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**SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION WHEN ENTERING NEW A MARKET**

Thesis about AWM Network

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis was done about a Danish online marketing company AWM Network. The company started a website for a loan comparison services in Finland in January 2017. I was the person responsible for creating the content and link building for the website, and before the thesis I had worked in the company with Search Engine Optimization for another website the company runs.

This thesis looks at the process of the website and implementation of search engine optimization (SEO) during the first 9 months of the website, and see what kind of results the different actions caused. The thesis also looks at the theory behind SEO through online marketing related literature and articles from industry experts. The aim is to determine which steps are necessary for implementing SEO in a new market in the most effective way possible.

The process of creating the content for the new website includes keyword research, site structure and content creation to multiple different link building projects. The tools used for keyword research were Google Adwords Keyword Planner and Ahrefs Keyword explorer. Link building projects examined in this thesis were infographics, competitor link analysis and data driven projects. The main parts of the whole process were documented as well as their results to determine, which were the most effective ones.

Based on the results that the website generated, the most important step of implementing SEO to a brand-new website is a thorough keyword research that takes search intent in to an account, as based on it, it is possible to create a coherent site structure, and to gain the most relevant traffic to the website. When it comes to link building, it is important to experiment with multiple different projects to determine which receives the best results in the market. SEO is a long term process, and results of actions can take up to months to appear. This is why it's important to keep producing good quality content consistently and tracking multiple different parameters, in order to see more permanent results in website traffic, and eventually revenue.

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Keywords:

Search Engine Optimization, Search Engines, Search Intent, Market Penetration, Online Marketing

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Search engine optimization has been a practise used by online marketers ever since Google came to existence. While some years ago it was an alternative to online marketing that few people knew how to do, it has in the recent years become a necessity to companies, if they wish to have a strong online presence. With search engine optimization, it is possible for online marketers to target their content to users who are already searching information about products and services they offer, and help the users find the company without expensive traditional media advertisement and commercials.

Search engine optimization can be done without spending a penny on anything else than the salary of the people implementing it. Search engine optimization doesn't bring the fastest result, but when done in long term, the return of investment of it becomes very high. Using relatively simple methods consistently on the website and off the website, it is possible to reach the top positions on relevant keywords in search engine results and generate an impressive amount of traffic.

SEO might be cheaper than traditional advertisement in short term, but it is not completely straightforward and easy. Search engines continually change their search algorithms, so SEO is a constant process of figuring out how to reach the top of the search results pages with different techniques ranging from content creation to link building. It is a challenging field even in markets that you are familiar with, but even more so when entering new markets.

## 1.1 Thesis Objectives and Organisation Background

This thesis will take a look at the process of launching a website to a new country and market from the beginning, and how a company can create traffic and visibility with SEO as their only form of online marketing. The thesis will first take a look at the theory behind SEO, and market penetration, clarifying what all of these concepts mean and how in theory they should be executed. After this, the thesis will look and document the process that the company has done since January 2017, when building their page from zero, and implementing SEO at the same time.

This thesis will be done about a Danish company, AWM Network. It is an online marketing company, that runs many different lead generation and affiliate marketing websites. It is also part of AW Media, that is an online marketing Agency, doing online marketing, search engine optimization and search engine marketing to customers. The website that is the subject of this thesis, is one that compares and provides information regarding personal economy, ranging from loans to phone insurances to phone subscriptions. The website has been up and running in Denmark from 2013, and is performing well on Google, ranking on the top of the search engine result pages on many very relevant keywords.

In Finland, the domain was first created in January, 2017. The website at that point had no content or design, everything was created from that point on. The website would in the beginning only focus on comparing loans and providing information about different forms of loans to the consumers, as the company had limited resources for content creation, and wanted to have one focus point. Before the launch of the website, the preparation for the launch began on November 2016, with keyword research and content creation.

## **1.2 The Development Task**

The development task for this thesis is to document and analyse the process that the company went through when launching their website to a new market, and how the implementation of SEO was done during this process. The process will be looked at critically and compared to the Theory of SEO and market penetration. The results that the process has brought will also be taken into account, and compared to the actions, to see if some correlation can be seen between the actions and the results.

The aim of this task is to provide the company with better tools and information for the future, if they wish to enter new markets with one their businesses. By creating a coherent documentation of the process with critical remarks and analysis, the company can see what methods worked, and where they could improve their actions and measures next time. By looking at the methods that brought the best results can also be implemented to their other websites, as changes in the new market and website are more obvious than in the websites that are already established and performing well.

### **1.3 The Research Question**

This thesis will aim to provide an answer to what are the recommended steps in order to implement SEO effectively to a website when launching in to a new market. Answering this question will be done by looking at the theory behind search engine optimization and market penetration. The theory will also be compared to the actions that the company has taken so during the past year.

### **1.4 Research Methods**

The theory behind search engine optimization and market penetration will be acquired through desktop research, and combined from different sources, including books, websites and online articles. The data for the documentation will be collected from the company's drive folder, where all the keyword research analysis, content and link building projects are stored. The results regarding traffic ranking positions and revenue will be found from Google Analytics, Ahrefs, Accuranker and from a Weekly Domain Report that has been updated since January.

## **2 SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION AND SEARCH ENGINES**

This chapter will take a look at the theory behind search engine optimization and the concepts related to it, as well as the theory behind market penetration, and find out what are the measures needed in theory with SEO before a business enters a new market.

### **2.1 Search Engine Optimization**

Search engine optimization is the act of optimizing web pages in such manner, that they seem as desirable, knowledgeable and trustworthy as possible through the eyes of search engines. It is a form of online marketing, and a way to manipulate the search results. The aim of SEO is to rank high on the search engine result pages with relevant keyword, in order to gain more visibility and traffic to your website (Ledford, 2008). This is done through different tactics including both content, HTML and other techniques that include writing content in a desirable format, including media and other engaging elements to your content, and gaining links to your domain from other high-quality domains. SEO can be roughly categorised to two different categories, on-page SEO and off-page SEO. On-page SEO is optimizing the content on your website to try and match the search algorithms of search engines, and off-page SEO is gaining links and traffic to your website from other domains. These different factors through On-page and Off-page SEO combined together determine the ranking and the value of the website when it comes to search engine visibility. While both are essential for a good quality and well ranking website, off-page SEO plays a slightly bigger part in the search engine ranking, but should always be built upon a steady on-page optimization. (Zlatin, 2017.)

Different search engine rank websites differently, but the ranking most people in the western world find the most important is Google's, as it has the biggest market share of the leading search engines. In July 2017, it held 86,83 of the search engine market (Statista, 2017). The most obvious way to track your performance on search engines, is to see where your webpage ranks on them by searching with your desired keyword. However, there are other factors that can be used to track your performance. One very commonly known one is Domain Authority, DA. This is ranking created by MOZ, a website created in 2004 in order to understand Google's ranking factors. It ranks all the website in its index with a score from zero to a 100, zero being the lowest possible score, and 100



being the highest possible score. The number is based on a logarithmic scale, and it takes in to account factors like trustworthiness and popularity of your website and domain. (Moz, 2016.) Other established ways to track your domains value are DR, Domain Rating, by Ahrefs, and Alexa Ranking by Alexa.

Google's search engine algorithms change constantly, about 500 – 600 times a year. While most changes are just smaller tweaks, there have been a couple significant ones, that changed the entire game for SEO at the time. For this reason, it is almost impossible to say what the most important factors of SEO are at any given point. (Moz, 2017a.) In the early years of search engines, optimizing the content on your website to match the Google search algorithm was enough to get you at the top of the rankings, but nowadays no one factor is enough, but a combination of all the different measurements are needed to gain good visibility. It is important however to not focus only on creating content optimized for search engines, but for the actual users too. If Google sees, that your webpage has a lot of visitors leaving the website, it makes the conclusion that your page does not provide the information they want, and will lower your ranking. In their Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, Google specifically mentions, that content should always be designed for the user first and foremost, as your target audience is the consumer, not search engines. (Google, 2017.)

## **2.2 On-page SEO and Content Optimization**

On-page SEO covers all the measures that are taken on your own domain in order to improve the rankings on search engines. This includes creating content that is optimized to search engines, by following keyword analysis, and creating content that is genuinely useful to users. On-page SEO also covers Technical SEO, that makes sure Google is able to find your website in the first place, and can understand what different content is, and how the content is linked up to each other.

### **2.2.1 Keyword Research**

Creating optimized content on Google begins with thorough keyword research. In order to rank on Google, it is essential to find out and choose the keywords you want to focus on. According to The Art of SEO, the Keyword research is one of the most valuable and high return investment to make with search engine marketing and search engine optimization. By choosing the keywords you want

to focus on as early on as possible, it is much easier to create content that will rank well on the search result pages with these keywords. (Enge, Spencer, Fisking & Stricchiola. 2010.)

There are three types of keywords; general keywords, broad keywords and long tail keywords (Poulos, 2015). The general keywords are the very basic keywords related to your business, usually consisting of one word that describes your product or service. An example of a general keyword would be “coffee machine”. It includes only one product a company might be focusing on, and no other words. From these general keywords, broad and long tail keywords are formed. Broad keywords are a bit more specific than the general keywords, but still usually consist of around two to three words. An example of a broad keyword related to “coffee machines” would be “coffee machine prices”. Long tail keywords are the most specific keywords, and often consists of three words or more. Long tail keyword related to coffee machines could be “Which coffee machine to buy”. By choosing your seed keyword or multiple seed keywords at first, you can create a well-structured and coherent keyword plan for your website and content with proper long broad and long tail keywords. (Soulo, 2017.)

According to Moz’s Beginner Keyword Research Guide, long tail keywords make up 70% of the all the searches, meaning that the general, high search volume keywords and broad keywords only make up approximately 30% of all searches. Most of the long tail keywords only have a couple of searches per day, but they have very specific search intent. They tend to bring in traffic that is much more likely to convert to a customer on your web page, than users searching with the higher volume general keywords. This is why in your keyword plan it is important to keep a balance between the high search volume general keywords, and the lower search volume long tail keywords. (Moz, 2017b.)

A good tool to begin your keyword research with is the Google AdWords Keyword Planner. By inserting your desired keyword to the Keyword Planner, you are able to find information on the search volumes and keyword trends (figure 1). With trends, it is possible to see what time of the year the keywords reach the highest searches, and how in general the search volume for the given keywords has develop during the years. You can also see, if the keyword has high competition. These figures can help you determine, if the main keywords for your business are on the rise or decline, how hard they will be to rank for and how high search volumes they receive monthly.

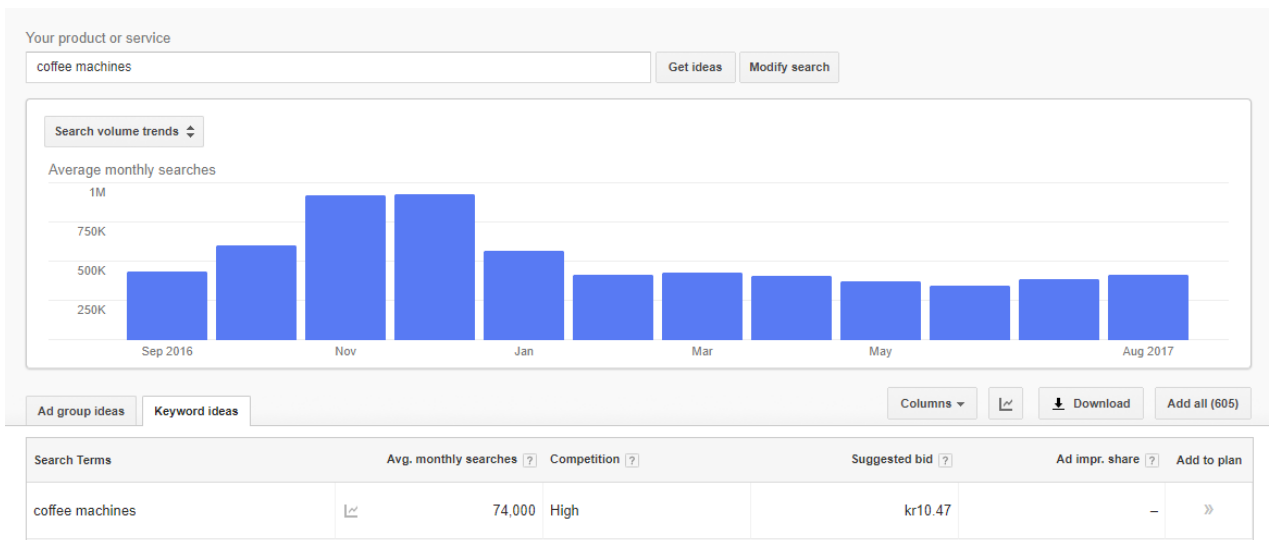


FIGURE 1. Keyword Planner Example

While Google Adwords gives a good picture on how the search volume of certain keywords is developing over time, it doesn't give a very detailed information about the nature of the searches, the engagement of the keyword or the competition with the keyword.

Another well-known tool for keyword research is the Ahrefs Keyword Explorer. Keyword Explorer allows you to see in more detailed the traffic the given keyword receives. It shows, where the most traffic is coming from, and how much the traffic receives actual clicks on the searches (figure 2). With the clicks, it is possible to see, if users are clicking on the organic results, meaning results that are not paid for, or the paid marketing results. Ahrefs also present keyword difficulty, giving an approximation on how many linking domains you would need on a page targeting the given keyword, in order to rank in the top ten results.

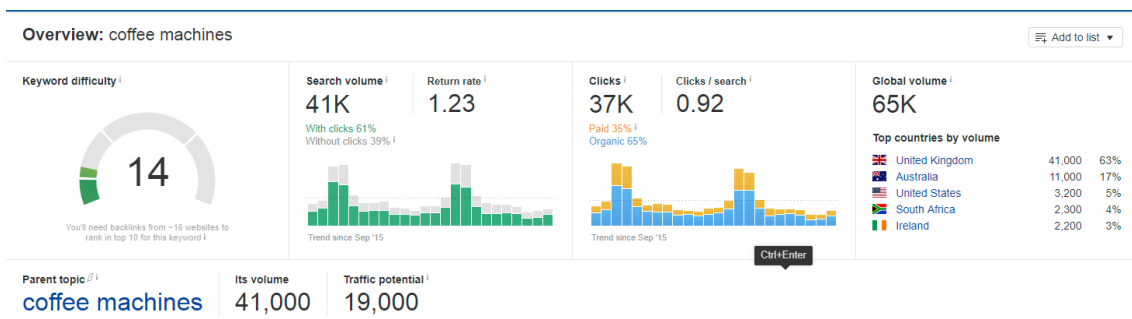


FIGURE 2. Ahrefs Keyword Explorer Example

Both the Ahrefs Keyword Explorer and Google Analytics Keyword planner also provide their users with keyword ideas. These ideas include broad and long tail keywords including the general keyword that was inserted. They also provide ideas for related keywords. Related keywords don't actually include the main general keyword in them, but they are closely related to the concept of the main keyword, and are also very valuable keywords to target. (Soulo, 2017).

### **2.2.2 Content Creation**

Content creation is consisting of creating all the content visible to users on your website. It includes your landing pages, blog posts and any other possible content placed on your website. Google itself gives guidelines, on how to create content that will more likely rank high on search results. From Googles Webmaster Guidelines for content creation, it becomes apparent, that the focus should always be on content, that is useful to the user, rather than content that is purely created to look rank high in search engines. High quality, user friendly content is the safest bet, when creating content, but there are measures that can be combined with this, in order to reach good results on search engines. Google also provides a thorough guide for search engine optimization. (Google Webmasters, 2017.)

One of the most important things when writing search engine optimized content, is the correct keyword density. It is therefore necessary to have done your keyword research, and to have created a detailed keyword plan in order to write search engine optimized content. The main keyword you choose to write about should appear on a content many enough times, that it can be distinguished from other possible keywords. This let's search engines know what the page is talking about. Along your main general keywords, you should choose related broad and long tail keywords to support the text. This will help search engines further understand, what concepts your page is talking about. Reaching proper keyword densities should be done in a manner, that seems natural, rather than unnecessarily stuff your keywords in a text. Writing your keywords in a text unnecessary large amount of times is called keyword stuffing. Keyword stuffing can make your content look suspicious to both user and search engines. For the most optimal text, the keyword density should be the highest at the top of the page, and lower towards the bottom. This follows the natural eye of the human eyes when looking at any kind of content, and will thus appear natural and user friendly. (Ledford 2008.)

Search engines in most cases prefer pages that appear to have expertise about the keyword and topic at hand, and pages that seem to answer the user's queries in a proper and easily understandable way. As search engines cannot fully comprehend what your text is about, and how well it is written, they have to look at other factors. One of these factors is the length of the text on your page. For a long time, SEO industry specialist have been saying, that longer content performs better than shorter content. Moz and Buzzsumo created a thorough content analysis for million articles on Google in 2015, and found out that the average length of the articles ranking in top 3 positions was 750 words, while the top 20 articles had the average length of less than 500 words. (Moz, 2015). This supports the claim that longer content is more optimal for search engines. Longer content often also had more links and interaction, which can further boost the ranking of these pages on their related keywords. General rule with content is, that in order to optimize the text, it should be at least 300 words long, and it is a good idea to aim for over 750 words. However, as with keywords, this should also be done in a way that seems natural and brings value to the user, rather than trying to reach certain number of words with thin content. (Demers, 2017.)

Readability, engagement and user friendliness is also important for search engines. In their SEO Starter guide, Google encourages webmasters to make sure their content is easy to read by dividing the text in to paragraphs, and structuring it with headlines and other visual elements. Writing a thousand-word article without styling will look undesirable for both search engines and the user, so the layout of articles and text on your page should be something that is carefully thought out. Paragraphs should ideally be only 3 rows long, as this will keep the text easily readable, and make it feel less crowded. (Google, 2017.)

A great way to increase both user engagement and the flow of your text are so called bucket brigades. These are short one line paragraphs, that either comment something that you are about to describe in your text, or something that you just described. Brian Dean of Backlinko describes in his article about 17 powerful SEO content writing practices, that he uses this method in almost all of his text, and reports great results both for search engine rankings and user engagement and decrease in bounce rate. In the same article, he describes how keeping your users in your webpage can really positively affect your ranking. If the users stay under 10 seconds, it will affect your ranking negatively, while as if they stay for over 10 seconds, your ranking will be affected positively. (Dean, 2017b.)

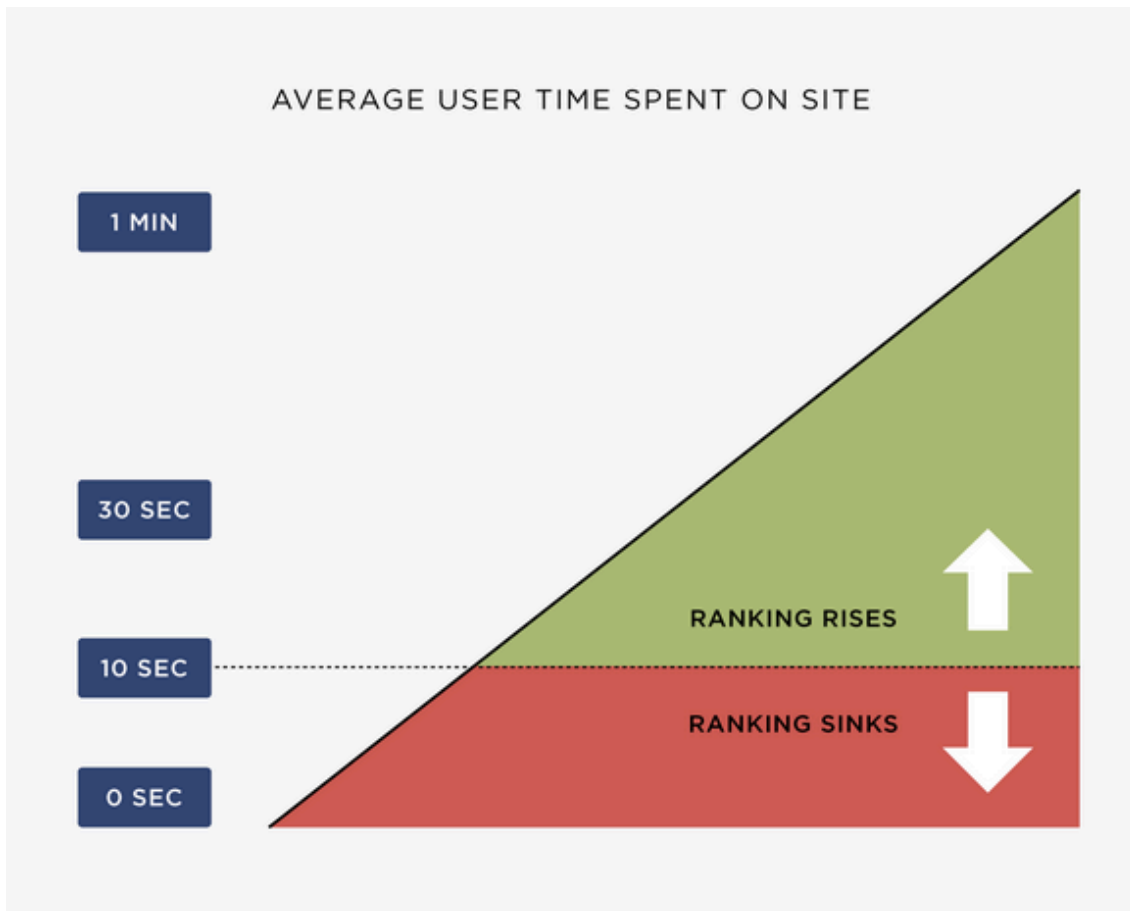


FIGURE 3. How the time users spend on page affects rankings (Dean, 2017b)

In order to make your text even more appealing to search engines, after 3-4 paragraphs there should be some form of a visual element, or a headline in your text. Even though search engines cannot understand the content of images, they are aware of the fact that people prefer content that is somehow visualized, rather than just a long text. By providing visual elements, it is easier to keep the attention of users on your text longer, and increase the time they spend on page, as well as decrease the bounce rate of users. In order for images to bring the most value, it is important to provide each image with a descriptive alternative text, as this will let search engines know what the image is presenting. Videos are also a great way to boost your content and to naturally increase the time users spent time on your web page. (Dean, 2017b.)

### 2.2.3 Search intent

For keyword research, it is important to understand search Intent. Search intent is the answer to the question why the user is searching something through search engines. Understanding the

search intent behind the keywords, you can bring in customers who are much more likely to bring you revenue. According to Kasteler in his article about Search Intent Optimization, search intent can be divided into four different categories: informational, navigational, commercial investigation and transactional. The first category of intent, informational, is where the user is trying to gather more information about a product, service or a concept. Usually these types of searches include questions, along the lines of “what is something” and “how does something work”. Informational search intent can also be behind simply searching the exact keyword. Usually the keywords with informational intent have very high monthly search volumes, and are generally not related to a commercial or transactional decision. With navigational intent, a user uses keywords to end up in a predetermined destination, for example a website or a piece of information. In these searches, the user already knows what they want to find, and are using different keywords to reach this destination. These searches are also not generally transactional by nature. (Kasteler, 2015.)

When the intent of a search is commercial investigation, the user is searching information related to a product or services, they potentially wish to purchase. These searches can be close to the informational searches, but have a transactional or commercial motive behind them, usually including details about the product or service, like prices or information about how to acquire them. The last of the search intent categories is transactional intent. With these searches the user has already made the purchasing decision, and are looking where to buy it. They might also be comparing prices and trying to find the best alternative. These keywords have a lot lower search volume compared to the other categories, as they are usually long tail and precise. (Kasteler, 2015.)

The search intent can be tied to the transactional funnel, where the four stages of making a purchase are awareness, interest, decision and action (Zehl, 2016). The awareness is related to the informational intent, interest is related to the navigational intent, decision is related to the commercial investigation intent and the action is related to the transactional intent. As with the sales funnel, the search intent gets narrower towards the latter categories. As a result of this, finding the balance of different keywords with different intents can be tricky. You want to create a balance of high volume searches at the beginning end of the sales funnel, and low volume long tail keywords at the end of the sales funnel.

While focusing on informational intent keywords will most likely bring more visitors to your website through organic searches, most of these searches will not lead to a goal completion, as they are simply searching for information. Bringing focus to the commercial investigation and transactional

keywords, you will be attracting traffic with the commercial intent, and are much more likely to have the customer complete the transaction in your website. Ideal situation is where you can gain users from all the search intent categories, and can convert people from the beginning of the sales funnel to the people at the end of the sales funnel. (Kasteler, 2015.)

### 2.3 Technical SEO

Technical SEO is a part of On-page SEO, instead of the visible content on a website, it focuses on the HTML code behind it. It is also referred as Website Optimization. Even though Technical SEO is not directly visible to a human eye, for Google it is just as important as the written text and other content and media on your website. Through Technical SEO, it is possible to tell the search engines what are the most important parts of the text used in the website, what content images represent and how webpages are connected on the website. (Ledford, 2008.) One of the most important aspects of Technical SEO are the different kinds of HTML tags on your page, specifically title and alt tags. It is important that these elements are as descriptive as possible, especially with media other than text, as search engines can't see, what they represent. By providing an accurate and descriptive alt text to the media allows you to inform the search engine of the content, and tie together with the text to support SEO. In their SEO for starters guide, Google recommends that title and alt tags are as descriptive and clear as possible, include the keywords that the page is related to. Title tags will let Google know what is the main keyword that the website targets, and how the content is structured. (Google, 2017.)

Other important tags for your website are the meta title and meta description HTML tags. These are the tags that define, how the search result for your page will appear on Google and other search engines. The example below (figure 4) is produced with a Google SERP Snippet Optimizer tool by SEOmofo. These tags will not only tell Google further what your page is concerning, but it is a big factor in Click Through Rate, CTR. This number represent the amount of times that users on Google will click on your listing, when they see it appears in their search results. A good meta title and description tag will let the users know what they can expect to find from your site, while making sure to attract users to your page simultaneously. Along with title, header and meta tags, Google will look at the URL of the page in relation to the title tags, and conclude what the topic of the page is, and what the most important keywords are. (Google, 2017.)





FIGURE 4. Meta title and Meta description

In order to help search engines understand your website, it is important to provide a sitemap, that shows the structure of your website, and how the different landing pages are related to each other's (Google, 2017). With site maps, it can be easier to establish site hierarchy in a way that supports your main and secondary keywords. With site maps, it is also easier to make major changes in the structure of the website. Google recommends websites to create two different site maps, one for users, and one for the search engines. While the user site map is a list of links of your whole content tree, the sitemap targeted for Google should be an XML file that is submitted to Google Webmaster Tools, nowadays also known as the Google Search console. To make it easier for Google to understand your sitemap, you should focus on optimizing your URLs in a way, that they are as short and descriptive as possible. (Google, 2017.)

Designing your site structure in a natural hierarchy allows Google to also see which pages and products are the most important ones on your page, and make the most sense to user. Naturally hierarchical content means, that pages are linked in a way so, that more general, broader keyword focused pages are the top-level pages, and the more specific, longer tail keyword pages are lower in the hierarchy. Internal linking is also a very important part of Technical SEO, and making search engines understand the relations between your pages, and the hierarchy of sites. Sites that are under a top level page should always to link to the pages higher in the hierarchy, and top level pages should also always link to content below them in the site hierarchy. Cross linking means lacing internal links to a different product and keyword, and it should be practiced carefully, and only in places where it naturally makes sense, in order to confuse the search engines as little as possible. (Google, 2017.)

For user related optimization and search engine optimization, it is very important that the page loading speed of websites is not too long. This means the code should not be too heavy and complicated, and there should be as little duplicate content as possible. Google itself has specifically stated, that page speed is considered a ranking factor, which should not be overlooked. (Enge et al. 2010.) Most of these changes are done through HTML and other code used on the

website, but page speed can be improved with simple changes on the main content too. One of the biggest factors that can be done on page, is to make sure that the media on the webpages is not unnecessarily big in file size. For example, images can easily be compressed and cropped in manner that doesn't lower the quality, but can reduce the size by 70%. Tool for this is tinyPNG, that compresses images by merging similar pixels to each other's. This will reduce the size dramatically, but often doesn't affect the quality of the image in a visible way, as long as it is not taken too far. Optimizing the side speed is not only important for search engines directly, but slow page speeds can lead to increased bounce rate, as users get frustrated of the long wait to access your page, and simple exit the page. (Enge et al. 2010.)

In 2017, one of the most important factors regarding technical SEO is making sure the website is optimized for mobile devices. This means, that the website must make sure that mobile users can easily use and read the website too, by making sure the images are scaled properly, tables and navigation are usable on smaller screen and the text is readable. (Scwartz, 2016b.) In the past years, your website's ranking wouldn't get hurt by ignoring mobile users. In the past few years mobile users have started to cover more than 50% of all the internet traffic. According to Smart Insights in their mobile marketing statistics, the amount of mobile users surpassed the amount of desktop internet users already in 2013 (Smart Insights, 2017).

Due to this change in the preferred devices of the users, Google rolled out an update in mid-2016, that heavily punished all the websites that weren't optimized for the mobile users. Furthermore, Google announced early 2017, that they will be implementing a so called Mobile-first index sometime late 2017, or early 2018. What this means, is that Google will start to index all web pages based on their mobile versions. Previously, the desktop version of a website and the mobile version of a website have been indexed differently, and the ranking has changed based on if the search queries are done on mobile or desktop. With the mobile-first index, Google wants to cater to the majority to their users, who already are mobile users. Having no mobile version of your website has been already a bad ranking factor for your website, but after the mobile first update is rolled out, it will be even worse. This won't mean however, that Google will not index pages with only desktop versions at all, they will simply keep indexing only the desktop page. (Scwartz, 2016b.) All of this goes to show, that Google will always rank high the pages, that take account the user the most, instead of websites that purely focus on creating content optimized for the search engines.

## 2.4 Off-page SEO and Link building

Off-page SEO focuses on the relationship between your domain and all the other domains on the internet. The most important off-page factor are backlinks, meaning any links from different domains back to your website. For the longest time, backlinks were the most important factor when it came to SEO, and to this day they are one of the biggest singular factor. Having a lot of backlinks tells search engines, that your content is something many people find useful and are willing to share with other people. Google even revealed themselves, that Links were one of the top three most important search engine ranking factors in their algorithm (Scwartz, 2016a). An analysis done by Brian Dean in 2017 showed that links still were the most important factor when it comes to search engine rankings. However, having a lot of backlinks cannot guarantee high ranking on a SERP, it has to be with proper and high-quality links and built upon a well optimized on-page content. (Dean, 2017a.)

All backlinks are not equally valuable. The value of a link to your website is determined by the DA of the linking domain and the relevancy to your website. For example, for a Finnish website, link from a Finnish domain is a lot more valuable than domain with a similar DA from China. Link is also more valuable if it is from a domain that deals with the same topic and industry. One very big factor of backlinks is, if they are a Follow link, or a No follow link. Most links are automatically Follow links, which means that they transfer all the possible value to the linked domain. When a link is a No follow, a tag `rel="nofollow"` can be seen in the HTML code. This tells Google to transfer only a part of the SEO value to the linked domain. Google implemented this feature when linking to other websites in order to provide a solution for spam like links. (Google, 2017.)

There are multiple tactics to gain links from domains, and these different tactics are called link building. The simplest way to gain links is to create high quality content, that people will want to share on their web pages or social media channels. However, this usually is an option only for already well-established pages, that get a lot of traffic to all of their content. New websites have to make efforts in order for people to see their content. This is usually done by making some sort of outreach, when new and shareable content is created on the website.

Gaining links through high quality and popular content is called link earning. It is a way of link building, and sometimes doesn't even require outreaching and presenting your content to others,

but instead they will discover the article and content by themselves, and want to link to it purely because they found value of it. (Ledford, 2008.)

In his article about Definitive Guide for Linkbuilding for SEO, Brian Dean lists some classic ways of building and earning links. One of the most popular and effective one is content marketing, and content creation. He mentions, that high quality, visual content is still one of the most effective ways to gain high quality backlinks. Content marketing can include anything from blogpost to videos, but one of the most commonly known methods is infographics. Infographics are images, that combine data with a visual representation. They are an easy tool for content marketing, as they are very easily sharable, and people prefer visual content over plain text. These characteristics make infographics an easy and relatively fast way to earn and gain links. Other great ways include creating a list post, as these are highly popular in the current market. These different link building project are made more valuable and more likely to succeed, if you are able to include data to them. Guest post are also still a very common way of building links. In the article Dean advices to do this cautiously, as Google will get suspicious if you only gain links through posts you wrote on other people's blogs. When done right and in relevant webpages, Guest posting can bring value to your website. (Dean, 2017a.)

Besides backlinks from different domains, Social media links and mentions are a part of off-page SEO also. In earlier years of SEO, social media did not exist. Thus it makes sense, that when social media started to gain momentum, search engines didn't think to include social mentions and links as factors that affect SEO. Even though social signals still aren't considered nearly as big as a factor than links, it is undeniable that they have some sort of effect in terms of SEO. As social media has become an integrated part of people's lives, Google and other search engines are forced to see value from mentions and links from social media platforms also. Links from social media also often drive more traffic to webpages, and create more engaging of the user, so in this way, they do have a clear positive effect on the page organic performance, even if they in themselves are not a direct part of search engine algorithms. (Ledford, 2008.)

## 2.5 Search Engines

In order to fully understand search engine optimization, it is important to understand the goal of search engines like Google, as SEO is completely dependent on the behaviour and the functions

behind search engines. Search engines are free to use for users. They generate money through paid advertisements and affiliate links that they place on their search results pages. In order to generate this revenue, the search engines must gain the trust of users and provide them with what they want to find. Therefore, the goal of search engines is to provide users with the most relevant, accurate and fresh content based on the keywords the users used, or at least make the users feel that they are provided with this. (Enge et al. 2010.)

The search engines achieve this perceived relevancy by conducting thorough research of user's reaction and engagement on different web pages, like time spent on each site, how many times they chose the site from the search engine results page and how many internal links they clicked on the site. Search engines also look at the links and other engagement the site has received. Based on these, and multiple other factors, the search engine creates a complex algorithm, that defines, which of the pages are shown toward the top of the search engine results pages, and which towards the bottom. The algorithm changes constantly, in order for the results to stay as relevant and natural as possible. (Enge et al. 2010.)

In order for search engines to rank websites based on their algorithms, they need to discover them first. The process of discovering websites is done differently based on what kind of search engine is in question. Search Engines can be categorized to two ways doing this, Crawler-based search engines, and Human-based search engines. (Enge et al. 2010.) Human based search engines are run by humans, who pick what results will be shown on these search engines. This is a very labour intensive way of doing search, but can create very specific results. The other, crawler based search engines index websites by software that crawls webpages automatically. This is where they get their names also. Majority of the established search engines are crawler based, including Google. The software that crawl pages are called spiders, and they go through every single page that they can access. After a page has been crawled, it gets added to the Index of a search engine, and can be taken as a part of the search results. Google and other search engines do this process to all published websites, but it might take some time. (Enge et al. 2010.) In order to speed up the process, it is possible to crawl your pages manually by submitting them to Google Webmaster Tools.

## **Search engines and their reception of SEO**

SEO is generally seen as a negative practise by search engines, which is one of the reason they constantly change their algorithms: in order to prevent SEO professionals altering the search results as much as possible. The search engines see SEO as a way to interfere with the most relevant search results, and want to prevent this to bring the most user-friendly results to the top. On top of constantly changing their algorithms, search engines try to lessen the effect of SEO by penalizing sites that gain links through suspicious ways, or use other, not sincere methods of gaining rankings (Enge et al. 2010). To try and influence the ranking of websites in a positive way, Google has released their own guidelines for ranking and indexing your website, called the Webmaster Guidelines. They advise to create content primarily for the users, and not the search engines. (Google Webmasters, 2017.)

Doing SEO in a manner that does not look natural, and tries to use dishonest and manipulative ways to get to the top of the SERP, is called black hat SEO or Spamdexing. Some of the techniques that are commonly known as black hat SEO include for example placing white text on a white background on your website, that is stuffed by keywords but not visible for the user. Other way is buying a large number of links at once. Both of these methods used to work for a short period, but as Google updates it's algorithm, it can detect easily dishonest measures like this, and penalize the website's rankings heavily, if not completely removing them from their results. (Enge et al. 2010.)

Opposite side of black hat SEO is white hat SEO. White hat SEO is done by using tactics, that are both user friendly, transparent and that seem as natural as possible. This includes writing text with a reasonable keyword density, that still provide users with useful information, or optimizing the pages in such manner that they are as easy to read as possible, both on desktop computers and mobile devices. Gaining links through good, interesting and shareable content would also be a form of White hat SEO. These techniques usually take longer to execute, and require more effort than black hat SEO techniques. (Enge et al. 2010.)

Grey hat SEO is a strategy, that combines white hat SEO with black hat SEO. The ratio of the techniques can differ. While black hat SEO is faster to create, and usually brings results in faster, it is a risky way of gaining rankings and visibility. If Google catches a website using deceiving and manipulate tactics, it can remove the website from their search entirely. White hat SEO requires

time and effort in creating content that users can also enjoy, but it is much likely to bring better, long term results to website. Combining these tactics can be a way to reach rankings quicker in the beginning, but once the site gets established, it is safest to move to only white hat SEO. (Enge et al. 2010.)

## 2.6 Entering a new market

The key to entering a new market is careful planning and research. Before you can enter a new market with your company, it is essential that you know the characteristics of the new market. In this thesis the new market in question is a new country, so it is very essential for the company to find out if the business practices of the new country are similar to the ones in the original country, or if the legal aspects force the company to adapt their practices to the new market. It is also important to know, what the condition in the country is regarding your product, how saturated the market is, who are your main competitors and how you can stand out from the competition. (Lavin & Cohan, 2011.)

With a new country, it might be possible that the terms that you have used in your old markets differ completely from the new market, so the company needs to have people who speak the new language and know the market. While translating the terms online can provide cheap and quick results, it is very likely that the terminology around these terms is impossible to figure out for a person, who doesn't speak the language. (Lavin & Cohan, 2011.)

With international market penetration branding also easily becomes an issue, from the name of the company to the name of the products, and services provided. The company needs to decide how they will want to brand themselves in the new country. Usually the first challenge a company faces in the new market is the question of branding, and the name of the company. The first questions the companies need to ask themselves are: is the name international enough, and will it make sense in the market is. If the answer to one or both is no, the company is faced with a problem. The company needs to decide, if they want to brand the company in the new market with a completely new name. Not only is it important to research the market, it is extremely important to get to know the target audience in the new market. (Smartling, 2017.)

### **3 ENTERING A NEW MARKET AND IMPLEMENTING SEO**

The process for new website began in November, 2017, when I was tasked with creating the 4 first top level pages for the website while still being an intern. Before I could start creating these web pages, I had to familiarize myself with the market we were dealing with, and create proper keyword research in order to decide, what pages were necessary ones to create, and in what kind of structure.

#### **3.1 Setting the goals**

As with any online marketing strategy, search engine optimization also requires clear goals in order for there to be a coherent strategy. Without goals, it is difficult to set priorities in actions, and decide what actions should be done in the first place in order to improve the sites performance.

The first goal that was set, was simply visibility for the website. As the website would start from scratch, it was difficult to set specific goals, as the company had no previous experience with the competition in the branch in Finland. The company had two main focuses in mind, and those were generating traffic through organic searches, and starting to generate revenue on the website through the organic traffic. The way the revenue would be generated, is through affiliate networks, that provide a small revenue, each time a user on the site clicks an affiliate link. The goals were never specified on paper, and a specific plan was never made in order to achieve them, but they were clear from the actions the company started to take as they launched the website.

The broad goal for revenue was to start generating any kind of revenue within a year from starting the website. While this might seem like a very open-ended goal, it was again very difficult to estimate, what the potential would be, and when would it be realistic to expect the first revenue to arrive from the website.



### 3.2 Familiarising the market and branding

While the company had many employees experienced with the market of personal loans and personal finance in the Danish market, they had none who was familiar with the loan market in Finland. For this reason, I was hired from an intern position, to focus specifically on the new website, and familiarise myself with the different words and products within loans, the kind of competition the market had and what kind of content would work best in Finland. Having an employee who had experience working with SEO, and was a native Finnish speaker was essential for a website that was only going to be focusing in online marketing through organic SEO. With the market familiarisation, the company also received help from their affiliate network, that is working in all of the Nordic countries, including Finland.

The big question the company faced, was with branding, more specifically with the name of the website and service. The service in Denmark is called “Mikonomi”, which doesn’t quite fit the Finnish language. The name in Danish is a wordplay of the words “my economy”. On one hand, the wishes were to create a name that has the same spirit as the Danish name, but they also wanted to think about options, that would be broader, and clearer on the fact that the website was aimed for providing consumers with a service that allows them to compare different aspects of their personal economy. On the other hand, the company wanted to make sure the name would not restrict the company in the future, as the goal was to compare everything related to personal economy. While the Finnish website would focus on personal loans in the beginning, the plans were to expand the website eventually to provide the same range of services as the Danish website. Therefore, the name was not designed for loans specifically.

At the start of the naming process, the company looked at some of the competitors of the branch from the English market. The biggest inspiration the company at this point was the economy comparison service “Money Supermarket” in the UK market. The CEO of the company was very fond of this branding, as it gives away the idea of saving money through the service, and thus wanted to generate ideas that would be close to it. This was a task given for the Danish employees, who would also take in to an account, that the website name could also be possibly used in Norway. The Danish employees came up with names, and the interns and employees would then vote on them based on different factors (figure 5). These different factors included easy pronunciation, internationality, product relevancy and if the name was memorable or not.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	
1	NAVN	Nemt at udtale	Noget folk husker	Skal fungere international	Produktrelevant	SCORE	
2	Mymoneysaver	3	3		5	4	15
3	mymoney	5	3		5	3	16
4	supersaver	5	3		5	3	16
5	moneymarket	5	5		5	3	18
6	moneysaver	5	5		5	5	20
7	myeconomy	3	2		5	3	13
8	comparemyoffer	2	4		5	5	16
9	mysaver	5	1		5	2	13
10	financialmarket	1	2		5	2	10
11	myfinance	5	3		5	4	17
12	moneyrunner	5	3		5	3	16
13	Moneycompare	4	3		5	5	17
14							
15							

FIGURE 5. Voting for name suggestions

At this point, no Finnish speaking employees had yet been a part of the naming process, which meant, that there was a risk, that none of the name suggestions would actually fit for a Finnish website. This is why at this point the Finnish employees of the company were included in the naming process. The Finnish employees would come up with suggestions of their own, first only based on the Danish website, Mikonomi. They then would be presented with the different options that the Danish employees had come up with, and would write down a few Finnish options seen in

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	NAVN	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	SUM	AVERAGE
2	moneysaver	17	19	12	19	20	20	16	123	17,6
3	moneymarket	18	18	13	17	18	16	17	117	16,7
4	supersaver	16	19	12	19	16	20	14	116	16,6
5	Mymoneysaver	14	13	15	17	15	16	19	109	15,6
6	mymoney	15	18	13	18	16	19	10	109	15,6
7	mysaver	16	16	14	19	13	20	11	109	15,6
8	moneyrunner	14	15	10	18	16	17	14	104	14,9
9	Moneycompare	15	16	11	16	17	16	11	102	14,6
10	myfinance	16	19	8	18	17	15	5	98	14,0
11	comparemyoffer	14	13	15	16	16	12	9	95	13,6
12	myeconomy	16	16	9	16	13	15	9	94	13,4
13	financialmarket	14	17	10	18	10	13	6	88	12,6
14	Talouteni (My economy)									
15	Mikonomia									
16	Talousmarketti Economy market									
17	Rahamarketti Money market									
18	Raha-apuri Money helper									
19	rahavalint Money Choice									
20	rahaexpertti Money expert									

FIGURE 6. Finnish naming suggestions

figure 6.

The final decision for the name was made based on what sounded the easiest for Finnish pronunciation, and one that fit the brand of the website. While the suggestions that the Danish interns and employees came up with were taken into account, it was in the end determined, that the words simple didn't quite fit the Finnish language, and the company wanted to come up with something that seemed more native to Finland. The name that was going to be used was "Talouteni". The meaning behind is the same as the Danish website, my economy, but it isn't a wordplay in the same way, as it is already a one word. It can be easily related to the Danish website, and it sounds good in the Finnish language.

### 3.3 Keyword research and site structure

Once the goals, branding and name was decided, began the keyword research. The keyword research was first done by one of the Danish employees, who had worked with the Danish website for over three years, so he was familiar with the personal loan market in Denmark, and had a clear idea in mind, what he wanted to create in Finland in the beginning. He began by inserting a few translated phrases related to loan and loaning money in Google Translate, and entering them to Google Keyword Planner, in order to see which of them would have the highest searches (figure 7). Based on this, the seed keywords for the keyword research were chosen, and those would also be the first content pages created.

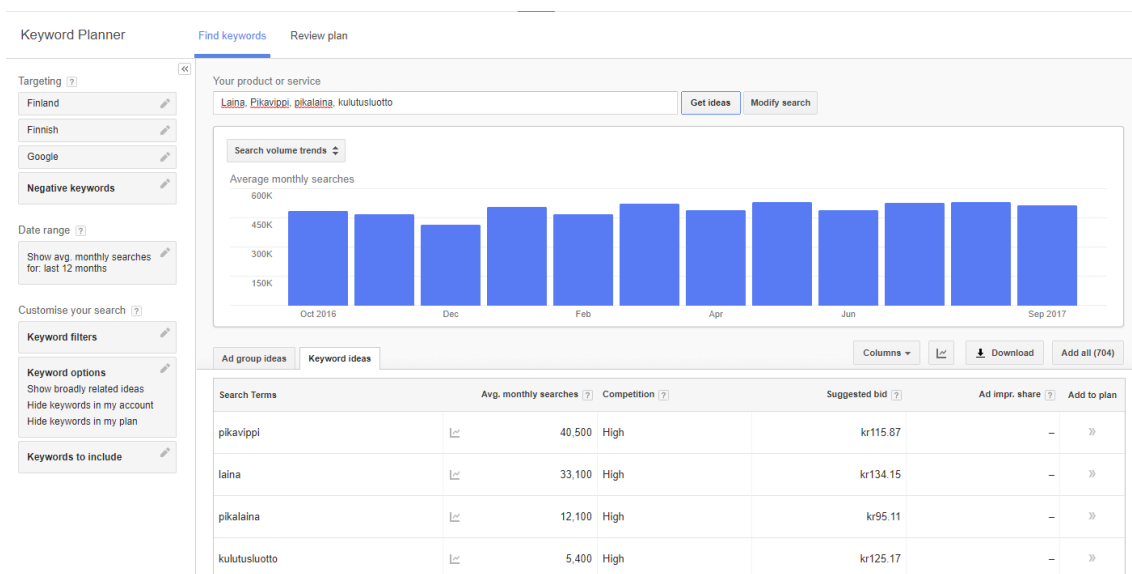


FIGURE 7. Keyword planner suggestions for "Laina"

The main seed keyword chosen for keyword research was “Laina”, loan. This was going to be the focus of website and the service, and it had the second most high searches according to Google Keyword Planner from all the loan related keywords, 33 100 searches per month. As loan also was the broadest of the words, it made sense to choose it as the main seed keyword. It would be the first content page created. The second seed keyword would be “Pikavippi”, fast loan, the loan related keyword with the most searches on Google, with around 40 500 monthly searches. The third seed keyword that was chosen, would be “Pikalaina”, another word for fast loan, with around 14 800 monthly searches.

The meaning of the word is the same for both Pikavippi and Pikalaina, but the company wanted to create both, as they believed Google couldn't differentiate the two words, as while they meant the same thing, they looked very different to a person who didn't speak Finnish. As they both had very high monthly searches, it was decided that both of them would be created as separate content page. This decision was also influenced by the company's belief, that Google wasn't as good as picking up the different related keywords in Finland, as it was in Denmark. The last seed keyword and content page that was chosen, was “Kulutusuotto”, a consumer credit, a bigger version of the fast loans. Compared to the other keywords, Kulutusluotto has relatively low search volumes, only around 5400 per month. While the searches are low compared to the other three, it fits next to them well, being a different kind of loan compared to Pikavippi and Pikalaina, but it also had the highest searches of the different broad keywords related to loans. Only other keywords related to loans with higher searches were either long tail keywords, that were going to be used as secondary keywords, or companies in the loan industry.

Once all the four seed keywords were decided, it was easier to start creating a more thorough keyword research for broad keywords and longtail keywords. The first draft of keyword research for the whole website was done by exporting data from The Google Keyword Planner to an excel sheet. This sheet would include all the keywords related to the word “laina”, their monthly searches, and the completion each keyword faced. Altogether, there was around 350 keywords that Google related to “laina”. They were first sorted by the average monthly searches. This soon proved to be a very inefficient way of arranging them, as the different keywords based on their searches were not related to each other's, and thus it was difficult to see, which keywords would make sense as broad and long tail keywords to the four chosen main keywords.

To make the keyword analysis easier to read and analyze, all the keywords were arranged so, that the words that were closely related to each other were grouped together, and within these groups the keywords were then arranged by their monthly searches. One important factor in the grouping of the words, was to make sure that keywords that were clearly related to each other's would be in a single group, but only if they resembled each other's enough. In figure 8 can be seen how "Pikalaina" and "Pikavippi" have been put in to different groups, because while they have the same meaning, they are very different looking words, and thus have a high change of Google not recognizing them as having the same meaning. Organizing over 300 words by meaning is a time consuming task, but it made finding broad and long tail keywords significantly easier for all the following content pages.

yhdistä lainat	1000	0,99	connect loans
<b>Pikalaina</b>	<b>14800</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Fast loan</b>
pikalainaa	1600	0,99	fast loan (in a different form)
pikalaina heti	1000	0,99	fast loan immediately
ninnin pikalaina	320	0,99	Ninni's fast loan
pikalainaa heti	260	0,99	fast loan immediately (in a different form)
pikalaina heti tilille	260	0,97	fast loan immediately to an account
pikalainat pitkällä maksuajalla	210	1	fast loans with long payback time
pikalainaa heti tilille	170	0,97	fast loan immediately to an account (in a different form)
uusi pikalaina	140	0,98	new fast loan
pikalainat uudet	140	0,98	fast loans new ones (uudet pikalainat makes grammatically sense)
pikalaina vertailu	110	0,94	fast loan comparison
pikalainaa netistä	90	0,87	fast loan from the internet
uudet pikalainat	90	0,96	new fast loans
pika lainaa	90	0,96	fas loan (in a different form, grammatically incorrect )
pikalainat vertailu	70	0,95	fast loans comparison
<b>pikavippi</b>	<b>49500</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Fastvippi</b>
vippi	14800	0,99	a word for a small loan
pikavippi heti	3600	0,99	fastvippi immediately
vippi fi	2400	0,97	vippi fi
pikavippi heti tilille	1600	0,99	fastvippi immediately to an account
pika vippi	880	1	fast vippi (grammatically incorrect)
pikavippivertailu	880	0,96	fastvippi comparison
vippivertailu	260	0,94	vippi comparison
pikavippi 24h	590	0,99	fastvippi 24h

FIGURE 8. Keyword Grouping

The keyword research would work as a base for the structure of the site, and determine which content pages should be created. As mentioned earlier, it was decided that the four main landing pages would be "Laina", "Pikavippi", "Pikalaina" and "Kulutusluotto". These would all become pages directly under the main page, hosting under them related level two and even level three pages. The structure of the website was planned and illustrated in Google sheets, where each keyword was set on a specific place on the structure, and the URL of their page would be included in this structure also. The plan of the structure can be seen in figure 9.

Keyword	Url
Talouteni	/
Laina	/Laina/
lainaa heti	/Laina/Lainaa-heti
lainaa ilman vakuuksia	/Laina/Lainaa-ilman-vakuuksia
lainaa ilman luottotietoja	/Laina/Lainaa-ilman-luottotietoja
lainojen yhdistäminen	/Laina/Lainojen-yhdistaminen
koroton laina	/Laina/Koroton-laina
Luottotiedot	/Kulutusluotto/Luottotiedot
pankkilaina	/Laina/Pankkilaina/
opintolaina	/Laina/Opintolaina/
lainaa netistä	/Laina/Lainaa-netista
lainavertailu	/Laina/Lainavertailu
Lainantarjoaja(t)	/Laina/Lainavertailu/Lainantarjoaja(t)
lainaa puhelimella	/Laina/Lainaa-puhelimella
Pikavippi	/Pikavippi
pikavippi heti	/Pikavippi/Pikavippi-heti
pikavippi ilman luottotietoja	/Pikavippi/Pikavippi-ilman-luottotietoja
ilmainen pikavippi	/Pikavippi/Ilmainen-pikavippi
pikavippi ilman kuluja	/Pikavippi/Pikavippi-ilman-kuluja
Edullinen pikavippi	/Pikavippi/Edullinen-pikavippi
Helppo vippi	/Pikavippi/Helppo-vippi
pikavippi luottotiedottomalle	/Pikavippi/Pikavippi-luottotiedottomalle

figure 9. Plan of the structure for the website

As can be seen, the top level page is the front page, named “Talouteni”. Underneath this directly are the main keywords, “Laina” and “Pikavippi”. Underneath the main keywords in the structure are the general and related keywords. The structure was designed based on the keywords and their relations, in order for Google to easily be able to see, which pages related to which, and what the overall structure and hierarchy of the website was. Creating a clear plan with keyword research, and site structure, allowed the company to make a clearer plan, on what pages were to be created first, and in what order the pages should be prioritized and created in the early stages of the website, and focused on when doing link building for specific keywords.

### 3.4 Content creation

The first step of content creation was to conduct a more thorough keyword research for the specific keyword. Even though in the beginning of the process a keyword research for the whole website was conducted, it is good idea to create a keyword research for each individual content page, as you can go in to more detail, and find more keywords related to the specific keyword, that might have not surfaced in the original keyword research. The tools for the more thorough keyword research used in the process were Google Analytics Keyword Planner, and Ahrefs Keyword

Explorer. Additionally, the search results that came up when searching with the keyword, looking both at the organic results, and Google Adwords results were taken in to account. Originally, this keyword research was done on paper, but during the process of this thesis, all of the keyword research for each content page was written in Google docs, and added to a folder with the content itself in the company's Google Drive, in order to see what the keywords used for each content page are, for future references and improvement. Each keyword research would include the main keyword and secondary keywords, their average searches per month, and the number of times the keyword should appear in the content. Alongside in the keyword research, the content planning document included the goal length of the text, and the planned structure of the headlines. Most pages were aimed to be around 1000 words, but the four top level pages were all planned to be 2000 words long. The content pages are created at these lengths, as according to the theory, it is more likely to rank on Google when you create texts longer than 750 words.

The first pages that were created were all of the top level content pages with the general keywords mentioned earlier. The content for these was rather straight forward, and it followed the length and keyword densities described in the content plan closely. In the longer, 2000 words text, the keyword density was around 2 percent, and would be the densest in the first 200 words of the text. The 1000 word texts had a slightly higher keyword density, 2,5 percent. All the first content pages follow strictly the recommended format of an SEO text. The paragraphs were kept approximately 3 lines long, and after every 4 paragraphs a visual element of some sort would follow. This visual element could be an image, bullet points or a table. All the images would be optimized to fit both desktop and mobile dimensions, by changing the width of the images to be 100% instead of strict proportion. All the images also got descriptive and content related alt tags, in order to help Google realize how the images are related to the content. Tables would not be included in the first content pages at this point, but later on in the long tail keyword content pages their effectiveness was tested. The meta tags and titles of the content pages were carefully written, and made sure that they were the correct length for the SERP snippets. The focus on the meta titles was to make them engaging, and make people want to click on them, if they showed up on their search. Once a page was created and published, it was crawled through Google Webmaster tools, in order to make sure it got indexed on Google as fast as possible.

After all the main top level product pages were created, the next step with the website was to start creating depth to the structure of the website with 2<sup>nd</sup> level, long tail keyword content pages. The order of which these pages were created was determined by the amount of monthly searches these

long tail keywords had. The process of creating these pages was same as with the top level pages, and the plan for each page was included in the Google Drive alongside first keyword plans. The search intention of the pages was not taken to account at this point, as the hope was to gain as much visitors to the site through these pages.

Not focusing on the search intention from the beginning meant that the traffic eventually generated through some of these pages was not in reality relevant to the website. A good example of this is the page “Opintolaina”, study loan. This content page among one of the first second level pages created under “Laina”. This keyword is closely related to loans, and it had a lot of monthly searches compared to other keywords related to loans, which it was chosen to be included in the structure plan. The search intent of this keyword is however very likely informative, and not transactional in nature. Not only was it most likely informative, it was problematic in the way, that the website of the company was not going to be providing study loans, as these are mainly handled by larger banks in Finland. This meant that the traffic generated through this keyword was not very likely to be such that can be converted in to transactional traffic. Other example of generating irrelevant traffic was the content page “Lainaa ilman luottotietoja”, loan without credit information. This keyword again had high monthly searches, but unlike “Opintolaina”, this keyword was much more likely to be transactional in nature. However, in Finland it is nearly impossible to be able to apply for loan if you do not have your credit information. This meant, that the people doing searches with this keyword were very likely people who had lost their credit information, and would not be able to get a loan.

Both of these two pages generated a lot of traffic, and ended up ranking pretty well on the Google search results for a lot of the keywords. This was very likely because the competition in these keywords were not very high, as they do not bring traffic that is relevant to the loan industry of Finland, and thus the competitors of the website are not investing a lot of time on these pages and keywords. In comparison, the highest search keywords like “Pikavippi” and “Laina”, are very difficult to rank high on, as some of the competitors have spent years on fine tuning their content pages and building links on these pages. These main pages took a long to appear in the search results, and even at the end of September, were still around the 100<sup>th</sup> position in Google, generating next to no traffic. “Lainaa ilman luottotietoja” was created three months later, and it immediately showed up in the third page of Google search results, on position 35. After 4 months of being online, the page suddenly jumped to the first page on Google in the 4<sup>th</sup> position, and created a huge spike in the traffic.



This led to the conclusion, that the best pages to focus on at this point were long tail keywords that didn't have such high searches, but very clear search intent, and relatively low competition.

The example of the most successful page is the page "Lainavertailu", loan comparison. It didn't have as high of monthly searches as some other long tail keywords, but the competition for this keyword was also not as high. The search intention of this keyword is closer to transactional, and it was also very relevant to the website, as it provides a service for comparing loans. The page was created similarly to the other content pages until that point, the only difference that the page included HTML tables including information about different loan providers inside the content. This page was published and crawled on the first of August, and it appeared in Google's search results third page two days after. On September 24<sup>th</sup>, a bit over a month after the page going online, it reached the first page on Google, on the 8<sup>th</sup> position, bringing a lot of relevant traffic to the website.

### 3.5 Linkbuilding

The company has years of experience in link building, and has tried multiple different methods in various markets, and found out what seems to work best for these markets. However, there were no people experienced in the Finnish market, when it came to link building. The company had websites that had been running in Finland in the past, but the people who worked on those websites, were not working at the company anymore, and had documented their link building projects very minimally, if at all. This meant, that it was difficult to estimate and evaluate, what kind of link building would work the best, so it was natural to first give a try to the link building projects, that had been successful in other markets, especially in the Nordic ones.

The first link building project that was tried on the website, was competitor analysis. This is a technique, where you take a look at the links that your top competitors have, with tools like Ahrefs, and try to see, if there would be links, that are easy to gain to your own website also. Quite often these easy links are comments on forums and articles, or profiles that you can create to different websites, or even directories, where you can submit your websites.

The first step for competitor link building is to find who your primary competitors are. Primary competitors are companies and websites, that rank or aim to rank on the same keywords as your

domain, and also provide a service or product similar to yours. Secondary competitors are websites, that do rank on the same keywords, but do not provide a similar service, and thus are not directly competing with you. It is however also useful to find these secondary competitors, as they can provide good ideas for ranking higher on the keywords. Finding these competitors was done during this link building project in two main ways, through Ahrefs Competing Domains Tool and through Google, searching with the keywords the website aims to rank for.

The competitors that were found with these techniques were put in a spread sheet, so they could be further analyzed. Each of the determined competitors were inserted in the Ahrefs domain explorer, as this is the easiest way to see the referring domains each competitor has. With this tool it is possible to see the domains that link to the competing domain, how many individuals links they have, if the links are Follow or no follow, and what the anchor text for each of these links are. The list also shows the Domain Rating of each of the domains, so it is possible to focus on good quality and authoritative links. From this list of domains, it is easy to see, which links are done through very simple and fast manner, such as comments, directories, profiles or forum posts. From each competitor, a couple of promising, high DR link opportunities were gathered. Each opportunity would be described and planned out before actually leaving the comment, submitting a post or creating a profile. It was also decided, which pages on the websites should be linked to, from the competitor analysis links.

Once this was all planned out, the plan could be executed and documented, as in all the comments, forum posts and directory submission links would be posted, and noted. It is important to stick to websites that are as close to your field as possible, because these links will be more valuable, but the posts will seem more natural, and less spam-like. The competitor analysis brought in around 10 easy links, and it was a good first boost for the website, even though it didn't show in the traffic at this point. However, the change was noticeable in the Ahrefs ranking, DR, that started to increase from 0 after this project. Unfortunately, the company did not track the DR at this point, as DA was deemed more important, but during the process, it became clear, that Ahref's DR was much faster to react to the changes in the Finnish website, and thus it would have made sense to keep track from the beginning.

After the first competitor analysis project was completed, it was time to try out creating an infographic for link building. So far the company had had great results with infographics in many different markets, so it made sense to test it out in Finland. Finding a topic for infographic was

rather tricky, as there was no telling, what would work in Finland. Topic is essentially the most important part of an infographic, as in the company it had been time and time again, that a great design doesn't mean that the infographic project will be successful, but a great topic can bring some really valuable links from high authority and high DA websites and even news medias.

The very first infographic was about student loans, as it seemed to be a topic, that was talked a lot in the news and student medias. In the project, an infographic was created with a free online image editing tool, Piktochart, to explain the changes in the student loan in a simple and visual way in one single image. It was published in the blog section of the website, along with a short article. In order to gain visibility for it, a list of targets for an email outreach were created. The targets for the outreach for this project were gathered through searching for websites on google, that had talked about the topic in the past, or otherwise were related to the topic of the infographic. An ideal target would be targets, that have shared infographics about similar content before, as they will be often more likely to share infographics again, than websites that have never shared or posted infographics in the past. During this project it was discovered however, that infographics are not very widely used in Finnish websites, blogs or news medias, which meant that there were no websites sharing infographic related to the topic of this link building project. Instead, the outreaching list was compiled of websites that had created articles related to the topic. In the list, the website is listed alongside the URL and name of the target domain, as well as email address of an appropriate contact person from the target.

While the results and traffic from the infographic were rather impressive for the very first link building project, they were not quite as expected. The projects brought some traffic through social media mentions and links, and the email outreaching. However, in actual links from other domains, which was the goal of the projects, the results were rather minimal, as there was only one link from another domain, all the other mentions were social. Infographics were also attempted two other times during the spring of 2017, but neither times brought links, or even mentions, which meant moving to other kinds of link building projects.

The third kind of project was so called data-driven press release project. A data driven project in the company is a project, that is built around an interesting set of data, either gathered by the company, or found outside of the company. The goal of these projects is to create articles good enough for bigger news medias to get interested in sharing them, in hopes of getting very high DA websites to link back to company's domains. It had shown very impressive results especially in the

Nordic countries earlier, so it was a natural next step in the Finnish website. The topic for data driven projects is not easy to find, as it often comes from the data itself and the story build around it. In the end, the topic for the first data driven project in Finland, was chosen to be comparison of the costs of driver's licenses in 30 biggest cities in Finland. It was a topic that was talked a lot about in the media, and where there was a change for data to be gathered relatively easily. The process of a data driven link building project differs from infographic in that it focuses more on data and analyzing instead of creating something visually appealing. The targets for data driven project also differ from the ones of an infographic project, as the targets tend to be local news medias, or other relevant medias to the topic of the project.

For this project, the target group was small medias, especially focused in the cities that were targeted on the comparison. Alongside the small local news medias, a few nationwide medias were also included and outreached to. This turned out to be a much bigger success than the earlier infographic projects. The small news medias were very eager to publish the information, as it was both useful and interesting to see. The project was even published on one of the largest Finnish news media's, MTV's website, which created a large number of traffic to the website. Overall, the project gathered approximately 10 links from different news medias, and additional 5 mentions without a link from other medias, thus proving very successful.

### **3.6 Performance and results**

From the start, the website was connected to Google Analytics, a tool that allows you to track the traffic and the performance of the website. The traffic tracked by Google Analytics is categorized roughly in three different ways. Direct traffic most commonly means traffic that ended up on the site by directly typing the URL to their browser. Direct traffic can also be derived from bookmarks and documents. Referral traffic means traffic, that ends up on the site from links from either different domains or social media. The most important traffic for measuring SEO performance is the organic traffic. Organic traffic is traffic that comes directly through Google or other search engines. (Google Analytics Solutions, 2009.) Organic performance of a website in this thesis also refers to site performing with the traffic from Google, and performance consists along with traffic of conversions, Google rankings and links.

As SEO has been the only form online or traditional marketing used ever since the launch of the website, the main focus of tracking the results is naturally in the organic traffic, in order to see how much visitors are gained through the different targeted keywords through Google. This thesis will however look at other kinds of traffic too, as link building projects tend to bring a lot of direct and referral traffic to the website, even though their goal is to boost the organic performance.

The overall performance of the site traffic wise from January to September can be seen in figure 10. The spikes in the visitors before July correlate with the various link building projects done on the website. For example, the 500-visitor spike in March, is following a day after the publishing of the drivers license comparison project, that got published in multiple news medias around Finland.

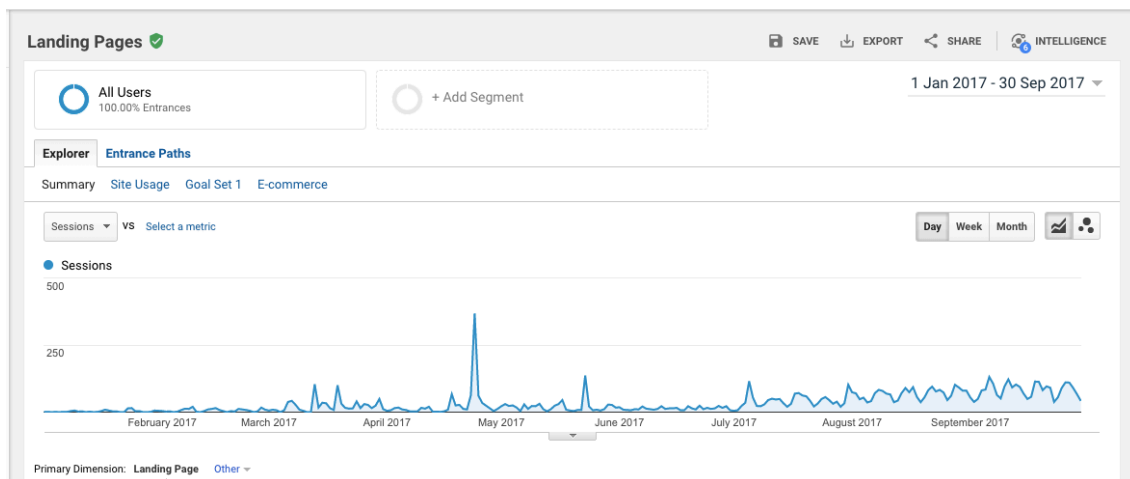


FIGURE 10. All website traffic

The organic traffic of the website from January to September can be seen in figure 11. from this figure it is easier to see the slow increase in the traffic coming from organic traffic, after more and more pages are created. In this figure, it is also easy to see the clear increase in organic session after July, which is when the page “Lainaa ilman luottotietoja” jumped multiple positions on Google, so much so that it reached 3<sup>rd</sup> position for the main keyword, and 1<sup>st</sup> position on multiple long tail keywords.

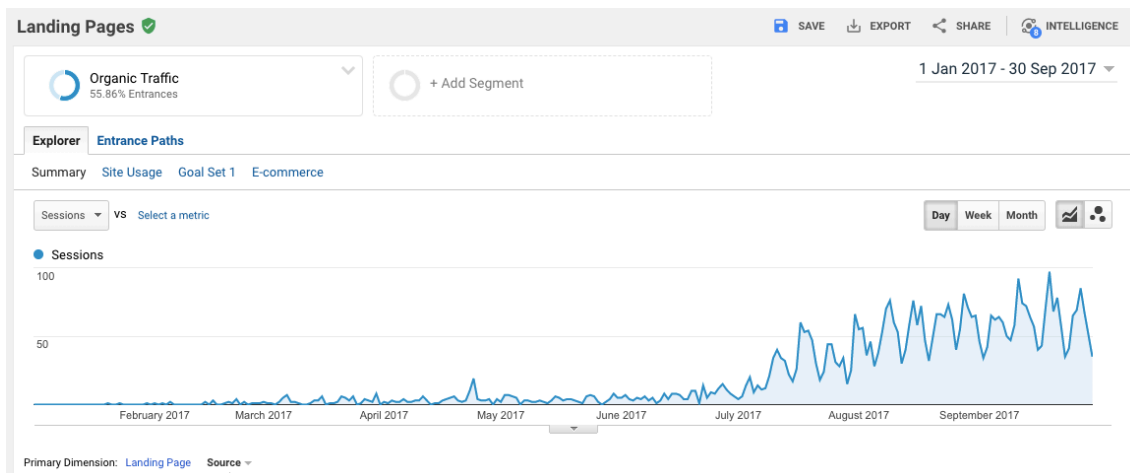


FIGURE 11. Organic website traffic

Links of the website are tracked in the company with the Ahrefs program. It shows how many domains are linking to the websites, and also all individual pages of the domains. Often the company only tracks the do-follow links the websites gets, but as Talouteni is a fresh domain, that had 0 links, it made to track also the No-follow links. No-follow links do bring some SEO value, even though they are less significant, but especially with small, new websites they can help boost the website.

During 9 first months of the Finnish loan site, the website went from 0 links, to 85 links. The links were gathered through different linkbuilding techniques, and were gained consistently through the 9 months. During this time, the traffic of the website went from less than 10 visitors a month, to almost 2000 visitors per month. The growth was very slow during the first months, but after July there was a clear increase in the website traffic. As mentioned, this is to biggest extend due to “Lainaa ilman luottotietoja” reaching the first page in Google. It is not the only page getting traffic, but most weeks, it gets close to 70% of the website traffic.

The project that brought the most links as well as the highest quality links was the data driven project about driver’s license comparison, and while there can be seen a clear increase in the traffic to the website due to the high quality news links, in the organic traffic the difference is much smaller, but still noticeable. The difference can be seen more clearly in figure 12, where the organic traffic is compared to all users during the time the link building project was published.

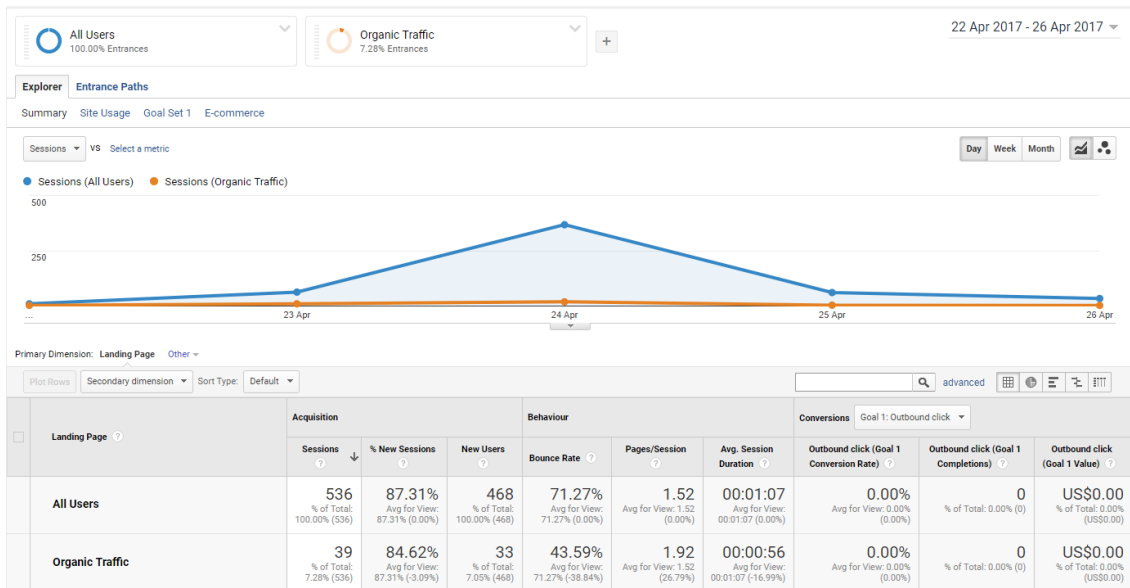


FIGURE 12. Difference in organic traffic and all users 22 - 26th of April

After the project, the organic traffic returned to similar level of users as before the project. The link building project seemed to provide a quick, short term boost, but long term to see more permanent results, it seems that it can take up to many months in order to see a boost in the organic traffic. For a slightly quicker, organic results, it seems, that creating content pages with long term, low competition keywords work better. It will still take some time for Google to index the page and for the page to find its place in the rankings, but it is possible to rank in the first page of Google within two months. If you are able to do this with keywords that match your business, and are transactional in the search intent, it is possible to generate revenue in a relatively early state of your new website.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The process of creating a website from the beginning is a long process with many steps, but it does give an opportunity to plan out the creation of a SEO friendly, well-structured website. It is important to get to know the market you are entering, and having a person who knows the market is a huge advantage. At the very least, you should have people fluent in the language of the new market, who are able to get familiar with the market, and create content consistently. You also need to make sure that you have a clear plan for branding.

The most important single factor for creating a plan for implementing SEO in a new market is a thorough and well thought out keyword research. A proper keyword research will help you understand the market more, and help you determine what are the keywords you want to focus on. These keywords will also in large part determine the structure of the website, so it is important to be able to prioritize and structure the keyword also, not to simply gather as many of them as possible.

Apart from finding keywords with high search volumes and little competition, it is crucial to think of the search intention of each keyword. It is not simply enough to generate traffic to your website, as you will want to generate relevant traffic. Creating a lot of traffic for keywords that aren't directly related to your products and services means that it is much less likely for you to be able to gain any revenue from the traffic, unless you are able to guide the traffic through the transactional tunnel by having them navigate on your website. The safest bet is however to make sure, that most, if not all the content pages and keywords you try to rank for, are in some form related to your business, and can lead to a conversion.

When it comes to link building in a new market, it is important to try multiple different techniques, and not to stick only to the ones that have proven to be working on other markets. While it is a good starting point to try projects that have worked in other countries, trying out multiple different ones is the key to finding the ones that bring in the best results compared to the amount of work they require. In the case of the Finnish market, it is clear, that visual content is not as popular as it is in other markets. However, data driven projects, especially ones that focus on local information, can bring impressive results. Experimenting with different projects and outreach target will lead to successful projects.



Search engine optimization is not a fast process, and sometimes it can take several months to see results from certain actions, and thus it is rather difficult to say which changes in ranking positions correlate to which changes on the on-site and off-site SEO. The most important thing is to keep producing consistent and good quality content, that serves primarily the user, and not the search engines. Especially with a new page, it is safe to make different kind of experiments on what works for different keywords and products, to create a clearer picture for future content pages, link building projects and website structures.

In general, the company managed to reach its goal of creating visibility and traffic through SEO. The growth was rather slow in the beginning, but with consistent creation of new pages, and experimenting with different kinds of link building projects, the traffic eventually increased a lot during the summer of 2017. For the results to have been more effective, the company could have made a more thorough research of search intention for each keyword, alongside at looking at how competitive the keywords are from the start, as this proved to be the most effective way to generate traffic. Other improvements for the company in the future could be submitting a site map to Google, in order to make the structure clearer both for Google and the company. The company could also spend more time in the beginning of the process, to research the market, in order to see what kind of content pages the competitors are investing in, and why, in order to see what pages make the most sense to be created first. In order to track the results of this kind of projects, the company could also focus on tracking a more varied selection of attributes than merely DA, as was seen on the Finnish website, DR was much faster to react to change on the website, and it would have been easier to look back on past projects link building and content pages and see the correlation of actions more clearly.

## 5 DISCUSSION

Both the process of the thesis and the process of being a part of creating a completely new website from scratch were an interesting process, during which I learned a lot. It was great to see the actual results of my work and having an effect in the website and the company, rather than only looking at the process from a theoretical standpoint. However, it was also very interesting to look at the methods I had gotten used to using with my work from a slightly more critical point of view, and alongside multiple sources of theory explaining why we do indeed use these methods at the workplace. While SEO itself was already a very familiar topic to me, this process taught me many ways to possibly optimize the methods I've gotten used to using, and achieve better results in the future, and hopefully also inform my coworkers if similar process will occur in our company again.

The sources for theory consisted of literature related to SEO and market penetration as well as multiple articles from industry experts. SEO is a subject, that changes constantly and is talked about a lot, and often doesn't have exact answers or direct solutions. This is why it is important to look at multiple different sources critically, rather than believe one source blindly. Literature written 10 years ago is barely useful at this day and age, even though some of the basics are still accurate. Looking at industry experts, their articles and experimentation can often bring a much more current information about SEO, as long as you don't rely solely on one source. I tried to find as many different books and articles as I could, to ensure that the theory would not be biased, or solely based on what I had learned through work. I believe the sources are overall reliable and the theory base is objective and wide enough.

I am overall happy about how the process of the thesis went, and the conclusions I ended up with. It was rather difficult to condense 9 months of working with a website, alongside with a theory to back it up, to a couple of dozen pages. I do however think that I managed to gather the most substantial parts of the process to include in the thesis. If I could do something differently, I would have started working on the thesis already from January of 2017, when the process with the website began. I think this way I could have explain the methods slightly in a more detailed manner, and be able to track the results more extensively. On the other hand, doing the thesis afterwards allowed me to see the slightly longer term results from the start of the thesis, and thus allowed me to decide more on what parts of the search engine optimization of the website I wanted to focus on.

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