

According to Busche (2017), an ideal title tag is between 50 to 65 characters in order to not be cutoff when being displayed in the SERPs. However, there is no exact character limit, SEO specialists should use the SERP Preview tool to test length and see where the cutoffs end in their audiences’ most popular devices.

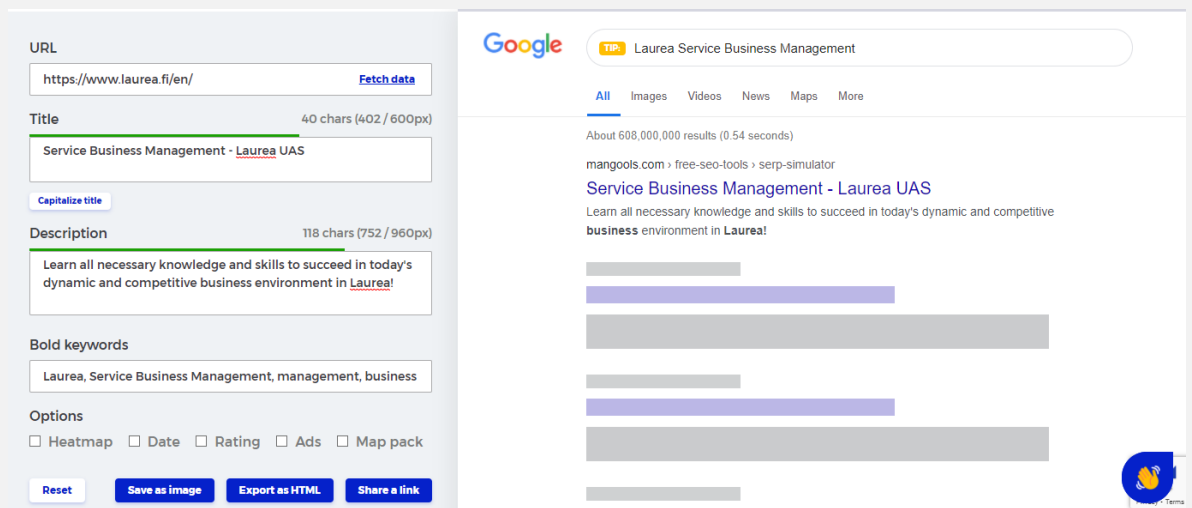


Figure 27: Mangools - An SERP Preview tool on desktop devices

As stated by Hallebeek (2020), meta description tags, which are only visible in the SERPs and Page Source, are also important for on-page SEO regardless of being unaffected to ranking factors.

```

<meta content="business management" name="keywords">
<meta content="Service Business Management" property="og:title">
<meta content="website" property="og:type">
<meta content="https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree_programmes/business-management-and-information-technology/business-management/" property="og:url">
<meta content="Learn all necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in today's dynamic and competitive business environment! " name="description" property="description">
<meta content="Learn all necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in today's dynamic and competitive business environment! " property="og:description">
<meta content="https://www.laurea.fi/globalassets/koulutus/liiketalous-ja-tietojenkasittely/liiketalous-2.jpg?w=1200&h=630&mode=crop" property="og:image">

```

Figure 28: Meta Description in Page Source

Even though containing focus keywords on meta descriptions do not have a direct impact like title tags, searched terms will be bolded and indicate the main content to the searchers. This means these highlights will attract people's impression toward the results, increasing click-through-rate from SERPs. Furthermore, meta descriptions serve as a short text of advertising, attracting the users to click through.

https://www.laurea.fi › degree\_programmes › business-... ▾

**Service Business Management - Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu**

**Service Business Management** is a versatile degree programme providing students with knowledge and skills for today's dynamic and competitive **business** environment with a focus on customer-oriented **service business** development. The programme is implemented as full-time studies. Classes are held from Mondays to Fridays.

**Meta Description**

Figure 29: Bolded keywords on a meta description

However, in case of being unrelated to the content or being left blank, meta description tags will be written by Google. In order to avoid that, it is recommended to keep the meta description text succinct, compelling and information, which is between 150 and 160 characters long (Hallebeek 2020). Moreover, telling the truth when writing meta descriptions is crucial, because a dishonest description will limit the impact on searchers' decision-making and overall user experience. Therefore, it will cause a poor brand association in the future. Besides, as with title tags, meta descriptions on each page must be unique to avoid being duplicate. Otherwise, two identical title tags and meta descriptions appearing to users browsing search results will cause a lot of confusion to both Google bot and the searchers. As a consequence, a lot of users can skip the website's link that may provide a great information for them or benefited the page. Finally, having keyword stuffing or no keyword can actually lead to lower rankings for a website while an appropriate number of relevant keywords can make a big impact on visibility and click-through rate.

## 6.5 URLs

URL stands for "Uniform Resource Locator" or as a "web address". When indexing and retrieving a web page, search engines build trust and authority based on the website's URL so

changing the URL without an appropriate redirection can cause damage to that page. It is recommended that the website's URL should be done correctly from the start (Digital Marketing Institution 2020).

Google states that it is important to use hyphens (-) rather than underscores (\_) in the web's URLs. When hyphens are used, bots will understand that they are two separate terms (Busche 2017). The URL [https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree\\_programmes/information-for-new-students/](https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree_programmes/information-for-new-students/) is much more useful to bots than [https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree\\_programmes/information\\_for\\_new\\_students/](https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree_programmes/information_for_new_students/)

Another ineffective URL could be:

[https://www.laurea.fi/index.php?id\\_session=4045&sid=30349503495000](https://www.laurea.fi/index.php?id_session=4045&sid=30349503495000). A long and incomprehensible URL can be difficult for both users and search engine to understand what it means. A correct URL should be: [https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree\\_programmes/business-management-and-information-technology/business-management/](https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree_programmes/business-management-and-information-technology/business-management/). Therefore, in order to improve user experience, a URL for a web page should be short and concise (less than 2,083 characters) (Moz 2021d), not case-sensitive, and included focus keywords, or a close variation. According to Google Search Central (2021d), unnecessarily high number of URLs can decrease the reliability of the page. For example, session IDs, which can cause a great number of duplication and URLs, should be substituted by cookies instead.

Google Search Central (2021b) stated that Google has updated the URL structure of the sites in a breadcrumbs-like format in both mobile and computer results to help searchers understand the website better.

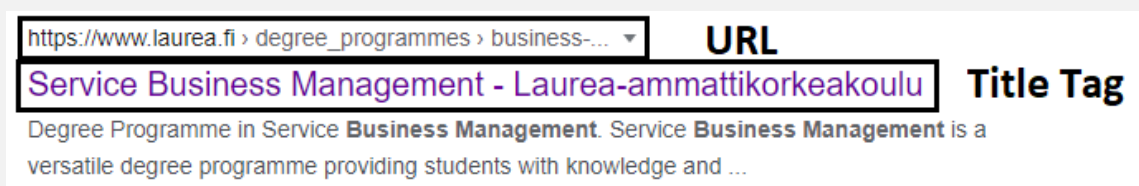


Figure 30: An example when searching for “Laurea Business Management” keyword on Google

The benefits of using breadcrumbs are it is clearly visible for Google bot and searchers to navigate a website. After entering a landing page, users can click to higher-level pages to view related topics of interests instead of going back to Google, which also reduces bounce rates. Breadcrumbs would be ideal for larger sites with a range of individual types of products because it provides an idea of the relationship of products to their parent categories.

In general, a well-crafted URL provides signals to searchers that the content is relevant to what they are searching for and at the same time attracts clickthroughs from search engine.

## 6.6 Backlinks or Inbound links

According to Backlinko (2021a), backlinks or inbound links are hyperlinks that lead from one website to another's page. Backlinks are regarded as "votes" for a particular page by Google and other major search engines. Organic search engine rankings are higher for pages with a large number of backlinks. While the specialist might not have full control of how external websites connect to the site, they can have an impact by producing excellent content.

Patel (2021a) stated that some backlinks from different pages locations are worth more or less than other pages. When Google sees a backlink, there are three elements they can choose to detect whether or not the backlink should add to the website's reputation. The first one is to check relevant backlinks using meaningful and descriptive (anchor) text are more likely to carry in referral traffic to the site. The second one is to determine whether or not the site's authority is reputable and trustworthy. Finally, while authentic backlinks drive more traffic to the rankings, irrelevant ones will lower Laurea's domain authority. Even worse, Google can penalize our rankings permanently.

Backlinks can be tracked through referral traffics on Google Analytics. Referral traffic is a Google's way of reporting visitors to the target site that came from sources other than its search engine. For example, when a user clicks on a link to visit a new page on another website, Google Analytics records the click as a referral visit to the second site. Meanwhile, referral domains, also known as linking domains are number of unique root domains (often where the homepage lives) that has a page which links to the school's website. For example, if there are 5 backlinks from a single domain (like m.facebook.com or campusonline.fi), it will be counted as one referral domain.

Source ?	Acquisition			Behaviour		
	Users ? ↓	New Users ?	Sessions ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages/Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?
	220,257 % of Total: 14.17% (1,554,634)	173,281 % of Total: 11.13% (1,557,434)	555,718 % of Total: 12.64% (4,395,160)	22.99% Avg for View: 20.20% (13.82%)	2.03 Avg for View: 1.98 (2.65%)	00:15:07 Avg for View: 00:12:06 (24.84%)
1. m.facebook.com	71,904 (30.85%)	66,694 (38.49%)	91,950 (16.55%)	27.61%	1.55	00:01:00
2. opintopolku.fi	21,052 (9.03%)	10,610 (6.12%)	41,182 (7.41%)	12.00%	2.94	00:11:19
3. laureauas.sharepoint.com	15,163 (6.51%)	4,118 (2.38%)	148,348 (26.69%)	13.53%	1.52	00:27:32
4. laurea.fi	11,018 (4.73%)	10,405 (6.00%)	18,398 (3.31%)	54.67%	2.42	00:02:39
5. campusonline.fi	7,465 (3.20%)	7,165 (4.13%)	10,982 (1.98%)	11.86%	3.95	00:05:29
6. amkoodari.fi	7,388 (3.17%)	5,934 (3.42%)	11,219 (2.02%)	2.77%	3.79	00:08:27
7. l.facebook.com	5,865 (2.52%)	4,819 (2.78%)	8,405 (1.51%)	30.08%	2.24	00:08:00
8. linkedin.com	5,729 (2.46%)	4,830 (2.79%)	9,133 (1.64%)	55.01%	1.55	00:05:07
9. laureauas-my.sharepoint.com	5,354 (2.30%)	5,354 (3.09%)	5,355 (0.96%)	99.96%	1.00	<00:00:01
10. studyinfinland.fi	5,115 (2.19%)	4,840 (2.79%)	6,587 (1.19%)	17.88%	3.81	00:08:16

Figure 31: Referral Domains on Google Analytics for Laurea (18th May 2019 to 19th May 2021)

By looking at the referral domains on Google Analytics, the specialist will know who the website can partner with and build a strong platform from that. Some ways to improve backlinks to the school's website are using original photos which would inspire people to connect to the content, including expert quotes so that the website can link to them, and having original data about customers, website or product (Patel 2021b). Besides, other ways include constantly investing in social channels and guest blogging partnership, answering relevant questions, repairing broken connections to the content and pitching the content in discussion forums are all things specialists can do to improve the social networks with other relevant brands (Busche 2017).

## 6.7 Domain Authority

As stated by Moz (2021a), Domain Authority (DA), which is a ranking score created by Moz to anticipate how likely a site is to rank on SERPs, is not a metric used by Google and has no effect on the SERPs. A Domain Authority score varies from one to one hundred, with higher scores indicating greater ranking potential. Generally speaking, in order to be at the top end of the Domain Authority, the websites have to be linked with a great number of high-quality external links, for example, Wikipedia or Google.com. Meanwhile, smaller websites with less inbound links will have a lower DA score. Since this is a comparative tool, there is no good or bad Domain Authority score but instead, it should be considered as a tool to determine which sites may have more vital link profiles than others.

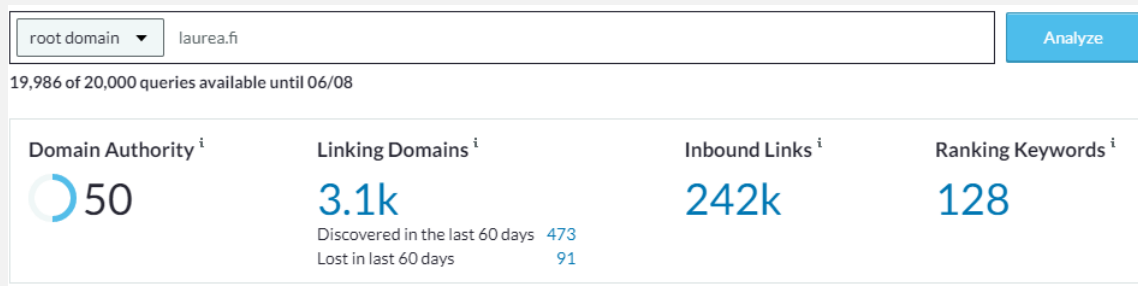


Figure 32: Laurea's Domain Authority on Moz.com, retrieved on 24th May 2021

Domain Authority is difficult to be influenced since it includes a set of metrics and links. Therefore, the best way to improve Domain Authority is to perform well overall SEO, which mean getting more traffics from authoritative backlinks, meaningful internal linking and removing unnecessary or spammy links (Busche 2017).

## 6.8 Images File name and Alternative text

Using pictures in the main articles inspires people to read them, and well-chosen images will also help the website rank well in image search results by supporting the post. If an image on a website fails to load on a user's screen, alt text is the written copy that appears in its place. In general, strong alt attributes describes images to visually impaired readers, enhances the message of the articles with search engine spiders and increases the website's usability.

Image alt text must describe the image in a human-friendly way while still being symbolic of the webpage it supports. In this case Laurea has successfully added descriptive and specific alt texts on the page.

```
<ul class="nav nav--middle">
  <li class="nav-item">
    <a href="/en/" class="nav-link"></a>
  </li>
</ul>
```

Figure 33: Alt text of a Laurea's image in Page Source

It is recommended to use original photos of the teams. Besides, the picture should either represent the post's subject or serve as an illustration within the article. Placing the picture close to the related text is also the best way to improve user experience. If there is a main image or an image needing to be rated, try to keep it near the top of the page if at all possible. However, if there are no original photos, Flickr.com and Unsplash are also the two nice image sources for instance. The name of the original photographer must be attributed after use (Heijmans 2020).

In order to ultimate the images, choosing the right file name is the first thing to do. It is important to also include main keywords in the image file name for Google to know what the

image is about. For example, in the figure 36 above, Laurea chooses a proper file name: “/Static/dist/assets/images/logo.svg”, which specifies every folder in a neat way. Second, the image should be in one of Google’s supported formats, such as BMP, GIF, JPEG, PNG, WebP, or SVG. Next, scale of images which affects on page load time have a big impact on user experience. The faster the site, the easier it is for the users and search engines to visit. Therefore, using the optimal image size for the website help optimize page speed and appearance and rank higher in the SERPs (Heijmans 2020).

## 6.9 Internal Links

An internal link is any link on the website that connects one page to another. It is also known as links used by both users and search engines to locate content on the website. Users use links to navigate through the webpage and find the information they are looking for while search engines use it to access the website. They will fail to find a page if it does not have any connections to it (Busche 2017). A sample code could be: `<a href="http://www.same-domain.com/" title="Keyword Text">Keyword Text</a>`. The word or words that lead to another page are known as anchor text, and they appear to the reader as blue text.

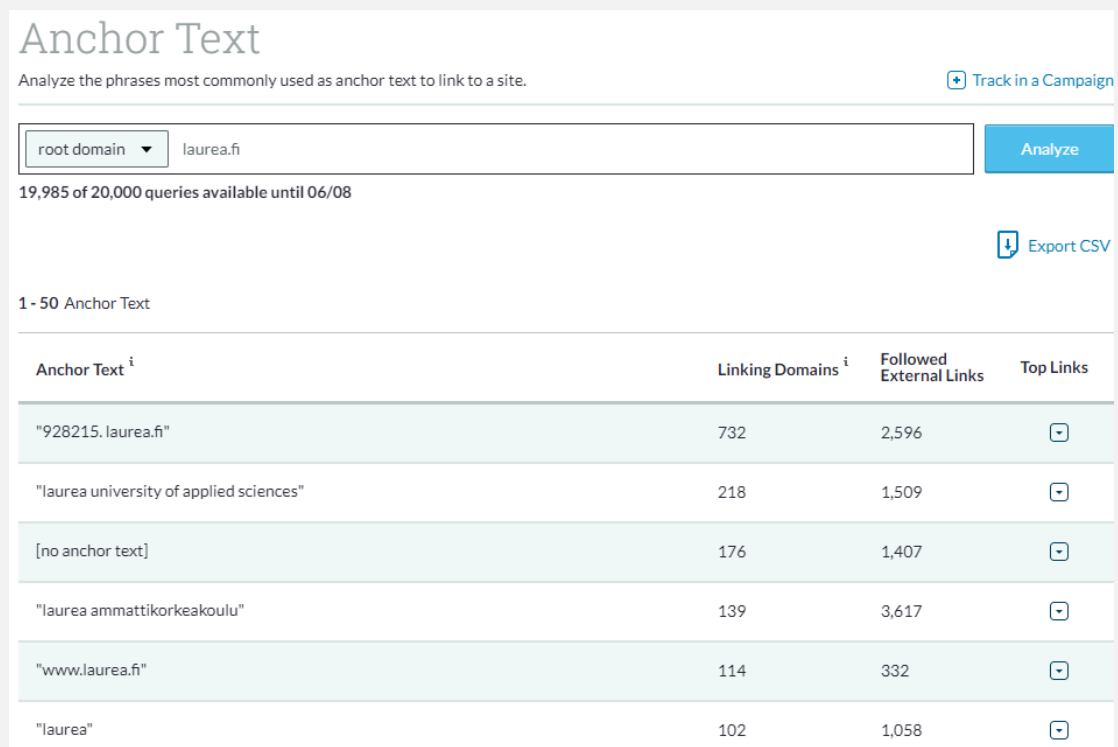


Figure 34: Laurea’s anchor text on Moz.com (retrieved on 24th May 2021)

In the figure above, it is possible to consult the most used anchor texts in Laurea.fi site. There are many “no anchor text” links which can be improved by adding phrases that describe what the target link is about. In conclusion, internal links can provide value to the

users by updating old article with new internal links and improving anchor text in a more natural way.

## 7 How to improve Laurea's webpages

This thesis aimed to analyze the current SEO situation of Laurea institution and also develop an effective on-page SEO plan to attract more international students. In this chapter, the author will make a specific analysis for a webpage to be friendlier with search engines and to improve the organic traffic from the SERPs.

### 7.1 Keyword research

Based on search intents analyzed in section 5.2, there are three types of searches including navigational, informational, or transactional. In this study, it will primarily focus on informational queries.

When picking a topic to research, it is vital to choose one topic at a time and ensure that it is relevant to the objectives and the industry. It is also recommended to have a specific web page in mind. Therefore, the author decided to choose Degree Programmes webpage to analyze in this section ([https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree\\_programmes/](https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree_programmes/)) and the topic will be: "Study in Finland".

The next step is to brainstorm keywords. This involves generating a list of keywords that are closely related to the chosen topic. At this stage, quantity is more crucial than quality, but the outcomes must still be relevant. Besides, it is important to take synonyms into account as well as plural and singular phrases. In addition, it is also useful to target those long-tail key phrases that were analyzed in section 6.1 above to increase conversion rate and less competitive. As a result, after analyzing keywords using Google Keyword Planner and Keyword Magic Tool by SEMRush, the author came up with 12 phrases as demonstrated in the table 2.

According to Semrush (2021), total volume indicates the total monthly search volume of all the terms in the current group analyzed. The higher the search volume, the better the keyword is. Besides, keywords in SEO tend to be targeted in a country level so the United States was chosen in this example since it has the highest international users in the figure 3. In addition, search volume has different ranges that vary from 1 to more than 100,000 times, depending on the target keywords.

Meanwhile, Average Difficulty means the process of evaluating how difficult it is to rank in Google SERPs. It also has different levels including Very hard, Hard, Difficult, Possible, Easy and Very easy, which are devoted to 85-100%, 70-84%, 50-69%, 30-49%, 15-29%, and 0-14%,

respectively. Finally, Relevancy is a subjective grading on how relevant a keyword is to a topic.

Table 2: Brainstorm keywords

Keyword	Volume	Keyword Difficulty (%)	Relevancy (%)
How to study in Finland	30	46	70
colleges in Finland for international students	20	45	37
study abroad in Finland college	30	20	25
Study education in Finland	50	26	35
study in Finland in English master	40	33	35
masters in Finland for international students	40	32	30
Bachelors in Finland	40	26	20
Study in Finland for international students	27	25	30
work and study in Finland for international students	30	25	n/a
Why study in Finland	40	27	40
Apply to study in Finland	31	n/a	35
postgraduate programs in Finland	50	27	25

After considering Search Volume, Keyword Difficulty and Relevancy, it is time to pick out the most important keyword for the web page. However, this is a subjective factor in term of how good the keyword is for the web page. Usually, keywords with a good relevancy and search volume will be considered as a high priority level. Besides, the higher the value of a keyword, the more individuals will compete for it. Conversely, the easier it is to rank for a

term, the fewer individuals will compete for it. Consequently, by prioritizing keywords, the school will know what keywords are worth to rank and what keywords are not.

To prioritize keywords, only one P1 keyword is chosen and also known as the most important one to focus on. Two P2 keywords identified as secondary keywords are the next target terms after P1. Finally, three or more P3 keywords are considered the next most important ones after P1 and P2 key phrases.

Table 3: Prioritize keywords

Topic	P1 keyword	P2 keyword	P2 keyword	P3 keyword	P3 keyword	P3 keyword
Study in Finland	Study education in Finland	postgraduate programs in Finland	Why study in Finland	study in Finland in English master	study abroad in Finland college	Bachelors in Finland

The topic above is one of those that can be created to improve the page. The institution can have multiple topics to aim for but should analyze one at a time in order to produce the best outcomes for the content.

## 7.2 Content

To serve the most relevant pieces of content, search engine will also consider how up to date it will be preserved by users. This can be for pages that already exist on the school's website, or maybe this could be for content gap. A content gap is a page that has yet to exist on the website but actually could be quite valuable to create.

The most important targeted keywords do not appear in the common words list of Degree Programmes webpage. Therefore, the specialist should modify the content to add more relevant keywords into the webpage, for example, in heading tags, image file names and alt text, and also internal link anchor text to improve the position rankings in the SERPs. Besides, the specialist can generate a new blog or even podcast to increase the school's reputation and create business leads. However, keyword stuffing should be avoided and focus on the most valuable keywords only. Finally, the writing could be more student-friendly using more casual vocabulary.

### 7.3 HTML

The heading tags are organized well in this page, which can help highlight the most important topics and keywords. H1 tag in Degree Programmes webpage is long enough and unique. Besides, the webpage also uses H2 and H3 tag in a logical way to describe the sub-topics.

The title tag is also organized well but the school should change the Finnish name to English name, for example, Laurea University of Applied Sciences or be shorten as Laurea UAS, to attract more international students to the page. However, the meta description in this page is not written well as demonstrated in the picture below.

```
<meta content="Degree Programmes" property="og:title">
<meta content="website" property="og:type">
<meta content="https://www.laurea.fi/en/degree_programmes/" property="og:url">
<meta content="Study a Bachelor's or Master's degree programme or apply for an trans-European business management degree programme to study first year with us! " name="description" property="description">
<meta content="Study a Bachelor's or Master's degree programme or apply for an trans-European business management degree programme to study first year with us! " property="og:description">
```

Figure 35: Degree Programmes's Meta Description on Page Source

This meta description is not descriptive and informative and therefore, when users search for Degree Programmes on Google, the meta description appears badly.

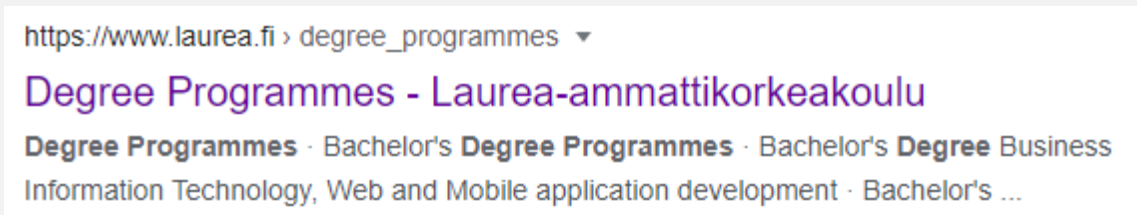


Figure 36: Degree Programmes's Meta Description on Google

It is recommended that the meta description should include priority keywords. Besides, it is also important to make sure the description is descriptive and using unique and accurate terms to improve the listing's click-through rate in the SERPs.

Finally, the images file names and alt text used in this webpage are concise and descriptive to the content and the images itself.

### 7.4 Backlinks

The current quantity of backlinks in Degree Programmes webpage is too little, only 3 Referring Domains and 13 Backlinks. The institution should improve backlinks by create quality content that everyone wants to link to. Besides, to attract visitors to the website, the

material should be updated or refreshed. The webmaster must also guarantee that the website is free of spam links.

## 8 Discussion and conclusion

This research aimed to set a plan for on-page Search Engine Optimization in Laurea University of Applied Sciences' international websites. Its goals are to expand the school's reach, improve ranking positions on Google SERPs and attract more international students to the website. The result indicates that in order to ensure the websites' contents are worldwide accessible, the main benefits of on-page SEO implementation might help to optimize the websites to rank higher, and earn more relevant traffic in search engines.

The study might suggest that the higher Laurea's website rank in Google SERPs, the more clicks and traffic the site will generate. However, if the website has irrelevant contents or keywords or bad user experience, it is likely to have high bounce rates, which decreases the website's reputation and rankings. Besides, unattractive titles and snippets also push the students away from clicking on the article displayed in search results. Therefore, in order to provide value to people, the institution needs to grab potential students' attention through meaningful title tags, meta descriptions, URLs, images file name and alternative text. The result of this thesis shows that the most vital aspect of increasing internationalization is to improve user experience across the entire site. Quality contents can be developed based on search intents and relevant keywords as well as good site speeds and quality backlinks.

These results should be taken into account when considering how the website will be ranked in the future. In the early years, Google's algorithms were only updated a few times. Now, it has been updated thousands changes every year. Some old SEO tactics and techniques are no longer effective and may cause harmful for the website. Therefore, even though SEO can change from the web design to social media marketing trends, Google's algorithms, long-tail keywords, anchor text and so on, the marketing experts have got to stay updated with the latest trend. Nobody knows how Search Engine Optimization is going to be in the future, but it is ensuring that SEO will always be human-centric, and also making the information appealing to humans is usually the safest approach to appeal to bots. It can be safe to say that search engine and search engine optimization are still long-term, repeatable and sustainable for the institution to stay relevant and attract more international students in the near future.

After analyzing the data, some recommendations are suggested. Based on the data gathered from Google Analytics, the website had low level of engagement both time on page and page depth, which were less than 10 seconds and 1 page, respectively. In order to decrease bounce

rate and increase average time on page, focusing on fast site speed, intuitive layouts and device-responsive experience such as mobile-friendliness should be taken into account. Besides, title tags in some English pages are using Finnish name which will avoid the international students from recognizing the institution. The website still includes meta keywords which are considered to bring spam to the websites. To fix these, Laurea should change the name of the title tags to Laurea University of Applied Sciences or be shortened as Laurea UAS and considers deleting meta keywords. It also detects that Laurea had the lowest number of ranking keywords among Haaga Helia and Metropolia, it can be improved by target the right keywords through understanding search intent behind them and long-tail keywords. On the other hand, the content of the website is well-structure by using meaningful heading tags, images file name and alternative text which helps reader easily follow. There is a suggestion for the content to include FAQ in every page and podcast to bring new traffic and new perspective to the environment.

### 8.1 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge some limitations and issues occurred during this thesis. The first limitation was that the research only targets one search engine - Google. However, there are many other search engines such as Bing, Yahoo, Baidu and each search engine uses different algorithms and rules. Therefore, it may have different ways to optimize the ranking factors in the SERPs. The results could have been richer if other search engines were considered; however, based on the data retrieved from Google Analytics, the school's traffic source is mainly from Google. As a result, this thesis utilizes Google as its main search engine. Besides, because Google's algorithms change every day and there are hundreds of factors influence ranking positions, the factors mentioned in this thesis are only a small portion of complexity of SEO.

Another limitation was time constraint and size of the thesis document. First, since the thesis worth 15 credits and the time to conduct the research was limited, it is beyond the scope of this study to analyze a complete SEO project including On-page, Off-page and Technical Optimization. Therefore, the author only conducted On-page SEO and the other two optimizations are considered as further research by the school. Second, concerning the sample size of this thesis, the author mainly focused on analyzing the quantitative numeric data on Google Analytics. Therefore, the in-depth interview was only an example of Laurea's student about the websites. However, it is recommended for the school to conduct a larger sample in order to come up with better insights and understandings of frequent problems of existing students on accessing the websites.

The final limitation is in regard to Organic Optimization and Pay-Per-Click advertising. This research included only organic SEO; however, according to Juha Niemi, a marketing manager

at Laurea, stated that better SEO performance could reduce the school's Google ads costs. Therefore, the institution can combine organic SEO and Google Ads to have the best chance of increasing traffic to Laurea's websites in the short term while also improving the school's online visibility for long-term success.

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## Appendix

## Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms .....8

GLOSSARY	MEANING
Algorithm	A process or formula for retrieving and organizing stored data in a useful way.
Alt text	Or alternative text is the text in HTML code that explains the images on web pages.
Anchor Text	The text that is used to link to other pages.
Backlinks	Or inbound links are links from other websites that point to Laurea's websites.
Bots	Sometimes known as "crawlers" or "spiders", these explore the internet for content.
Bounce rate	This is a metric that measures the percentage of visitors who immediately leave the website or landing page after visiting it. Bounce rate can be influenced by a variety of variables, but the most common include irrelevant or poor content, as well as an inadequate level of user experience.
Click-through rate (CTR)	Click-through rate is the ratio of users who click on a specific link to the number of total users who view a page, email, or advertisement.
Conversion rate	The percentage of people who visit the web page that complete a desired goal out of total number of visitors.
Crawling	The method by which search engines find a website's pages.
Direct traffic	Direct traffic is defined as website visits that came to the target website by either typing the URL into a browser or using browser bookmarks.
Domain Authority (DA)	Domain Authority is a Moz statistic for predicting a domain's capacity to rank; it is best used as a

	comparative statistic (for example, comparing a website's DA score to that of its direct competitors).
Duplicate content	Content that is shared over numerous domains or multiple pages within a single domain.
Engagement	Data that shows how users interact with the website and if they find it useful and interesting.
Google Analytics (GA)	Google's popular web analytics tool that tracks how people use websites, apps, and other digital and offline data.
Heading tag	An HTML element used to designate headings on a page.
HTML	Hypertext markup language is the language used to build web pages.
Indexing	The process of storing and arranging content discovered during crawling.
Informational queries	A query that is typed by the user who wants to discover something new.
Keyword/ Keyphrase	Words and phrases that people type into search engines to find what they are looking for.
Keyword stuffing	A spammy approach involves the overuse of significant keywords and their variants in the contents and links.
Landing page	The page which is created for marketing or advertising to the user in their first visit to the site.
Linking Domains	Sometimes known as referring domains, are number of unique root domains (often where the homepage lives) that has a page which links to the school's website. For example, if there are 5 backlinks from a single domain (like m.facebook.com or campusonline.fi), it will be counted as one linking domain.

Long-tail keywords	Long-tail keywords are ones that have more than three words. In regard to length, they are frequently more specific than short-tail keywords.
Meta Description	HTML components that describe the contents of the page where they are on. In search result snippets, Google occasionally uses these as the description line.
Meta Keywords	A meta keyword tag is an HTML element that is invisible to visitors but visible to search engines. In the past, the keywords that were stuffed in this element's content would be considered as a ranking factor by search engines. However, it is useless nowadays.
Navigational queries	A search query indicates an intent to find a particular location, for example, Laurea's degree programmes.
On-page optimization	On-page optimization is the process of ensuring that the content on the website is meaningful and offers a positive user experience.
Off-page Optimization	Off-page Optimization is the method of improving the site's ranking by engaging in activities that take place outside of it. This is primarily due to backlinks, which aid in the development of the site's credibility
Organic traffic	Organic traffic refers to visitors to a website that come from search engine organic results rather than paid advertisements.
Pay-per-click (PPC)	Search marketers can bid on ads that appear above organic results on search engines by bidding on certain keywords and terms, which is a type of paid media. Google AdWords is Google's pay-per-click (PPC) advertising platform.
Ranking	Search results are sorted by their relevancy to the query.

Referral traffic	Referral traffic is a Google's method of reporting visitors to the target site that came from sources other than its search engine. When a user clicks on a link to visit a new page on another website, Analytics records the click as a referral visit to the second site.
Return on Investment (ROI)	The profit or financial growth generated from a particular investment.
Search Engine	An information retrieval application that searches for items in a database that match the user's request. Google, Bing, and Yahoo are just a few examples.
Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	Increasing the volume of traffic to the website by optimizing it for high ranks in organic search engine results, for example, to rank highly in the SERPs.
Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs)	The pages of results that display when searchers use Google, Bing, or other search engines to look for a keyword or key phrase.
Search Query	Words typed into the search bar.
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats: a SWOT analysis is a study conducted by a company to learn about these factors - its internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as any external opportunities and threats.
Technical Optimization	Technical Optimization is the method of finishing activities on the platform that are not linked to content but are intended to enhance SEO behind the scenes.
Title tag	An HTML meta tag that specifies the title of a web page.
Transactional queries	Transactional searches are actionable: the user wants to do, buy and interact.
URL	Uniform Resource Locators: A URL is an internet address of a given unique resource on the Web.

Appendix 2: An example of a Search Engine Results Page on Google ..... 9

The image shows a Google search results page for the query "iphone 12". The page is annotated with numbers 1 through 7, pointing to specific elements:

- 1**: The search bar containing the text "iphone 12".
- 2**: The navigation menu below the search bar, including "All", "Images", "News", "Videos", "Shopping", and "More".
- 3**: The search results summary showing "About 3 470 000 000 results (0,70 seconds)".
- 4**: The "Ads" section titled "See iphone 12", featuring five product listings with images, prices, and retailers.
- 5**: The organic search results, including the official Apple website and a Finnish retailer Gigantti.
- 6**: The "People also ask" section with three questions related to the iPhone 12.
- 7**: The "Related searches" section with eight suggested search terms.

**1** Search bar: iphone 12

**2** Navigation: All, Images, News, Videos, Shopping, More

**3** Results: About 3 470 000 000 results (0,70 seconds)

**4** Ads - See iphone 12

Apple iPhone 12 128 Gt -puheli... €928.90 Verkkokauppa... By Kelkoo	Apple iPhone 12 64 Gt -puhelin... €878.90 Verkkokauppa... By Kelkoo	Apple iPhone 12 64 Gt -puhelin... €878.90 Verkkokauppa... By Kelkoo	Apple iPhone 12 5G 128 Gt... €929.00 DNA By Google	iPhone 12 Pro 128 Gt... €1,179.00 Telia By Google

**5** Organic results:

- www.apple.com › iphone-12  
**iPhone 12 and iPhone 12 mini - Apple**  
Meet the new iPhone 12 and iPhone 12 mini. 5G speed. A14 Bionic. Super Retina XDR display. Ceramic Shield. And Night mode on every camera.  
iPhone 12 and iPhone 12 mini · iPhone 12 · iPhone 12 128GB Blue · Financing
- www.gigantti.fi › cms › apple-iphon...  
**Apple iPhone 12 - katso tuotteet täältä - Gigantti**  
iPhone 12 mini on maailman pienin, ohuin ja kevyin 5G-puhelin. Siinä on A14Bionic, joka on nopein älypuhelimien siru. Uusi kahden kameran järjestelmä.

**6** People also ask:

- Will there be any iPhone 12?
- Why is iPhone 12 so cheap?
- What is the price of iPhone 12 in Nigeria?

**7** Related searches:

- iphone 12 pro
- iphone 12 size
- iphone 12 pro max
- iphone 12 max
- iphone 12 review
- iphone 12 colors
- iphone 12 price in pakistan
- new iphone 12

**Interview questions for Thu Nguyen - a student at Laurea UAS:**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? (Age?, Married?, Children?, Nationality?, School?)

My name is Thu Nguyen, a 24 year-old Vietnamese student at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. I have been living in Finland for 4 years. My main major is Service Business Management but I focused a lot on Accounting field.

2. What factors influenced you to choose Finland as your study destination?

I considered few things for me when making the decision. First of all, it was about the Finland's reputation because it is always good for me to know where I am heading to and what is the environment there. At that time, I already knew Finland was famous for its people and education system. Secondly, since I wanted to find a university that matched my study goals for my job in the future, it was about the university and courses offered.

3. What were your criteria in choosing Laurea

There were several factors for me to choose Laurea UAS at that time. First, after comparing Laurea with other universities, from campuses to degree programmes, the offer provided by Laurea met my needs and expectations the most. Second, Laurea provided the most effective network for college students. As a student, I wanted to interact with the teachers, get involved on campuses, build social networks and also improve teamwork skills. Laurea has done a good job on providing a great opportunity for students to do so. And finally, the intuition fee was something I needed to think over when having decided to study at Laurea.

4. Why did you choose your major?

At that time, there were mainly two reasons. The first one was motivated by my family to pursue this field. My family members are now all working at Accounting firms so this was a big motivation for me to work in this industry. The second reason was that when I was searching for a university in Finland, the curriculum offered by Laurea was interesting me the most, from the courses to the environment. That was the reason why I decided to apply for Service Business Management degree. In addition, I had a great time studying here not only because for the practical material of the courses but also for the teacher-student interaction as well.

5. When you were first searching for information about Laurea UAS, what pages you searched the most on the school's website ?

Before I applied for the school, the page I searched for the most was the course information. With the information available on the website, it was easy for me to make a comparison with other universities as well. The second page was the Frequently Asked Questions section because I believed that there were many students who had encountered confused situations like me. Reading the answers in one place saved me a lot of time because I did not need to send the school an email or call the office to get a question answered. Finally, at that time, because I did not have any experience with the online application process, fast and easy contact information helped me a lot through troubles before the application deadline.

6. Were you able to find the information you were looking for on the school's website? Yes, our school's website is very informative, and I can easily find the information that I am looking for. The site is also easy to navigate.

7. How can the website be improved in your opinion?

I think the school could also include more blogs and contents or even podcasts to bring new traffic and insights to our website.

8. What is one difference between education in your hometown and education in Finland?

The educational degree in Finland and my hometown are very similar. However, the teaching method in Finland prompts to be more practical while that of in my country focuses on more theoretical parts.

9. What is one part of Finland culture that you have experienced?

In my opinion, Finnish people are very kind. As an international student who live far from the family, I really need a place where I can get closer to others and feel safe to stay. I have met a lot of nice and kind Finnish people who helped me go through the seasonal affective disorder a lot during winter. And I really love that.

10. What is one part of your hometown's culture that you would like to share with?

As a Vietnamese, I am proud to say that we are very friendly and hospitable people even though we are just a small country in Asia. We love to make friends with other people and learn new things. Besides, even though we do not speak English fluently in our daily lives, we still try to communicate with foreigners to learn other cultures as well.

11. What was a challenge you have faced in Finland?

Well, the most challenge I have faced during the time living in Finland is the language barrier. The Finnish language is really complicated for me to understand and it takes months or even years to have the motivation to start learning the language.

12. How did you learn new information about the school?

Google and Youtube were the two platforms I usually searched for the information about Laurea UAS. Many abroad students after arriving in Finland have shared their experience and opinions through social medias as video blogs or blog posts as well. It is really interesting to watch and gain more information not only about the school but also about Finland in general. Besides, I also participated in several groups on Facebook and other digital platforms where a lot of students are studying in Finland to see interesting conversations, housing problems and even useful tips from them.

13. What publications or blogs do you read?

Finnish news is one of my favorite publications I usually read on my free time. I believe that reading news helps me to learn something new every day and is a source of inspiration and solving problems for every now and then, especially in the Covid-19 pandemic nowadays.

14. What associations and social networks did you participate in your school?

I usually participated in the school's events inside and outside the campus. It provided me a lot of useful opportunities to meet new students, and many teachers as well. I wanted to learn new things from them and broaden my social networks not only through face-to-face but also through digital platforms as well.

**Interview questions for Juha Niemi - the marketing manager at Laurea University of Applied Sciences:**

1. What are our goals for SEO?

The most important goal for the school's website is that all the text displayed on the screen have to be accessibility for every one to see. The secondary goal is of course to gain as much searches and visibility as possible.

2. In the marketing department, what are our main plans for the school?

There are many people in our marketing team to operate with the website. As well as in Laurea University of Applied Sciences, the school has the permission to access the website to update news and edit the contents as well. Our marketing team have different concrete skills regarding SEO. For example, about three people are

responsible for technical aspects of the website. Meanwhile, four or five members are in charge of updating the content or for improving searches or SEO optimization.

3. What is your main role and responsibility of the marketing team?

As a marketing manager, my main responsibility at the moment is to operate University of Applied Sciences. Previously, I was in charge of the marketing of our Bachelor and Master's degree programmes, abroad as well as in Finland. One thing I like to point out regarding the website is that within the last couples of years, our goals in acquiring foreign students has decreased a lot, we actually do not, nowadays, market Laurea outside of Finland anymore.

4. How we create a plan for Google Advertising, known as Google Ads?

Our Google Ads are just like seasonal campaigns. For example, when there is an application period for the English programmes in January, our campaign in Google Ads is basically from the middle of December until the end of January. Therefore, it could be said that the plan is very sporadic. Besides, when there is no application period ongoing, the campaign is also terminated. The bright side is that the English degree programmes have a lots more application periods, 2 mains application periods and a couple of shorter ones. On the other hand, in the Finnish websites, we conducted more keywords on page.

5. How do you measure SEO performance? Is Google Analytics one of the tools?

In our department, Google Analytics is used to measure other goals rather than measures SEO. We use this tool called siteimprove.com in our website's application systems that is for tracking the SEO performance. However, at the moment, noone is actively monitoring the tool.

6. Do you think that the website should include more contents or podcasts?

I agree with that. Our website needs to have more podcasts or videos in English contents. Our school actually has published podcasts on a soundcloud account but the problem is that the existing podcasts are not linked to our website and the language are only in Finnish.

7. Do you know any common SEO mistakes in our website?

In regard to the responsibility that I have, the English contents we published were written with a lot of academic terms that are unfamiliar with the potential students. Therefore, when a student is searching for a place to study, the keywords used during the findings do not match with the same words on our website. As a result, our website's visibility is in a low position in the SERPs and the students can not reach our

website. This is noone's responsibility since the SEO performance in our department is divided amongst members. However, in the future, an in-house SEO team will be trained to monitor our SEO performance weekly or even daily.

8. How do you see SEO and PPC working together to improve results?

I believe SEO and PPC should work together to bring the best results. A PPC audit once told me that higher SEO positions in the SERPs will positively affect our school's Google AdWords performance. It will lower the prices for the bid and budget when targeting a term or a keyword.