



How Kainuu can improve its online tourism marketing for international visitors

Customer acquisition through SEO

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This thesis is a research in the online marketing of the region Kainuu, in Finland.</p> <p>Done as a qualitative research, the main focus is on finding how the region fares in the field of online tourism marketing and why that is the case. Most of the information will be found through secondary data, which will be analysed, and the results will be used to help the researcher find a conclusion. After the conclusion has been formed, the researcher will be able to make suggestions for implementing new strategies or strengthening ones already in use.</p> <p>The main focus will be on two online marketing methods, Search Engine Optimization and keyword research, as they are extremely important in the hospitality industry and they offer a way for the region to increase its customer base through online acquisition. With a thorough research on how these online marketing tools are being used, or if they are, the research can obtain the data needed for the suggestions that are aimed to be recommended. Search Engine Optimization shall be researched with the help of online tools, while a Keyword Research will be done through secondary data from the regions official tourism boards, as well as a persona creation.</p> <p>The research holds importance for a region trying to further its tourism and find new international customers, especially in the aftermath the global COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to gather information on how it would be possible to improve online marketing, through SEO, with the focus on international visitors, for the region of Kainuu.

This thesis topic is motivated strongly by the author's personal interest in the region, as well as the general oversight of the region in both domestic and international tourism. This "oversight" can be seen in Visit Finland's (2019a) collected statistics, where Kainuu has only been shown to getting 4 % of domestic tourism in Finland, and 1 % of international tourism, as of 2019. This raises the question of why it does not have higher tourism.

Kainuu is a landlocked region located in the north-eastern part of Finland, bordering Russia on the east – and sharing a regional border with Lapland.

Kainuu has nature comparable to Lapland, to an extent, but is grouped together in the region of Finland's Lake Lands. (Visit Finland, -) Kainuu themselves describe their region's nature as fresh air, clean nature, and room to breathe in midst of the snowy forests and fells. (Arctic Lakeland, -a)

The region is accessible by one airport, located in the southern part of Kainuu – in Kajaani, which is additionally the capital and the largest individual city in the region. Other methods of accessibility are the railway network, that transits daily thorough the region, or a few hours of driving from close-by cities, such as Oulu or Kuusamo. (Arctic Lakeland, -b)

Kainuu is a diverse and large region in Finland, which in itself splits the region into smaller tourism destination. This has been taken into account, as the research has divided the region into sub-sections, according to the region's own division of them, which will be broken down later in the thesis.

Kainuu is putting out growing numbers yearly for their tourism, but has factors differentiating them from other regions in Finland. Their strengths include factors such as peace, quiet and extremely snowy winters – all part of the trademark how Finland is marketed to international tourists. Why the international tourists do not find their way to Kainuu,

which has the capability and infrastructure to host more visitors than they are currently receiving (Visit Finland, 2019b), could be explained through online marketing of the region.

While the author feels that the region has large potential in the sector or tourism, there has been some signs of this before the breakout of COVID-19. This can be seen in the percentages of visitors which remained quite small, but showed definite potential, as well as room for growth in the region, with Kainuu registering strong growth of 13% of domestic visitors during February 2020, in comparison to February 2019. (Kainuun Liitto, 2020a)

Kainuu is one of Finland's least visited regions, though it remains geographically large and filled with potential, with it sporting most of the factors listed in Visit Finland's travel groups, as their main strategy states:

“The main target group of Finland consists of people who have travelled a lot and are seeking new, fresh options. Instead of pleasing everyone, we are targeting the marketing activities to people whose set of values matches travelling to Finland. They appreciate quality of life, pure nature and responsibility.” (Visit Finland, -a)

On top of this, Visit Finland's main marketing and brands are Silence, peace, Wild & Free and Cultural beat. (Visit Finland, -b) Everything Finland is officially being branded as through Visit Finland, or where most of the visitors come from, fits exceedingly well for Kainuu, and being marketed online, could be a key to find the right visitors to notice the well-hidden area of Finland – connecting the customer to the businesses.

1.1 Research Question & Aim

There is very little research done on the topic of opportunities in online marketing for Kainuu's tourism sector, as this is only briefly mentioned in Kainuu's official tourism plan for 2018–2021 (Kainuun Liitto, 2018b), but the topic is raised in Kainuun Liitto's article about the effects of COVID-19 (2020), where the author raises the question of

could there be ways to improve their online marketing, listing it as one the ways to raise Kainuu's tourism back up after the COVID-19 crisis.

COVID-19 has taken a major chunk out of tourism everywhere, with UNWTO reporting international arrivals declining up to 70 % in January - August 2020 due to COVID-19 (UNWTO, 2020).

Still, there remains no doubt that at some point in the future, the industry shall get back to its feet, and possibly even thrive – making an excellent online marketing a change that can take a region to new heights.

For these reasons, this thesis is made specifically of Kainuu, and their potential growth through online marketing in the field of tourism.

The research questions are mainly in the title of the thesis - *How Kainuu can improve its online tourism marketing for international visitors*.

This divides the research question in two – how is Kainuu performing in online tourism marketing for international visitors at the moment, and what could potentially, with the evidence presented in the thesis, improve it.

1.2 Challenge, Objective and Outcome

While this topic is and will be important for the future and recovery from the current COVID-19 situation, very little research has been done on the subject, especially on the possibilities for growth, if and when the pandemic crisis is over.

The difficulty in this research is also linked with that fact – Without any hard data, or extremely similar regions, or without data gathered of a similar subject, a hard conclusion will be impossible to give without time to collect and analyse data from a fully completed trial of the methods, that will be discussed in this research.

While this thesis may not be able to give a conclusive answer, this thesis will still focus on introducing modern online marketing methods and the process of implementing them to reach an international audience. The method chosen to be researched is Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which is a method to reach out to a wide market, with little-to-no cost, providing a 24/7 marketing campaign, with the ability to direct marketing to the interested party. (Adsyndicate, 2020)

1.3 Thesis Outline

To start the approach to this research, this thesis will start with an introduction to online marketing – focusing on Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The research will focus on SEO but will include a separate research on sub-section of SEO: Keyword research.

After establishing the tools used for the research, we move on to study what tools Kainuu has already implemented, and how. As we are talking about a vast and diverse region, the region's tourism industry must be covered as well.

After researching the tools needed and if they are already used, as well as the data to solidify why they are needed, the research will focus on how they could be implemented to Kainuu's strategy and how this could improve the region's tourism.

While this thesis will be mostly done as a qualitative research, as the basis of the information will be gained of finding growths after implementing online marketing, we will also be looking at Kainuu's current online marketing towards international, and domestic, visitors.

Looking at both of mentioned subjects we can lead to a conclusion of suggestions to improve or to integrate new systems for the region's online marketing.

2 THEORY

The theories that are used in this thesis revolve around online marketing of Kainuu, of which this research is focusing on Search Engine Optimization and keyword research, as they are imperial in online marketing of hospitality industry.

Branding is the driving force behind the idea of marketing, be it online, or more standard marketing channels, especially as the marketing of Kainuu revolves around a niche market in the tourism sector. Without a brand to market, marketing tends to flop, as a strong marketing campaign requires something to sell, and branding is what gives a face to the brand of what is being sold. While Kainuu is a diverse region, they have unified tourism organizations, as well as strategies.

While the focus of this research will not be in the branding of Kainuu, per se, branding's connection to marketing should not be forgotten.

2.1 Online Marketing

Digital marketing is advertising delivered through digital channels, such as social media, mobile applications, email, web applications, search engines, websites, or any new digital channel. Digital marketing is done both online and offline, with both aspects remaining imperial. (Patel, N. -a) While in a sense it does not differ from traditional marketing, as an idea, the methods of the marketing can vary a lot, giving the system a rapidly expanding, and still untapped potential.



Figure 1. Digital Marketing Timeline. ROI Revolution, 2019.

While digital marketing is the larger heading, this research will be focusing on a sub section of the same heading – online marketing. The difference between digital marketing and online marketing is at best questionable, with digital marketing referred as an umbrella term that includes anything that requires the use of an electronic device, including online marketing, while online marketing, being the subset of digital marketing, covers any marketing happening that requires internet to perform. (Patlin, 2019)

Online marketing is made up of a large number of tools, but the biggest ones are as listed:

- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Search engine marketing (SEM)
- Content marketing
- Social Media Marketing (SMM)
- Pay-per-click advertising (PPC)
- Affiliate marketing
- Email marketing.

(Patel, N. -b)

Of these tools, this research will focus on two: Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and its sub-section: keyword research.

Online marketing and E-commerce in general are on the rise and will most likely be in the future. As Daniela Coppola represents in her Statista graph (2020), E-commerce share of total global retail sales are at 16% in 2020, with an expected yearly growth of 2%. “This equals to around 2 billion online buyers, which is around a quarter of the world’s population.” (Kristensen, E. 2020)

Online marketing itself affects more than just E-commerce, but arguably it affects most of E-commerce sales, as Google's report from 2020 informs that 63 % of purchases, online or in a physical shop, begin online. (Google, 2020) For the researched tourism market, the numbers are only bigger, with 66 % of bookings being direct online bookings, marketplace bookings holding 9 % and travel agencies with 24 % (Condor Ferries, 2019c). This shows the massive impact that online marketing has in the tourism market, and why it needs to be implied for growth in the sector.

2.2 Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process to modify a website or web page so that when searched with search engines such as Google and Bing, it will appear as one of the first search results.

Search engine optimization is the process of increasing visitors to your web site using organic methods, unlike paid advertising, which can be used to achieve the same thing.

The goal is to create a web site that generates visits, and achieves the top, or at least a first page search engine finds, when they use your chosen and motivated keywords.

How does the actual system work that determines the pecking order of sites, when searched with a term, for example, who gets the top spot when you search for "Holiday"? Nobody knows. Google, being the biggest search engine in the world, by a large margin, has never revealed their algorithms, but we do know there are over 200 factors. (Patel, N. -a)

Brian Dean has compiled over 200 possible factors affecting the algorithms in his article, "Google's 200 Ranking Factors: The Complete List" (2020). While some of these are disputed, some are used every day by SEO experts, and are known benefactors of your SEO score. The main categories listed by Dean are:

- Domain Factors
- Page-Level Factors
- Site-Level Factors
- Backlink Factors
- User Interaction

- Special Google Algorithm Rules
- Brand Signals
- On-Site Webspam Factors
- Off-Site Webspam Factors.

This shows how vast the organic SEO scene is.

SEO is done to attract more visitors and potential customers to your respective web site. While not everyone who visits your web pages will become a customer, some will and even without an actual purchase, there are the possibilities of self-marketing for the future and possibly even getting them to join your mailing lists, or other similar marketing tools that might be offered. This kind of site traffic and attraction brings plenty of benefits, and as more customers find their desired products online, SEO is one of the cheapest and most efficient names to grow your business. This still doesn't make SEO necessarily a money saver, as even though while an investment in SEO may, especially comparing to other digital marketing strategies, seem to be an expensive investment, especially as SEO delivers results over time and requires continuous investment. (WebFX, -a)

SEO is largely based on the use of keywords. The importance of keywords is unparalleled when talking about SEO, or in any way of finding your business on the internet. Keywords work with a simple principle, as when a website that is well optimized for search engines "speaks the same language" as its potential visitor base with keywords for SEO that help connect searchers to your site. This is also the reason why finding the perfect keywords is one of the most important aspects of SEO, as they are the foundations to all SEO (Word-Stream, -). Keywords are usually implanted to SEO through trial and error, and most keywords are discovered during the keyword research process and are chosen based on a combination of search volume, competition and commercial intent. (Dean, B. -)

SEO has to be implied both on-page and off-page for it to fully work. One cannot be more important than the other as the algorithms of what works are ever-changing. Continuous management of the system needs to be done as well.

On-page SEO includes everything on the page, from the content to the technical elements – to reach as high search engine results page (SERP) score as possible. There are some technical aspects that help the page reach as high SERP ranking as possible:

- Title tags
- Headings
- URL structure
- Alt text for images
- Site speed
- Internal links
- Meta descriptions
- Responsiveness.

(Digital Marketing Institute, a-)

Off-page SEO is largely dominated by backlinks, which are also known as “inbound links”, “incoming links” or “one-way links”. They are links from one website to a page on another website. Google and other major search engines consider backlinks “votes” for a specific page. Pages with a high number of backlinks tend to have high organic search engine rankings. (Dean, B. -)

Other notable ways of increasing your off-page score are adding your business to local listings and internet directories, participating in discussions on sites like Quora and answering questions on other Q and A sites or submitting backlinked content to various sharing sites, including image, audio, and video sharing sites. (Digital Marketing institute, -b)

SEO is not entirely a new idea: marketing has long known that to be found first is one of the most helpful tools to grow a business. As John M. Kruger explains in his article “Get Found! Search Engine Optimization” from 2012:

“Why would a law firm want to perform SEO on its website? For the same reason that a car mechanic in the days of the Yellow Pages might have named his shop "AAA Auto Repair": to be listed first.” (Kruger, John M. 2012).

But with the rise on online purchasing, and selling your brand, it has become a crucial factor in marketing today, as on any given day, people conduct more than 2.2 million searches. And that's just on Google — to say nothing of the other search engines. Therefore, showing up on the front page of Google can be the deciding factor between a business that's thriving and one that's, well, bankrupt. (Patel, N. -b)

SEO works as a way to connect your customer to your business, and with properly done SEO, you will be found before your competition, giving you an important advantage. This applies on the research of this thesis fully, as SEO not only works on people trying to find exactly *you*, but similar, or even exactly what you offer, but they are not aware of you. As Diego Barboza explains the phenomenon on his blogpost from 2018:

“If you have an online toy store, and your page appears first in Google results when someone searches for words like "buy dolls" or "toy store," it is more likely that that person will visit your website instead of looking at another that appears on the second page of results.

And if the products you have are attractive, make the purchase at that time or save the link to your online store to place an order later.

Therefore, this is one of the best digital marketing strategies to generate traffic to your website, to know more people, and with which to attract visitors who then become customers.” (Barboza, D. 2018)

For a niche market that Kainuu more or less is, in the field of tourism, customers finding, or hearing about it with the right keywords is extremely important and full of potential.

Online booking for holidays has risen exponentially in the last decade, with statistics already showing that 83 % of US adults now prefer to book their travel online. (Condor Ferries, 2019a). This gives an impression of how people already book online, with the statistics also showing that 70 % of travellers research travel on their smartphone. (Condor Ferries, 2019b). These two statistics alone show how much of an importance SEO can be, and how much it can give an industry in the tourism market. Applying this sort of a strategy for Kainuu could wield immense growth – as COVID-19 has left customers yearning for a holiday and Finland could offer a relatively safe and interesting choice of destination. This possibility is entertained by Kristian Sievers, an expert in tourism from Lapin matkailuliitto, in an YLE article from 2020 (Heikinmatti), where he compares the

possibility of Finland being a “safely viewed destination” after the COVID-19 crisis, to tour operators changing flights from Nice and Berlin to Lapland, after the terrorist attacks in 2016, as Finland was viewed a safe destination.

As of now, if you Google search some of the defining qualities of Finnish marketing branding – such as silence, nature, et cetera, you will struggle to find anything about Finland, until scrolling into further page results. While it is a positive that something is found, unfortunately according to multiple studies, only 25 percent of users go to the second page of search results. (WebFX, -b)

To gather the data of how the regions SEO is implemented, as of now, this thesis is using Simon Kingsnorth’s division of SEO into a triangle from his book “Digital marketing strategy” from 2019 (2nd edition), which will be used as the guideline for this research. As the name suggests, the SEO triangle divides the SEO aspects into three pieces, which all have their sub-sections:

Content

- Content length
- Keyword density
- Frequency of updates

Technical

- Domain names
- Title, - and heading tags.
- Page load speed
- Image optimization
- Alt tags
- Usage of meta tags

Links

- Internal link volume
- Quality of incoming links

Kingsnorth's division makes the research towards the current state of Kainuu's divided SEO strategy straightforward, leaving the researcher with the basic structure of the current SEO-condition, as if the basics are done correctly, you will have an improved broad SEO strategy, that will be more efficient in all aspects. (Kingsnorth, 2019. p. 124)

2.3 Keyword Research

While Kainuu focuses on its own attractions with its SEO, the region needs further recognition to be found. This is why the region needs to be made possible to find through internet, as we have already established that current statistics indicate that over 90% of travellers will do their research online, and 82% will end up making their booking online as well. (Deane, S. 2020)

SEO in general is extremely important, but to a sense a wasted effort, if you aren't sure of what should be pushed towards Google's algorithm and what people are actually searching for. From here comes the importance of a strong keyword/phrase strategy.

While Kainuu's biggest tourism organizers SEO was researched, it was felt that a keyword research goes hand-in-hand with it.

Keyword research is one of the most important parts of your whole SEO-strategy. While being such a large sub-section, it is ultimately overlooked when talking about purely SEO activities. Keyword research is simply: understanding your customer (Kingsnorth, S. 2019. P.125) – you need to be found with what they search for, and the best way to do that is understand how your customers would be searching for products or services, you can offer.

For this keyword research, we will sample two different techniques. The first one will be a simple data mining. Kainuu's tourism agencies offer different plans and strategies, that highlight strengths and points of focus, throughout the region – which make excellent keywords by themselves.

The other technique used to “mine” keywords will be a persona creation. While the author feels that Kainuu has many excellent strengths and unique qualities to be used as keywords, they also get lost with more basic ones – ones that possible customers search for online, when they don’t know exactly what they want.

A buyer persona is a semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer, their backgrounds, goals, challenges, and so on, based on market research and real data about your existing customers. (France, H. 2020) As Kainuu’s tourism strategy names their biggest customer segment (families), we will create two or more personas, with at least one of them fitting the largest segment. This will help us create keywords and phrases, that could possibly be used by real customers as well.

After we have “mined” our keywords and phrases, the research will run them through online tools, mentioned below, to find how the words or phrases are searched for the most.

2.4 Tools of the Research

- Keywords Everywhere

Keywords Everywhere (K.E) is a real-time keyword data digger. Keywords Everywhere explains themselves as a tool that seamlessly appends search volume data, CPC and competition data onto the interface of your favourite keyword research tool. You are now able to see all the relevant search volume data in real time while you are on Google, YouTube, Amazon, Bing, Google Search Console, Google Analytics and more.

Keywords Everywhere also allows access to keyword metrics for any list of keywords and lets you download the list in Excel, CSV, or PDF file formats. (Keywords Everywhere, -)

For the purposes of this research, K.E provides us with the most used “keywords” in sites that will be researched. It also gives us a SERP ranking in the used keywords, providing the research extremely valuable information with relative ease.

- Answer the Public

Answer the Public (AtP) gives suggestion according to search engines' auto-complete feature around your chosen keyword. It gives an extremely helpful insight to possible keywords to be implemented, or what keywords/phrases to strengthen in an existing strategy. AtP describes themselves as listening into autocomplete data from search engines like Google then quickly cranks out every useful phrase and question people are asking around your keyword. (Answer the Public, -)

- Google Trends

Perhaps the most well-known tool used for keyword planning, Google Trends shows how frequently a given search term is entered into Google's search engine relative to the site's total search volume over a given period of time. Google Trends can be used for comparative keyword research and to discover event-triggered spikes in keyword search volume.

Google Trends provides keyword-related data including search volume index and geographical information about search engine users. (WordStream, -)

- Keyword Guru

Keyword Guru works in a similar way to Answer the Public, as Keyword Guru is a Live Search Suggest tool that pulls in keywords from a variety of search suggest sources including Google, Amazon, YouTube, eBay, Bing, and Google Play Store. (Joe Youngblood, -)

- Moz

Moz is another excellent software for SEO analyses of web pages. Moz offers keyword research, link building, site audits, and page optimization insights. (Moz, -) For the purposes of this research, Moz will be used to research and evaluate backlink process.

- SEOptimer

SEOptimer is an excellent multipurpose SEO-tool, which for the purpose of this research will be used to check image optimization, meta tags and alt tags.

SEOptimer runs an individual domain page, gathering most information needed for SEO analysis. Their DIY SEO crawls your whole site for problems, recommends clear, easy to follow tasks with guides for your website type. (SEOptimer, -) While being an excellent tool, their free version allows detailed and accurate results, saving time from doing everything manually.

- Google's Page Speed Insights

Google's own programme for measuring page speeds and providing us with analysis on what aspects of it are slow, what fast. It provides us with detailed information and most importantly a ranking. (Page Speed Insights, -) This was the chosen tool for page load speed, as the research is done to portray SEO insights especially for Google's search services.

3 METHOD & DATA

For this thesis, I will be using a qualitative research method – secondary analysis and official statistics. This means that I will be finding statistics in visitor numbers from official statistics, making the research a secondary analysis. This method is employed for many reasons, such as “many of the data sets that are employed most frequently for secondary analysis are of extremely high quality. By this I mean several things. First, the sampling procedures have been rigorous, in most cases resulting in samples that are as close to being representative as one is likely to achieve.” (Bryman, A. 2012. P. 313a)

While the main focus will be placed upon statistics, of either Kainuu’s performance as of now, to a hypothesis of how it could perform, we will need to look at more than just statistics. This becomes important when discussing digital marketing methods, as of them, one cannot provide accurate data on how they have helped the market to grow in.

“However, in the world of digital marketing it can be difficult to determine appropriate measures. Or it can be overwhelming, with so much data available to you. [...] And then you need to be able to navigate all the information available to you, to determine which metrics actually help you measure achievement of your business goals. It’s not always easy to do with a digital marketing strategy.” (Canstello, D. 2019)

As mentioned, the other aspect of the research is the possibility of implementing more digital marketing to the region, and what it could do for the region’s tourism in whole. This will be studied through statistics of growth and expected growth on what the implementations could realistically do.

Factual evidence of the effects of digital marketing will also be studied and used as a mean to give a hypothesis.

3.1 Setting

For the data collection part, this thesis will use secondary information sources that provide certified data, such as Business Finland, Tilastokeskus, Kainuun Liitto and Visitory.io (Which uses data from Business Finland, Finavia, Statistics Finland and etc.).

This is all official statistics, giving this thesis a strong validity for the used data. With this sort of collected data, we can provide a base for the investigation of the research, leading us to the research where the thesis ponders on the idea of potentially improving the digital marketing.

As the data that we require for this particular analysis, will be gathered with official statistics, it makes the data secondary data.

“Secondary analysis is the analysis of data by researchers who will probably not have been involved in the collection of those data, for purposes that in all likelihood were not envisaged by those responsible for the data collection. Secondary analysis may entail the analysis of either quantitative data (Dale et al. 1988) or qualitative data”. (Bryman, A. 2012. P. 312)

While secondary analysis will provide this research’s major investigation, the research needs to investigate Kainuu’s presence in the field of digital marketing. For this part of the research, we will need to change our investigative method, as there is not enough primary data of the field, to conduct a secondary analysis.

Due to this, the data for this section will be collected by a more qualitative approach, as Kainuu’s presence in search engine optimization will be studied with content analysis, which is:

“an approach to the analysis of documents and texts (which may be printed or visual) that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner. It is a very flexible method that can be applied to a variety of different media. In a sense, it is not a research method in that it is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts rather than a means of generating data.” (Bryman, A. 2020. P. 289)

This is done, as it is needed to establish their presence in digital marketing and how strong it might be, through our own observations. Secondary analysis will be used together with content analysis, as sites such as Google Trends provide excellent secondary data.

3.2 Sample selection & Motivation

The data collection, as previously described, will be done mostly through already existing, well researched official statistics making it a qualitative research. This will provide the research with proven data and numbers, indicating how the proposed tools could help the growth of the target areas tourism. This data will be mostly gained through Finnish tourism, either independent or government run organisations.

Statistics of this area should be accurate, and possible to get, as Finnish tourism organizations collect data yearly, as do the region themselves. This data used to set the premise for visitor numbers, etc. will be official data – making it reliable and usable to this thesis. This also means that the data and statistics used for this thesis will be entirely reliable and non-biased.

Data of Kainuu’s various tourism organizations will mostly be gathered through online software, all of which are introduced in the theory chapter, or with direct observation, given that it’s possible in the situation.

To start the research, we need to pinpoint the web sites, as well as the structures, that the research will be done on.

Kainuu, as the whole region, unfortunately doesn’t have a “flagship webpage”. The structure is mostly set as discussed in *Kainuun matkailustrategia 2018-2021* (2018b):

“The ideas and will of entrepreneurs to implement strategic guidelines are the starting point for development work. The growth of tourism in Kainuu is mainly done through the work of entrepreneurs, co-operation between entrepreneurs and the co-operation of 14 tourism areas of the Kainuu Federation. The development of tourism is also strongly supported by the municipalities of Kainuu, the Kainuu ELY Center, Metsähallitus, the Kainuu Association and the future Kainuu Province. [...] Kainuun Etu Oy works actively as Kainuu’s tourism regional Visit Finland’s organisation on charge of Kainuu’s international tourism marketing and co-operations”.

As the tourism strategy states, the region is a bit divided in its marketing. While it is promoted as a unified region most of the growth in the area is still done by entrepreneurs.

For the research, I have thus chosen the largest tourism web sites, which promote either the whole region, or at least the majority of it. As well as the two largest skiing centres, since as mentioned earlier, they constitute 80% of the region's tourism – and as such, are the two single most important factors in the region's tourism.

The choices of the chosen web pages are done to mimic Kainuu's regional divide (see Fig.2), according to Kainuu's tourism strategy's division on the region's tourism zones. This gives the research a fair perspective of the whole area, while researching their various uses of SEO strategy divided between the touristic zones and hot spots of the region.

This leaves us with the four major touristic areas of Kainuu: *Oulunjärvi & Kajaani, Wild Taiga - Kuhmo ja Suomussalmi, Vuokatti-Sotkamo* and *Ukkohalla-Paljakka-Ristijärvi*.

On top of the four major areas of the region, there are two sub-areas, *Hossa* and *Paljakka*, which both are viewed as individual tourism sectors in the region, according to Kainuun Liitto.

Two of these tourism sectors are covered by their skiing centres, Vuokatti for Vuokatti-Sotkamo and Ukkohalla for Ukkohalla-Paljakka.

On top of the 6 major tourism sectors, one regional tourism organization will be included as well: *Arctic Lakeland*, which is Kainuu's own co-operation under the Visit Finland's regional placement of Lakeland. Kainuun Liitto, the union of the region, unfortunately does not have an English tourism-based webpage and thus shall not be included in the SEO research.

Tourism agencies in the region that will be researched.

- Arctic Lakeland

Arctic Lakeland is a project started in 2019 with the co-operation of Visit Finland, Kainuun Etu and Kainuun Liitto. The project is based on the idea, that where Kainuu is part of Visit Finland's Lakeland area, it is a unique area offering different possibilities than the rest of the Lakeland region – and thus should be marketed also as a unique part.

Arctic Lakeland strikes the research as a unifying process, something that gives the region of Kainuu their own distinctive marketing and gives a brand under which all of the regions separate individual tourism zones and businesses can fall under. This gives the branding and marketing a strong name and goal.

- Visit Kajaani

Visit Kajaani is the tourism organisation responsible for the area of Oulunjärvi and Kajaani.

- Hossa

Hossa is the newest of Finnish national parks and was launched as a national park in 2017. Hossa is located on the northern end of Kainuu and has been a popular hiking and nature destination.

- Wild Taiga

Wild Taiga is responsible for the Kuhmo and Suomussalmi regions of Kainuu, the eastern most part of the region.

- Paljakka

Paljakka is the similarly named area's tourism organization, located on the north western end of Kainuu.

Skiing centres

- Vuokatti

Vuokatti is the main attraction in the Vuokatti-Sotkamo area of Kainuu – and one of the biggest skiing centres in the whole of Finland.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka

Ukkohalla-Paljakka is another ski centre and the main attraction of the Ukkohalla-Paljakka-Ristijärvi region of Kainuu.

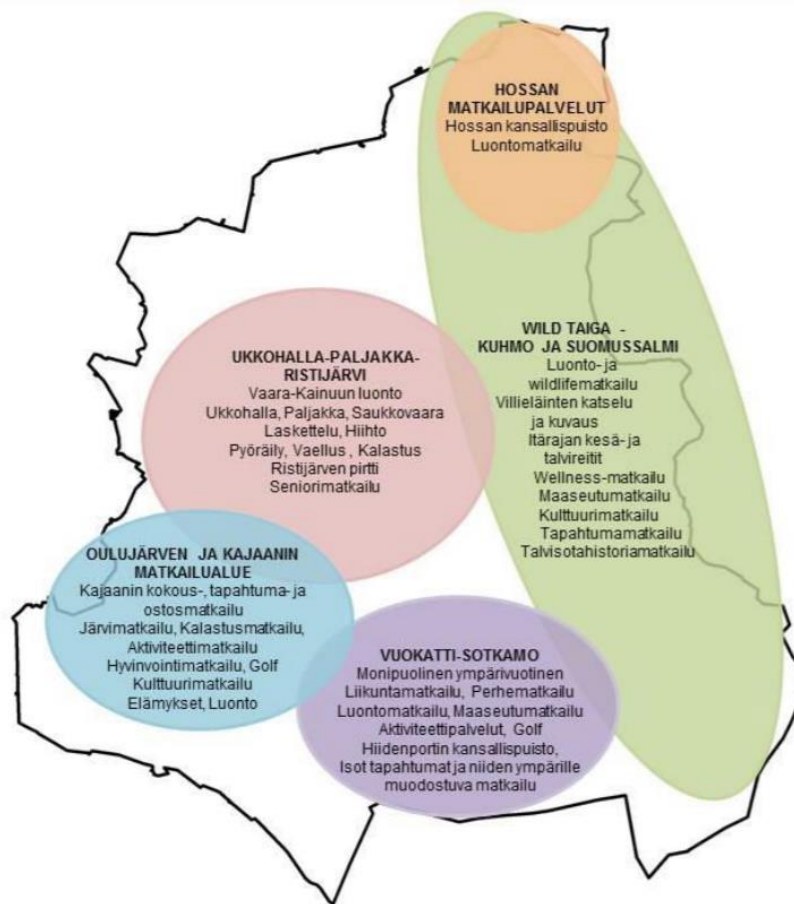


Figure 2. Kainuun matkailualueet ja niiden eritysvahvuudet (Kainuun matkailustrategia, 2018).

There are a few other projects, that the research will not include, due to the size of the research.

- Visit Arctic Europe
- Visit Finland (Lakeland)
- Kainuun Etu

The research is also set on understanding the current state of the SEO's working, which can be viewed with relative ease: how well it works. The easiest way to see how the SEO is doing is to see how they rank when searching with keywords. (Patel, N. -) After we have established how they rank in SERP and how their "triangle" is performed, we can investigate further to see why this is.

3.3 Procedure

The answer should be able to be found out with a straightforward data collection and analysing.

To study the current online marketing, we can use qualitative research to investigate the situation.

For the potential improvements, we should be able to find sufficient data to back up evidence of how digital marketing could be an improvement. For implementing it inside the strategy, we have valid theories providing us the information on how the researched parts of SEO, or keyword research, help websites to be found. Thus, given the what the researcher will find, we can provide a strategy on how to make both theories more efficient.

3.3.1 Procedure for SEO

As we have mentioned in the theory chapter, this research will follow the guidelines from Simon Kingsnorth's division of SEO into a triangle from his book "Digital marketing strategy" 2019 (2nd edition)

The procedure done in each of the steps goes as follows:

CONTENT

Content might be the individually most important part of the triangle since it can be defined as the foundation of a strong SEO strategy.

Content optimization is online content designed to rank in search engines, which is usually written around a specific keyword. (Dean, B. 2019) Creating continuous content around your chosen keywords might just be the best way to increase organic visits to your site, as the Search Quality Senior Strategist at Google Ireland, Andrey Lipattsev confirmed in 2016, content and links pointing to your site are the most important factors in SEO. (Search Engine Watch, 2016)

These algorithms do change all the time as the technology advances, but it doesn't take away from the fact that without proper content, your web sites will not stand a chance against the majority.

3.3.2 Keyword Density & Content Length

Keyword density, in its simplicity, is the number of times your keyword appears in the content, reflected on the number of words in the content. Keyword density, also known as keyword frequency, is relevant to monitor to ensure you're creating a balance between using a keyword often enough to rank, but not too often that it hurts your ranking. (Storm, M. 2019) The way to formulate keyword density is shown in the figure below. Optimal keyword density is believed to lie somewhere around 0.5-3% (Heesen, F. 2019), and the research will regard any density in between to be good.

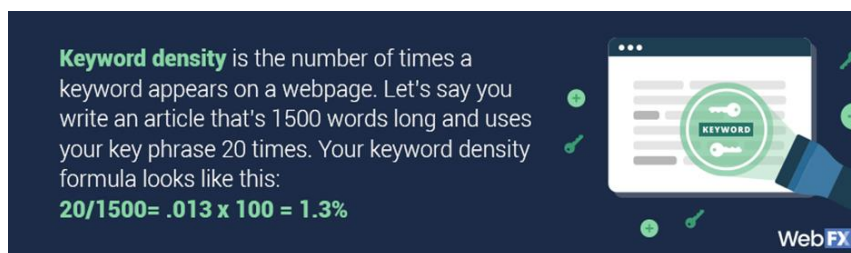


Figure 3. Keyword Density, WebFX. 2019

Keyword density will be measured through the Keywords Everywhere tool. The tool allows us to see all keywords used in the web page and shows us the numbers they have been used in all of the content on the page. With this information, the research can clarify the keyword density. While the research doesn't have the information on what keywords are the researched sites pushing – the keywords researched for density will be the ones most used on the site.

Content length will be done simultaneously, with the same Keywords Everywhere tool. Measuring content length itself is quite self-explanatory – count the words. But what’s the right number of words to be used? It seems to be a conversation with arguments. Still, back in 2012, serpIQ conducted a study involving more than 20,000 keywords. The results showed that the average content length of each of the top 10 results was more than 2,000 words. The average number of words for the content in the #1 spot was 2,416. For the #10 spot, the average number of words was 2,032. (Lincoln, J. 2015)

3.3.3 Frequency of Updates

Frequency of updates is the other large part of SEO content optimization. This is something that affects Google’s crawler bots, designed to search for sites according to the search. While frequency of updates brings your web site up as more relevant, it also affects the way the crawler bots act. If a bot comes to your site one week and comes back a month later to discover that nothing has changed, it will wait a few months before coming back again. Bots will also do the opposite and come back more often if they discover that you are making frequent updates. Thus, you can train the bots to index your site more often. This is important, because when you do make a vital change to your site, you want to make sure the bot discovers it fairly quickly. Easiest ways of keeping fresh content are updating the site content, blogging, news section, events and updating pictures, etc. (Informatics Inc., 2014)

As viewing how frequently the website has been updated is not an option without managing the website directly, the call for action is to manually research the sites to see if there has been any new content, for example review their news sections.

TECHNICAL

The second part of the SEO “triangle” is technical. Technical SEO works exactly as it sounds. It’s all about the technical factors of a website, including aspects like making a website faster, easier to crawl and understandable for search engines are the pillars of technical optimization. Other important aspects of technicality are that the site is craw-

lable for Google's search engine robots (sites structure makes sense, good internal linking), there aren't many "dead links" (links that lead to sites shut off, or false links in general) and not having too much duplicate content, as this tends to confuse Google's search engine robots. (Hallebeek, W. 2021)

Technical aspects are just as important as the other two factors of the triangle. With well executed technical aspects, Google tends to rate your site higher in its rankings – as it finds the site better. This is also an aspect in keeping customer interest, as Google's research on customer behaviour found out that 53% of mobile users abandon sites that take over 3 seconds to load. (An, D. 2018)

3.3.4 Domain Names

Domain names hold a certain value towards SEO. The value is very straightforward, and Google search tends to value domain names in its algorithms, but keep in mind that one of the specific functions of Google's algorithm is to combat keyword-stuffed exact-match domains. (Moz, 2021a)

The biggest factors in domain names are: keeping your domain name memorable, this helps with mouth-to-mouth advertising, as well as just being easier to memorize and type. Second, use broad keywords, but sensibly. Thirdly, avoid hyphens if it is possible. Search pages have a tendency of seeing domain names with hyphens and treating them as more spammy. (Moz, 2021b)

Top-level domain (the .com part) is another factor that search engines look for. .com, .org and .net are the most popular ones, which tend to rank best in search algorithms, but country coded top-level domains (.fi) have their own strengths, and sites with country coded top domains tend to rank better in their own respective countries (Grey, J. 2020), which is why for this research, .fi will be viewed as good as any of the top three contenders.

3.3.5 Title & Heading Tags

Title tags are the names of your website and they tell the search engines what it is. The importance of a title tag derives from it being the first thing a customer or Google's algorithm sees of your web page on a SERP. This is a major part of SEO process, but it works just as importantly towards the possible customers, as this is what they will first see of your web page. (Big Commerce, -) While the content of title tags is an important factor, so is the length of one. Google typically displays the first 50–60 characters of a title tag. If you keep your titles under 60 characters, research suggests that you can expect about 90% of your titles to display properly. (Moz, -)

Heading tags are, as the name suggests, the headings on a web page – or to put it more technically, they are the h1 is an HTML tag that indicates a heading on a website. (Patel, N. -) Heading tags are excessively more important than one might think, and for an example in Moz's (2015) Search Engine Ranking Factors, Page-Level Keyword Usage Features, which include title and heading tags, rank as the #3 most important features in Google's Broad Search Ranking Algorithm.

Heading tags should be focused on providing structure to the page, being interesting and they should aim to include keywords. (Willson, A. 2020)

3.3.6 Page Load Speed

Page load speed is another technical aspect that affects both Google's algorithms as well as consumer behaviour. While Google has officially stated that page load speed affects their SERP rankings, it is quite obvious that slow loading website can hurt your Google rankings. (Backlinko, -)

Page load speed is also a fascinating aspect in consumer behaviour, as seen in figure 4 below.

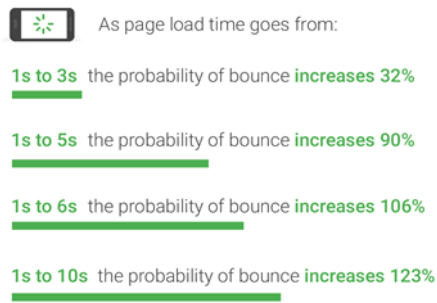


Fig. 4 Google/SOASTA Research, 2017.

Page speed test was done through Google’s Page Speed Insight’s, Google’s own programme that gives estimates of page load speed. While the program is easy to use, it does offer different data starting from First Contentful Paint to Time to Interactive. To keep the research manageable, as page speed time is only a part of it, we will only look at time to interactive as this data gives us the time when the page is fully interactive.

For how they do in page speed, the research will use the data provided by the same program, which ranges from 0-100, with 100 being the best possible score. Of this 0-49 is considered a poor score, 50-89 is considered to need improvement and 90-100 is considered good.

3.3.7 Image Optimization

Image optimization comes down to two major steps: images need to be clearly titled and described for Google to surely recognize them as what they are and the images need to be made as small file size as possible, without losing the quality, since poorly optimized images are one of the main causes of slow web pages. (Fach, M. 2020)

3.3.8 Alt Tags

Alt tags are written texts accompanying images on your page. To visualize them, they are the text that pops up on the place of the image, if the image fails to download. These texts are extremely important for Google’s search crawl bots ranking your pages in SEO generally, they also provide another aspect of mostly forgotten form of searching, and one of

the most important things image alt text can do for you is turn your images into hyper-linked search results -- giving your website yet another way to receive organic visitors. (Becker, B. 2020)

3.3.9 Use of Meta Tags

Meta tags are another form of “hidden” communication between the web site and search engine crawler bots. Meta tags are snippets of text that describe a page’s content; the meta tags don’t appear on the page itself, but only in the page’s source code. Meta tags are essentially little content descriptors that help tell search engines what a web page is about. (WordStream, -)

LINKS

The links part of the content analysis we will use the tool Moz, which shows the volume of links to a certain site. This tool provides us with information of how many links there are from and to the web site, and from where and to these links are.

This information is particularly crucial for the SEO analysis, as links/backlinks are one of the ways to rank up on SERP. This comes from Google’s algorithm, which specifically tries to find good-quality backlinks to your web site, which it then approves as quality resource worthy of citation. (WordStream, -b)

The Moz domain authority score is Moz’s own comparative metric, that doesn’t reflect Google’s SERP rating, but can be used as reflection of how well the linking structure works. The metric works from 1-100, with the bigger number being the better. (Moz, -)

3.3.10 Internal Link Volume

Internal link volume is done through Moz’s website analysis, which tells us the number of internal links *from* and *to* the analysed website.

3.3.11 Quality of Incoming Links

Google appreciates quality links since they give your web site a certain reliability as well as relevancy. The belief is if a site is good – it should attract quality links. Thus, the belief that more links the better is completely false in the eyes of Google’s SEO. Buying, sharing, or just gathering links from everywhere is something that will harm your SEO, as Google’s crawler robots pay attention to behaviour as this. (Kingsnorth, S. 2018a)

Good quality links can be achieved through PR, Outreach and your own content strategy. Your own content should be the major importance, as that is something that can be quite easily researched and optimized. For good quality of links, through your own content, you should pay attention to having original content, that isn’t duplicate and make sure you don’t have too many empty pages without much content.

For dubious backlinks, one should analyse if you have any spammy or low-quality links. These links should be tried to get rid of, as they provide harm, rather than help. (Kingsnorth, S. 2018b)

3.3.12 Procedure for Keyword Research

For the research’s keyword part, we will use two different methods:

Firstly, the research sets on finding keywords from Kainuu’s self-established strengths:

As the main focus is on improving Kainuu’s online marketing for international visitors, we firstly have to establish what Kainuu sees as its strengths. Kainuu’s established strengths and goals in their own wording are obvious keywords and phrases – as they are the ones, they would be pushing to have their possible customers know of the region. The research will list the strengths and qualities that Kainuu has to offer, according to their own words, in their tourism strategies.

And secondly, the persona creation:

For our persona creation for the keyword research, it will be researched in accordance with Simon Kingsnorth's suggested method in his 2019 book *Digital marketing strategy (2nd Edition)*.

This will split the research into five parts:

1. Persona creation

The research will start with creating fitting customer personas connected to Kainuu's tourist segment. With these imaginary customers, we will brainstorm keywords and phrases, according to how and with what words they would be searching for something like Kainuu.

2. Create logical segments

Creating logical segments is done according to Kainuu's mentioned strategies and strengths.

3. Mine your data

Giving the personas appropriate keywords – words and phrases they would use to search for a vacation of the like.

4. Mine secondary data sources

Finding with the help of SEO tools, mentioned beforehand, what are the most widely used relevant searches done – and what could be used as keywords.

5. Sense check

Sense checking for SEO is always an excellent idea. This rules out keywords that would be too competed for, not searched enough for, or in other words, irrelevant.

Using these two theories for the data collecting, the research will provide an accurate, yet fair picture of how the region's SEO is currently implemented.

The proposed implementations that will be suggested will have their validity according to recognized statistics of how the proposed digital market can improve a business.

3.4 Data Analysis

To analyse the data, I will use several techniques. For statistical information, the analysing can be done with simple reading of the data and comparing the statistics to previous years or to the predicted statistics. Secondary data analysis itself, is a process according to Oxford Essay (2020) that involves four major steps, which are “Developing a research question”, “Identifying a secondary data set”, “Evaluating the identified secondary data set” and “Preparing and analysing the data from selected secondary data set”.

For the data gathered with content analysis, I will specifically use the ethnographic content analysis technique, which is

“a term employed by Altheide (1996) to refer to an approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts. It is also sometimes referred to as qualitative content analysis. As with most approaches that are described as ethnographic, there is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding meaning in the context in which an item being analysed (and the categories derived from it) appeared.” (Bryman, A. 2002. p. 291)

With this analysing technique, we can observe the regions digital marketing through their presence in the digital world– for social media, we can follow the activity and the range of people who see it, for SEO, or similar, we could use Google Trends, or similar investigative tools to see the effect and popularity this has on Google.

Google itself is the most important search engine to look in SEO, and in general digital marketing, as Google's search engine market share is more than 90%. Considering that there are almost 4.39 billion internet users, the number of Google users worldwide is nearly four billion. (Georgiev, D. 2020)

3.5 Validity & Reliability

To research Kainuu's SEO strategy, it was necessary to find a way to research it fairly.

English keywords and language will be main language used in the research, even while most tourists coming to Finland are in order Russians, Germans, British, Swedish and Chinese. (Business Finland, 2020) This is done as the research would become extremely large, if compared in all possible languages of international travellers – and due to the fact that English is the most understood language in the world. (Statista, 2020) While Kainuu is a Finnish region, and majority of its customer base is Finnish, this research is concentrated on international SEO marketing, and thus the research will be done using English keywords. This includes the webpages on this research – they will be done of the English version of the page, not the Finnish one.

The research will also be focused on single page study. As researching the whole domain requires either paywall restricted software, or dubious amounts of time, the focus will be on the “landing page”, in this case the homepages.

This research was chosen to research SEO, as for a “niche” area in travelling, SEO might be the best cheap way to improve and gain larger knowledge of it. What you want for a region like Kainuu, for growing their international tourism, is for the right people to find you. This is where SEO comes in and can help you gain the right type of attraction. (Nicole, 2018) SEO is also one pillar of marketing these days, as the importance for a strong SEO comes from the need of it – if you have a web site, you are already actively using a SEO channel, like it or not. (Kingsnorth, 2019. p.124)

Overall, implementing strong, quality SEO on a brand's website and digital properties is always going to be beneficial to that brand and its marketing efforts. SEO remains a "cheap" marketing strategy, which can be thought of as a long-term investment, that will help for years to come, creating more visibility, trust and overall marketing towards your brand. While it may be considered a "new age" marketing technique, it's critical to a brand's web presence in this day and age, especially as available data and rivalling competition continue to increase and grow. (Hollingsworth, 2018)

SEMrush's (2019) State of content marketing report, which is made by analysing 450,000+ tweets, hundreds of thousands of search queries, 700,000+ blog posts, and surveying 1,200+ marketers across the globe, gives us an impression of the importance of SEO in modern content marketing. 67% of responders placed SEO as the most efficient content marketing tactic implemented by their team in 2019. Organic traffic was also found to be the key measurement to measure contents success.

Measuring SEO is in no means an accurate and fool-proof method and as mentioned before, the SERP rankings of Google search are derived from hundreds of different aspects that are unknown to anyone outside of Google. The difficulty in researching specifically Kainuu's SEO performance also derives from the fact that this research doesn't have access to their performance scores through their respective Google Analytics, etc. This leaves the research without some information, such as SEO landing pages, pages per visit, their respective most successful keywords, bounce rates, etc.

This does not mean we can't get the results we need for this research, or clear picture of how they are performing on analysing the SEO-strategy of Kainuu. There are staples in SEO-strategy that need to be in excellent condition, which can be researched through the mentioned tools, giving us a clear vision of how and why their respective SEO's are, or are not, working. Understanding these staples gives the research a way to see how the working foundations of SEO are in place, and the results of this research can be used in a very straight way to pinpoint the status of Kainuu's SEO strategy.

As mentioned beforehand, the researcher will be using Kingsnorth's theory of "SEO-Triangle".

Using official tourism agencies data gives us dependable and relevant data. The data they provide is primary data, which means that it is collected and analysed by them. As these are Finland's official tourism agencies, as agencies of the state, in the course of their business, are required to keep a running record of their areas of activity. (Bryman, A. 2020. p. 320)

This data that will be used to set up the research will thus be foremost valid and reliable. The data used in this thesis will be data gathered by social research organizations, "as they have developed structures and control procedures to check on the quality of the emerging data." (Bryman, A. 2012. p. 313b)

The proposed implementation or changes that the research will suggest will be based on the methods mentioned.

As the research will only suggest implementations, of ways that might help the region to achieve growth through digital marketing, one has to remember that these are only suggestions based on the data collected and analysed, as the only reliable way to gather data of these implementations and of its effect, to this particular region, would require a full-scale program of actual implementations and a research done on its basis.

The error margin will remain quite large for some of the aspects, as for example, the region may have several different marketing companies and strategies, and some may be overlooked accidentally, giving inaccurate research.

As gathering data of how some digital marketing tools may work, this is still only speculation, without doing an actual digital marketing campaign and studying the results.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Search Engine Optimization

Content

4.1.1 Keyword Density & Content Length

- Arctic Lakeland

For the research, Arctic Finland offers a webpage, which consists of singular homepage and a few more descriptive introductions to the cultural aspects of the region, as well as the activities to do. The webpage itself remains rather small and doesn't offer much, except the basic information of the region.

The keywords used on the page are left a little unclear, as the amount of content is quite small. Arctic Lakeland still ranks on the SERP on two keywords *Kainuu* and *Kainuu Finland*. Their respective ranks are 7 and 6 for Google SERP. *Kainuu* has the keyword density of 1.56, which is an excellent keyword density score. *Finland* as a keyword has the density of 0.36 but is used as part of key phrases often. On other SERP rankings, Arctic Lakeland ranks quite highly on *swamp soccer/football* searches, with variations of the keywords having 0.30-0.70-word density.

Arctic Lakeland's word count is 572, which is considered to be a fairly good amount, although it could be improved with more content.

- Visit Kajaani

Visit Kajaani ranks most notably in SERP with the keywords *Kajaani*, *Vuolijuoen Kesäteatteri* and *Mökkivuokraus Kainuu*. Their respective rankings are 2, 6 and 9. The keyword density for *Kajaani* is quite large with 4.37, which is a little off the scale in

general for keyword density. *Teatteri* (Finnish for theatre) in all its phrases has density between 0.20 to 0.70.

Visit Kajaani's word count is 994 words, which again is considered to be a good amount, but even this could be pushed with more content.

- Wild Taiga

Wild Taiga ranks well in SERP with their respective keywords: *taiga finland*, *wild taiga*, *ethno music*, *Kalevala hotel*, *caribou taiga*, *reindeer tracking*, *taiga places to visit*. Taiga has a 1.91 density rating, giving it an excellent score. *Music* scored 0.54, while *chamber music* scores 1.09.

Reindeer, nor *caribou*, are not mentioned on the landing page, but remain highly rated as keywords, nonetheless.

Wild Taiga's word count is 1040 words, which is a good amount. While this is more content than most, it could still be more than doubled to reach the rumoured top potential.

- Hossa

Hossa ranks with keywords such as *Hossa kansallispuisto*, *Hossa national park* and *luonto-opas*. *Hossa* has a keyword density of 2.94, *national park* has a density of 4.28. These are a bit higher than recommended, but not too far off.

Hossa's word count is 377, which is rather thin. This could and should be pushed higher – for potentially higher SERP-ratings.

- Paljakka

Paljakka mostly ranks with searches connected to their name. *Paljakka* as a keyword has a density of 3.79. Other notable keywords are *experience Paljakka* with 1.03 density, *holiday* with 0.52 and *nature* with 1.03 density.

Paljakka's word count is 593, which is good, but could definitely be pushed further for improvement.

- Vuokatti Skiing Centre

Their highly ranked keywords come out mostly as searches related to the word *Vuokatti*. *Vuokatti* itself has a 2.35 keyword density, making it a bit high. *Ski* has a density of 0.85.

Vuokatti's word count is 244, which is not optimal. The amount of content should be pushed up, to rank higher in SERP.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka Skiing Centre

Ukkohalla-Paljakka ranks highly in SERP with keywords dwelling around *Ukkohalla*, which has a density of 1.94. *Wakeboarding* was another highly ranked keyword, with the density of 0.58.

Ukkohalla-Paljakka's word count is 491, which is another negative performance. The content amount should be improved upon for a higher SERP-rating.

4.1.2 Frequency of Updates

- Arctic Lakeland

As the site contains only minimal amount of information – rather than news, or anything time specific.

- Visit Kajaani

Visit Kajaani has articles on the site, with the latest being from 2017. They also have social medias, Facebook & Instagram linked to the site, which are active and updating frequently. They also have an event calendar that is up to date.

- Wild Taiga

Wild Taiga has news section on the site, which is frequently updated, as well as social medias linked to the homepage, which are active as well.

- Hossa

Hossa has an automatic weather forecast, social medias and an upcoming events calendar, which are all updating frequently.

- Paljakka

Paljakka has weather conditions, social media and an events calendar as well, which are frequently updating.

- Vuokatti

Vuokatti has updated seasonal offerings that have been updated according to the season.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka

Ukko-Halla has social media linked on their page and have updated COVID-19 regulations and regularly updates seasonal changes.

Technical

4.1.3 Domain Names

- Arctic Lakeland has a simple domain name of arcticlakeland.fi, which for the purpose of this research, serves its purpose fully. It's simple, no hyphens and has a top-level domain of .fi.
- Visit Kajaani has another simple and solid domain name with visitkajaani.fi. No hyphens, country's top-level domain and includes the keyword "visit" into it.
- Hossa has again a simple and effective domain name with hossa.fi. Country based top-level domain and nothing unnecessary.
- Wild Taiga has another similar simple domain name, with wildtaiga.fi. No hyphens, simple to remember, but words of the company work as keywords and country's top-level domain.
- Paljakka has done the same, with a simple domain of paljakka.fi. No hyphens, and country's domain.
- Vuokatti follows the suite, with vuokatti.fi. Simple, no hyphens and country based top-level domain.
- Ukkohalla-Paljakka has the domain name of ukkohalla.fi. It's simple, avoids the hyphen in its double worded name, which can be a little confusing, but as well fruitful for the domain name. County based top-level domain.

4.1.4 Title & Heading Tags

- Arctic Lakeland

Arctic Lakeland has the title tag *Unique Experiences in an Untouched Environment - Arctic Lakeland*. The title tag is 64 characters long, which exceeds the 60-character limit. This affects the title tag on search page, by cutting it. The title tag is interesting and has potential keywords in *unique, experiences, untouched environment*.

Their heading tag is: *Both sides of Finland*. This is a simple enough heading tag – featuring a keyword in *Finland*. For technicality on the page, it features nicely as a big heading being the first thing you see on the page.

- Visit Kajaani

Visit Kajaani’s title tag is: *Home - Visit Kajaani*. It features 20 characters, making it fit in the search page. This does leave 40 characters untouched. Technically this is space wasted, that could be used to intrigue the customer, as well as include keywords. Having “*Home* – “as your title is just not necessary in any mean.

Their heading tag is: *Welcome to Kajaani!* Which again is simple enough, as it is placed quite nicely on top of the page – being the first thing you’ll see on the page. The problem with it, is the lack of any real substance – or keywords.

- Wild Taiga

Wild Taiga’s title tag is: *Explore true wild north - Wild Taiga*, having 36 characters in it. This is a good number of characters, and an excellent use of keywords with it.

Their heading tag is: *Explore Nature full of experiences*. It’s located on top of the page, giving a nice title to the site. On top of technically looking pleasant, it’s rich with keywords fitting their services.

- Hossa

Hossa’s title tag is: *Hossa - Can you hear the calming stillness of the wilderness?* Which is 61 characters, simply meaning the question mark at the end isn’t possibly visible. It’s a tiny bit of fault, which doesn’t take away from it being interesting and having excellent keywords in it.

Their heading tag is: *Can you hear the calming stillness of the wilderness?* Which is the same as their title. The keywords still work well, but the title is a bit lower on the page, which means you have to scroll down to see it.

- Paljakka

Paljakka's title tag is: *Paljakka | Holiday Resort Finland | All year-round activities for whole family*. This is 78 characters, which makes it a bit too long of a title tag. You can't see half of it on a search page, but it features some excellent keywords.

Their heading tag is: *Come and try our new winter experiences*. It's located on the lower half of the page, but visible without scrolling. It has some good keywords (*winter, experiences*).

- Vuokatti

Vuokatti's title tag is: *Welcome to Vuokatti - Vuokatti.fi*. This features 33 characters, making it good lengthwise. While not including any keywords, it also includes the website in it, using up space that could be used to make it more interesting.

Their heading tag is: *Holiday in Vuokatti*. It's simple enough and does include *holiday* as a keyword. Technically it looks pleasing, welcoming you to their website, but it could be more intriguing and have more keywords.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka

Ukkohalla-Paljakka's title tag is: *Ukkohalla Resort*. It has 16 characters in it. The title is simply just their name, lacking any keywords or more clues of what it is about. With 16 characters used, there should be plenty of space to add more.

Their heading tag is: *Spend your holiday in Ukkohalla*. It is located lower on their homepage, making you scroll down before seeing it. Though they do have an introductory video placed before it, that you'd see first. The title is still lacking a bit of content and could do with keywords.

4.1.5 Page Load Speed

- Arctic Lakeland scores 1.0 seconds on time to interactive, and an overall score of 94%, which is excellent.
- Visit Kajaani scores 2,5 seconds on time to interactive, and an overall score of 68%, which is decent, but by needs improvement.
- Wild Taiga scores 1.4 seconds on time to interactive, and an overall score of 79%, which is on better half, but still needs improvement.
- Hossa scores 2.0 seconds on time to interactive, and an overall score of 74%, which is on the better half, but still needs improvement.
- Paljakka scores 2.4 seconds on time to interactive, and an overall score of 79%, which is again on the better half, but still needs improvement.
- Vuokatti scores 3.9 seconds on time to interactive, and an overall score of 54%, which is on the lower side of needs improvement.
- Ukkohalla-Paljakka scores 3.9 seconds on time to interactive, and an overall score of 48%, which is on the poor scale.

4.1.6 Image Optimization

- Arctic Lakeland

All of the images on the page appear to be optimized.

- Visit Kajaani

The page appears to include images which are poorly optimized. Properly formatting and compressing images can have a significant impact on page load performance.

- Wild taiga

All of the images on the page appear to be optimized.

- Hossa

All of the images on the page appear to be optimized.

- Paljakka

All of the images on the page appear to be optimized.

- Vuokatti

The page appears to include images which are poorly optimized. Properly formatting and compressing images can have a significant impact on page load performance.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka

The page appears to include images which are poorly optimized. Properly formatting and compressing images can have a significant impact on page load performance.

4.1.7 Alt Tags

- Arctic Lakeland

There are images on the page that are missing ALT attributes.

Of the 53 images on the page, 4 of them are missing the attribute.

- Visit Kajaani

There are images on the page that are missing ALT attributes.

Of the 67 images on the page, 32 of them are missing the attribute.

- Wild Taiga

There are images on the page that are missing ALT attributes.

Of the 105 images on the page, 40 of them are missing the attribute.

- Hossa

There are images on the page that are missing ALT attributes.

Of the 52 images on the page, 46 of them are missing the attribute.

- Paljakka

There are images on the page that are missing ALT attributes.

Of the 53 images on the page, 47 of them are missing the attribute.

- Vuokatti

There are images on the page that are missing ALT attributes.

Of the 18 images on the page, 15 of them are missing the attribute.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka

There are images on the page that are missing ALT attributes.

Of the 34 images on the page, 16 of them are missing the attribute.

4.1.8 Use of Meta Tags

- Arctic Lakeland

The page has a meta description of optimal length (between 70 and 320 characters).

Experience the untouched environment, enjoy premium services, and yet be enchanted by the quiet peace of nature. Arctic Lakeland.

- Visit Kajaani

The page appears to be missing a meta description tag. A meta description is important for search engines to understand the content of your page, and is often shown as the description text blurb in search results.

- Wild taiga

The page has a meta description of optimal length (between 70 and 320 characters).

Wild Taigan talvi tarjoaa unohtumattomia luontoelämyksiä. Tutustu ja ihastu aitoon erämaaluontoon sekä kulttuuritarjontaan. Wild Taigan alueelta löydät runsaasti ohjelmapalveluita ja aktiviteetteja mielesi mukaan.

- Hossa

The page has a meta description of optimal length (between 70 and 320 characters).

Hossa - Kuuletko erämaan rauhoittavan hiljaisuuden? Hossan kirkaat vedet kuhisevat eri kalalajeja ja löydät upeat puitteet olemiseen ja retkeilyyn.

- Paljakka

The page has a meta description of optimal length (between 70 and 320 characters).

Paljakka - puolet lähempänä. Koko perheen keskus korkeiden vaarojen ja puhtaasti luonnon keskellä. Hotelli, lomahuoneistoja, ravintolat ja tekemistä ympäri vuoden.

- Vuokatti

The page has a meta description of optimal length (between 70 and 320 characters).

Vuokatti tarjoaa tapahtumia ja tekemistä kaiken ikäisille ympäri vuoden. Alueen monipuolisista majoitusvaihtoehdoista löytyy jokaiselle sopiva.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka

The page appears to be missing a meta description tag. A meta description is important for search engines to understand the content of your page, and is often shown as the description text blurb in search results

Links

4.1.9 Internal Link Volume

- Arctic Lakeland

Arctic Lakeland has 135 external backlinks, 22 referring domains and 44 outbound links. Of these 36% are to other domains.

The site scores 17 on Moz Domain Authority scale, which is not a strong score.

- Visit Kajaani

Visit Kajaani has 3 000 external backlinks, 233 referring domains and 342 outbound links. Of these 24% are to other domains.

The site scores on 32 Moz Domain Authority scale, which is a decent score, but could be improved upon greatly.

- Wild Taiga

Wild Taiga has 2870 external backlinks, 404 referring domains and 134 outbound links. Of these 36% are to other domains.

The site scores 40 Moz Domain Authority scale, which again is decent, but could be improved upon.

- Hossa

Hossa has 3800 external backlinks, 194 referring domains and 138 outbound links. Of which 67% are to other domains.

The site scores 37 on Moz Domain Authority scale, which is decent again, but could be improved greatly.

- Paljakka

Paljakka has 6970 external backlinks, 282 referring domains and 124 outbound links. Of which 59% are to other domains.

The site scores 31 on Moz Domain Authority scale, again a decent score, but it should be improved upon.

- Vuokatti

Vuokatti has 1660 external backlinks, 888 referring domains and 74 outbound links. Of which only 5% are to other domains.

The site scores 39 on Moz Domain Authority scale, which is a decent score, but once again could be improved upon.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka

Ukkohalla-Paljakka has 1150 external backlinks, 388 referring domains and 183 outbound links. Of which 14% are to other domains.

The site scores 36 on Moz Domain Authority scale, which is a decent score, but once more, could be improved upon.

4.1.10 Quality of Incoming Links

- Arctic Lakeland

Has highest rated backlinks such as: Epressi, Kainuun Liitto, Ask.com, Hecktic-travels.

- Visit Kajaani

Has highest rated backlinks such as: Wikipedia, Nationalparks.fi, Luontoon.fi, siteprice.

- Wild Taiga

Has highest rated backlinks such as: Europa.eu, the Guardian, Pintrest, Daily Mail, TripAdvisor, Metro.

- Hossa

The top authority backlinks come from sources as Wikipedia, new sources from the UK, such as The Independent, The Guardian and Standard – as well as Finnish news articles as YLE.

- Paljakka

The top authority backlinks come from sources mostly of Wikipedia and YLE articles.

- Vuokatti

Has highest rated backlinks such as: Wikipedia, Lonely planet, Four Square, Russian & Italian blogs/news.

- Ukkohalla-Paljakka
Has highest rated backlinks such as: Wikipedia, Yle, Visit Finland.

4.2 Keyword Research

According to Kainuu's tourism strategy (2015), the main strengths of the region are: clean nature, clean groceries, safety and peace. Other mentioned strengths include beautiful nature, quiet, space and its usability in tourism, versatile tourism services for all ages, four different seasons and safety.

The mentioned strengths are also in accordance with Visit Finland's marketing strategies, that were mentioned previously on introduction.

On top of all these mentioned strengths, we have keywords from Arctic Lakeland introduction (Matkailun suuralueyhteistyön valmistelu ja tulokset Kainuussa, 2015) from Kainuun Etu, which goes through their viewed strengths of the region. For all, the mentioned strengths, and possible, keywords include:

NATURE

- clean
- wild (animals)
- beautiful
- national parks

Finnish

- north & south landscape
- culture

- foods
- language
- nature

Other

- authentic
- safety
- peace
- quiet
- space
- privacy
- clean
- experiences
- versatile for all ages
- time for customers
- no mass tourism
- personal experience

On top of the strengths mentioned, the researcher felt that the actual tourism products and services are equally as important to be used as keywords. They are as mentioned:

- nature activities
- skiing
- downhill skiing
- husky, - and snowmobile tours

- hiking
- fishing
- hunting
- golfing

As seen, the list of officially mentioned strengths and qualities of the region is quite large, but nonetheless, an excellent list of possible keywords to be used – and should be used.

While establishing a strong set of keywords, as listed above, the researcher felt there was a need to dive deeper and find ways to increase the SEO strength of the regions various websites. For these reasons, it was decided to use a persona creation to give the research a clear direction.

The persona keyword research will be done, as explained beforehand, in accordance with Simon Kingsnorth's suggested method in his 2019 book *Digital marketing strategy*.

4.2.1 Creating Customer Personas

The researcher decided on creating two different personas, to better find out what two different customers would be searching for if they were looking for a service the like of Kainuu, without looking precisely for Kainuu.

- Tom and his family of two kids and a wife. He is a 35–50-year-old, who is looking for a family trip. The family usually takes one trip in a year – generally it being weeklong. This saves up money to be spent on the trip but leaves only limited time.

The family is looking for a holiday that offers activities to the kids, as well as the possibility for an active nature experience. As the family is from Berlin, they want the holiday to be an experience and especially focused on nature. Tom's family is not extremely rich, but wealthy and the possibility of high-class service and products would be appreciated. Tom uses his home computer to do his research and is more heavily influenced with travel agencies and package deals – he prefers the trip to be pre-planned, as this would free up the week to enjoy the vacation rather than plan it.

Tom's persona is created to mimic Kainuu's most common tourist type – family.

- Vicky is an 18–30-year-old young adult from Manchester, England. She is travelling with a friend. As she is just starting her career, or is a student, she isn't exactly wealthy. She has around a week as well for the vacation.

She is looking for an adventurous holiday, with the possibility to experience something unique, natural, and most importantly environmentally friendly adventure. She uses her smart phone to do her research and is heavily influenced by social media and customer reviews – she also prefers to plan her trip by herself, giving her the possibility to plan things she would prefer doing.

Vicky's persona is created as an opposite to Tom's family. Young travellers are a growing tourist group, and with all the activities Kainuu has, this type of tourist segment could be a big possible growth to the area.

4.2.2 Mining Our Data

The keyword, or phrases compiled are brainstormed ideas of possible keywords. All of the wordings have been compared to similar phrases with Google trends comparisons, where the more popular search term was chosen. For example, “holiday” is the chosen term, as it is much more used than vacation. Ecotourism again is much more used as a

search term than sustainable travel, green travel, environmental or responsible travel. Finland is used since phrases with “Kainuu” don’t have search data whatsoever.

Persona Keyword Research	
Tom	Vicky
Family holiday in Finland	Ecotourism (in Finland)
Skiing holiday in Finland	Active holiday in Finland
Winter holiday in Finland	Holiday in nature
Holiday in Finland	Finland review
Holiday to Finland packages	What to do in Finland
	Hiking in Finland

Fig. 5. Excel Chart, Persona Research. Pääatalo, O. 2021

4.2.3 Mining Secondary Sources/Sense Checking

On this keyword/phrase section, we first gathered a list of strong phrases through persona creation, brainstorming and finally moulding the phrase to the most popular possibility, through comparison in Google Trends.

For the final part of the keyword section, the researcher put the chosen phrases through software tools Keyword. Guru a program that works by taking a phrase and adding on top of it actual searches that people have searched for. As disclaimer, only popular search terms that have anything to do with geographical location (Europe or Finland), or are related to tourism were chosen. This and other types of “sensible” corrections were done as the sense checking – taking out phrases that won’t help in a tourism setting.

This will give us alternatives of the chosen keywords, plus adding more specific terms, that people have been proven to search for the most.

For the persona of Tom, the phrases and variations are as follows:

Family holiday in Finland

- family holiday finland summer
- family ski holiday finland
- best family holiday finland
- finland family holiday december
- finland family holiday accommodation

Holiday in Finland

- holiday finland 2021
- holiday finland 2020
- holiday finland northern lights
- holiday finland 2019
- holiday finland summer
- finland holiday packages

Skiing in Finland

- skiing in finland reviews
- skiing in finland covid
- skiing in finland in december
- skiing in finland at christmas
- skiing in finland in january
- skiing in finland 2021

Winter holiday in Finland

- winter holiday in Finland
- winter holidays in finland 2020
- winter holiday finland 2021
- winter activity holidays in finland
- best winter holidays in finland

Holiday to Finland packages

- Holiday to Finland packages
- delhi to finland holiday packages
- cheap holiday packages to finland

For the persona of Vicky, the phrases and variations are as follows:

Hiking in Finland

- hiking in finland book
- hiking in finland lapland
- hiking in finland reddit
- hiking finland in winter
 - hiking trails in finland

Active holiday

- Active holiday Europe
- activity holidays for adults
- all inclusive activity holidays Europe
- active holiday company

Finland review

- finland reviews
- finland skiing review

What to do in Finland

- what to do in finland in winter
- what to do in finland summer
- what to do in finland in january
- what to do in finland in march
- what to do in finland in October

Holiday in nature

- holiday in nature Europe
- family holiday in nature
- holiday parks in nature
- holiday in the nature

Ecotourism

- ecotourism activities
- ecotourism advantages
- ecotourism activities examples

- ecotourism business
- ecotourism europe

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Search Engine Optimization

Keyword Density & Word Count

The keyword densities are, in all cases, a little bit off. While there are most certainly keywords that are used in proper densities in all of the sites, there lacks a cohesive strategy of certain keywords being used to an advantage. For all of these cases, most of the keywords that rank, are either used too much or too little.

Word count is neither properly utilized. While Wild Taiga and Visit Kajaani have the most words used, at around 1000 each, the most recent discoveries – mentioned beforehand – suggest the use of 2000 words. While a thousand words is generally deemed a good amount, especially the sites that have under 500, should aim to build a larger amount of content. This could be extremely helpful for creating new content, to draw possible links, as well as use it to create more and efficient keywords. Overall, focusing on the content length gives the possibility to create more – keywords, content, links and overall ways to increase SERP-ratings.

Frequency of Updates

Frequency of updates seem to be well done in most of the researched sites. Easy ways to keep the website updated, such as news, linked social media and weather reports are successfully utilized. One thing that seems to be lacking in most of these sites, is the lack of new content. Adding blogs, articles and such, will most certainly bring more attention to the site, create stronger linking structure and increase the SERP-ratings.

Domain Names

The domain names seem to be in excellent order for all of the sites. They're all simple, yet effective. None of the sites have hyphens, or other non-necessary additions, which tend to lower a websites SERP-rating.

Title & Heading Tags

Title and heading tags are in most cases in good condition. A few of the cases, Vuokatti and Visit Kajaani especially, are not utilizing the space for the full potential. These are tags that are deemed very important for Google's algorithm and are quick to create or improve and gain all the potential.

While the titles and headings are quite OK, for the most part, the researcher would hope to see even more keyword usage – and especially titles and tags that drawn the customer in, along with Google's crawl bots.

Page Load Speed

The loading speed of the pages are in most cases excellent. Ukkohalla-Paljakka and Vuokatti being the negative exceptions. As we have established in the theory to this section, the page load speed is an important factor to Google's SERP ranking system, as well as to the customer coming to the site.

Image Optimization

Image optimization is mostly done excellently again, with the exception of Visit Kajaani, Vuokatti and Ukkohalla-Paljakka. This is an important part of SERP ratings, and it affects the page load speed simultaneously.

Alt Tags

Alt tags are missing in every webpage in the research. While most have half – or more, which is rather good already, alt tags are an important part of good SEO-strategy and should be utilized to their full potential.

Use of Meta Tags

Meta tags are well made for the most part, with the exclusion of Visit Kajaani and Ukkohalla-Paljakka, who are completely missing it. This is something that should be worked on, as it makes a huge difference in SERP rankings.

Internal Link Volume

Most of the researched webpages have a good amount of linking structure. While some are lacking the amount, such as Arctic Lakeland, it is a relatively new site. None of the sites manage to get even a 50 in Moz Domain Authority scale, and while this scale is not an official ranking factor – more of a guiding direction, it does give us a big nod towards how they are doing.

Tourism websites are the spearhead of their visibility in the online world and building a good linking structure should be of massive importance.

Building more and more content would help all of the websites to build larger linking structure – more good links bring in more audience, as well as better SERP-ratings.

Quality of incoming Links

Most of the websites do fine with the qualities of the links. There are news sources, Finnish and international, blogs and such. The researcher would still hope to see even stronger quality of links as this would help the “believability” of the websites in the eyes of Google.

5.2 Keyword Research

With this research, we have managed to create a rather large palate of keywords and phrases. While some of these may not be useful, there are things here that should be taken into consideration, if and when building or updating keyword strategies.

Kainuu’s tourism organizations have built up a huge list of strengths of their consideration in the region. These should be pushed more to the content, as these seem to be the words and phrases Kainuu would like to be associated with themselves, but people who will be searching for them are not currently finding Kainuu. This comes rather clear with how none of Kainuu’s destinations were listed in the first two pages of Google search, for any of the variations of the search phrases.

While, understandably, these persona created keywords and phrases are not perfect – they are exemplary. For example, focusing on the right phrasing of words – holiday, ecotourism – as they are the wordings actually used by Googlers, should be considered.

Another major factor, especially for international customers, is that unfortunately no-one searches especially for “Kainuu”. If Kainuu then wants to be found geographically, by new international customers, they could set their focus on keywords such as Finland, Europe, Northern Europe, etc.

There is a lot of space in all the researched websites for new content – pushing the suggested examples of keywords and phrases and focusing on their own choosing of established strengths of the region, could be a huge push for the region’s independent tourism entrepreneurs, as well as the regions tourism organizations.

6 CONCLUSION

After researching the websites in question, we are able to give a conclusion of how they fared. While the research will not go through how to improve a certain aspect in SEO, the research will point out the parts where improvement could be made.

Overall, in the research all of the websites did decently in content parts. Keyword densities and length of content are decent. Frequency of updates were in most parts well-constructed as well, with most of the pages having some sort of built-in weather, social media, calendar, or news source, to provide on-going updates.

In technical aspects some of the sites performed extremely well, while some were lacking bits and pieces. These aspects could be reviewed and updated, to rank higher in the SERP. While not only are there a few parts missing, like a meta tag for Visit Kajaani and Ukko-halla-Paljakka, there are missed opportunities for excellent keyword placements in most of the tags, titles and headings. Alt tags are another part where none of the researched pages had them in place for all of their images.

Links and link quality in general is an issue to some of the researched websites and could be worked on. Even the best performing sites in the linking category, could aim on improving, as they have definitely not reached their full potential yet. This is for the sole reason that good linking structure creates its own marketing – it helps with SERP-ratings and drives organic traffic towards your site.

For overall conclusion, the websites struggle in SERP-ratings. There are quite a few technical issues with all of the webpages, but the main factor for this seems to be lack of

linking, and efficiency in keyword strategy, or their lack in content. While there are aspects that could be done better from a technical point of view, they are mostly done well – and should not affect the SEO ratings too harmfully. Fixing, or optimising them would be a straightforward procedure, that would ultimately raise their SEO rating.

The research's advice would lean on keyword research, creating campaigns and trying to establish phrases and words for which they would be found. This could be implemented into content of the pages, giving it more content in general.

Title, - and heading tags, alt tags and such, could be improved upon greatly with keywords as well. Another aspect is the lack of content that draws people in. More articles, blogs and such would drive the amount of content up, would help with rating keywords and most importantly would create a healthy and strong linking structure – which would keep growing naturally. We have already determined the importance of SEO, especially for a little-known region such as Kainuu. If the website's can be found with ease, it would be a major step towards growing the entire tourism business in the region, especially as the region has already excellent websites that if found are surely going to bring tourists to the area.

The researcher is left with feeling Kainuu is not as visible in SERP-ratings, as they could be. Even with search phrases that accommodate their mentioned strengths, they are hard to find. This itself does bring a massive potential for improvement, if it's a strategy that the officials would like to push for. While Kainuu might be shadowed by its larger competition, for example other the skiing resorts – or as a nature destination Lapland, of which both commonly came up on the searches, Kainuu could expand the customer base by actively seeking keywords that are used, especially as Kainuu has much of the same as the larger competitors and especially their own unique attractions and sights to market.

The researcher's opinion remains that with a strong keyword research and implementation, Kainuu and all of its tourism destinations could grow with small effort to a larger international tourism spot. A cohesive strategy might not be impossible, at the moment, due to the spread of the region – and due to the strong independent tourism organizations in the area but implementing a strong keyword strategy could be massive for the independent operators as well as the region wide organizations. The researcher feels that Kainuu has a massive potential in tourism – and they have established them well in their

own tourism strategies, but what feels to be lacking is its use of those in their SEO. While the technical aspects are mostly on point, or close to it, using keywords and phrases to suit those strengths could very well be something that drives traffic towards them – helping them reach their potential in gaining new international audience towards their products and services. This could provide a lot of traffic to their websites, and in the end, even if the region doesn't work under one single strategy – when one destination in the area succeeds, its success will surely boost the whole region.

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