

CONVERTING TO

Topic Clusters

HOW TO CATEGORIZE CONTENT
TO 10X YOUR SEO EFFORTS

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human



Still relying on keywords alone to grow your organic presence?

Search algorithms are rapidly advancing. Optimizing for keywords isn't enough to obtain credibility and organic rankings.

To earn search engine trust, you need to become an expert on topics related to your business.

Enter topic clusters.

The topic cluster strategy is an SEO mindset that helps you focus on building topic authority.

In this resource, you'll learn the topic cluster strategy our team has used to achieve 7-30x organic growth for our clients.

Use this guide to:

- Understand the value and goals behind topic clusters
- Learn what works and what doesn't when producing content for organic growth
- Define and implement your topic cluster strategy

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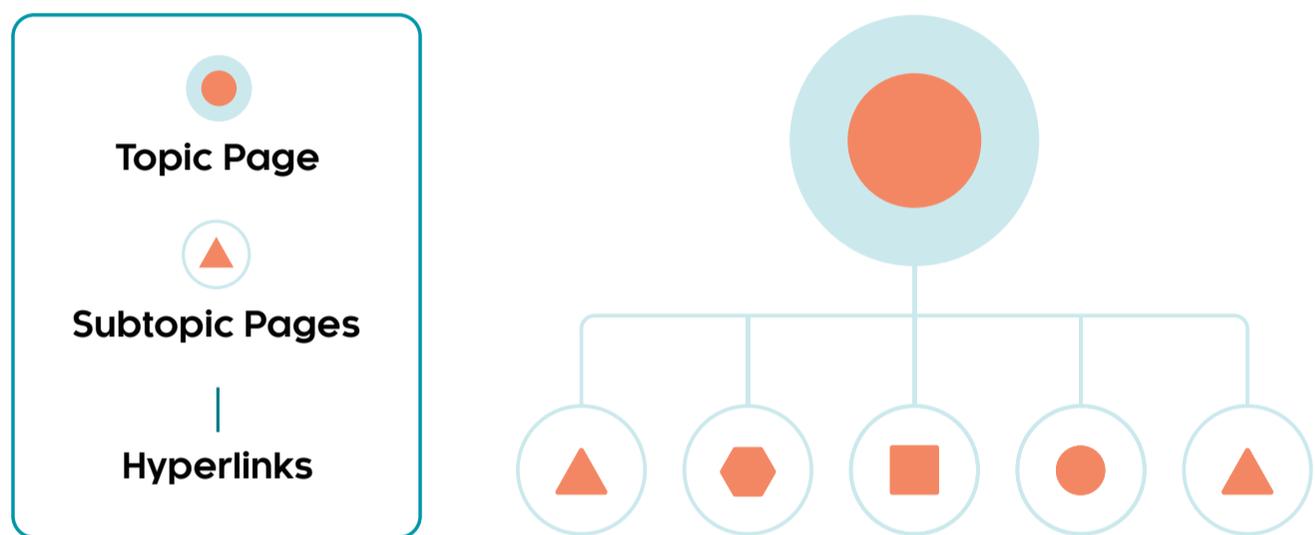
How to Execute a
Topic Cluster
Strategy



What Are Topic Clusters?

Topic clusters are groups of related web pages that all link to a broader pillar page. Thinking in terms of topics rather than keywords shifts your mindset toward user intent to create more helpful content and build authority to rank.

Figure 1.1
Example of
Topic Clusters



Topic Page

The topic page (also known as pillar content) is at the center of the cluster and serves as the authority page for the topic you aim to rank for. These might include informational services or resource pages.

Subtopic Pages

The subtopic pages focus on longer-tail queries that relate to your core topic, typically in the form of blog posts.

Say you own an ecommerce company that sells water bottles for dogs, and you want to build authority for “dog hydration.”

You might create an in-depth page on this topic. Using the topic cluster approach, you could create blog posts around related, longer-tail queries like “signs of dog dehydration” that link to this page.

Linking related content to your topic page helps organize your website and direct search engines to your most informative and valuable content.

2

Why Are Topic Clusters Important?

As a content marketer, you have limited time and resources.

Topic clusters help you create content with purpose, saving you from wasting time on content that won't generate results.

Creating separate blog posts targeted toward keywords that essentially mean the same thing won't work anymore. (Think “how to keep my dog hydrated,” “dog hydration tips” and “dog hydration best practices.”)

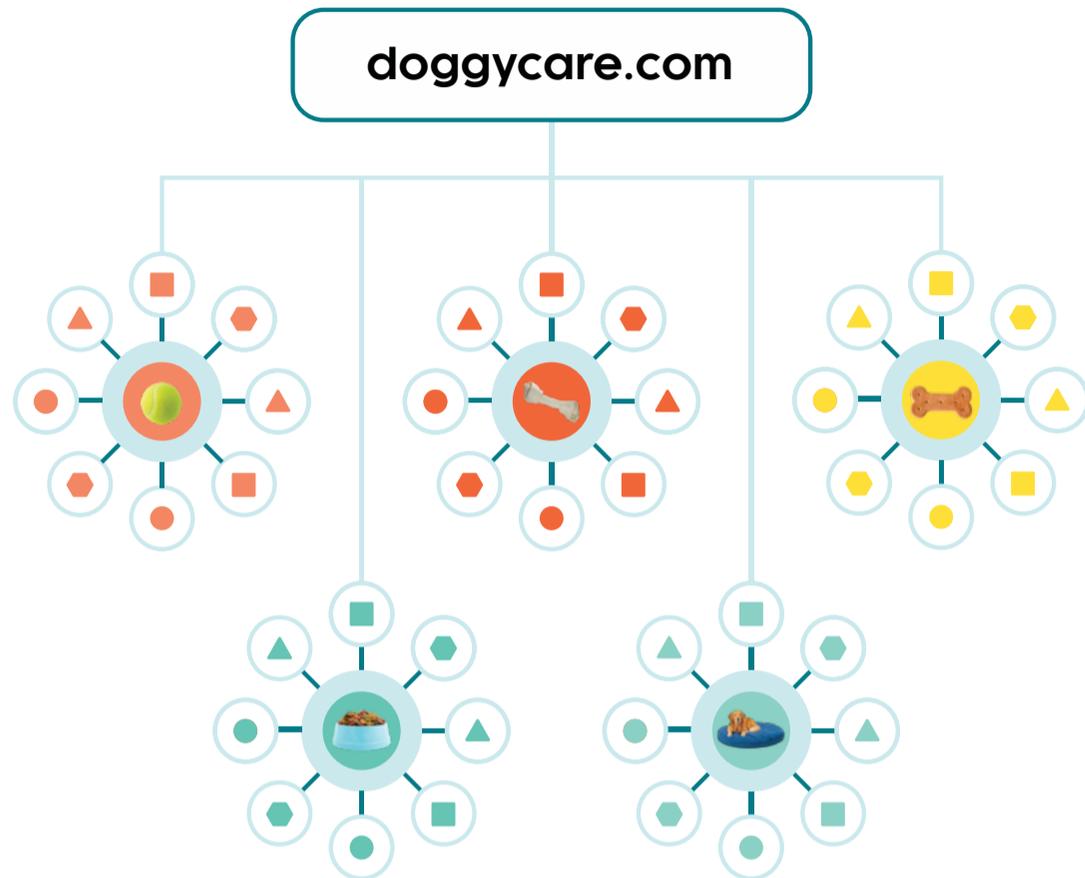
Slicing a topic into many similar segments only confuses search engines and readers. Search algorithms understand when multiple search terms have the same meaning. From a search engine perspective, topic clusters also organize your website content from this:

Figure 2.1
Disorganized content



To this:

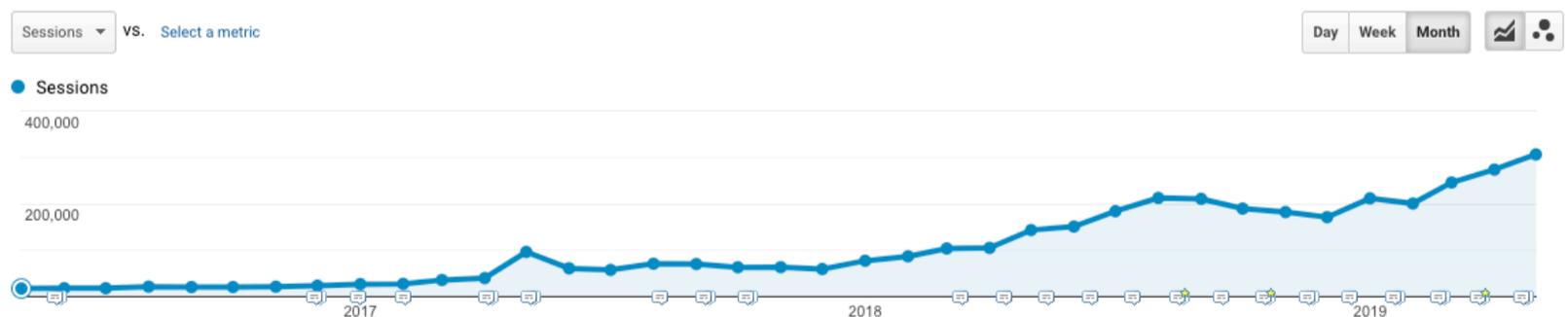
Figure 2.2
Organized by
Topic Clusters



Much more organized, right?

Taking time to implement a topic cluster strategy makes it easier for search engines to understand your website's core themes and better surface your content to interested readers.

And after implementing topic clusters for our clients, we found it works. Here's an example of one client's organic blog traffic trends:



By taking a topic cluster or themed approach to content creation, we helped grow this client's blog traffic from 5,000 monthly organic sessions to more than 300,000 in 3 years.

And in 2018, Google released a broad core algorithm update designed to demote sites with questionable expertise, authoritativeness and trustworthiness. In August 2018 alone, our clients with topic cluster strategies saw a 20% to 60% increase in organic traffic.

Because we focus on building well-researched content that answers the intent behind a topic, search engines view our client's content as more authoritative than competitors (though they might include more instances of a target keyword.)

Google will continue to reward sites with high authority and relevance. And adopting the topic cluster approach can help you focus on delivering value and building authority you need to rank.

But before charging ahead with your topic cluster strategy, you need to understand where content marketers typically stumble with SEO.

NOTE

- Slicing a topic into many similar segments only confuses search engines and readers.
- Search algorithms understand when multiple search terms actually mean the same thing.



3

Top 3 Mistakes When Writing for SEO

A content marketer at a \$50 million company recently told me, “We know a blog post could never rank for a competitive keyword.”

And that’s a common sentiment among many marketers.

But your content can dethrone the top organic position (we’ve helped small businesses outrank sites like Microsoft for their own products).

We see companies waste **so much** time creating content because they commit one of these mistakes:

- 1. Overlapping content:** When creating content around keywords, you’ll likely end up with multiple pages that essentially say the same thing. Search engines may struggle to distinguish these pages and know which to rank.
- 2. Focus on quantity over quality:** Blogging for the sake of blogging will never produce tangible results. Before engaging with us, one client published 10-15 blogs per month and generated 50 monthly organic visitors after 1 year. After we wrote 3 blog posts per month for the same period, organic traffic grew to more than 60,000 monthly visitors.
- 3. Stale content:** Having a large amount of low-value content can actually hurt your SEO. Updating old content shows search engines that your information is current.

NOTE

- **Do** have a content roadmap to guide the ideation process
- **Don't** focus on quantity
- **Do** focus on quality
- **Do** revisit past blog posts and improve them



How to Execute a Topic Cluster Strategy

You know why topic clusters matter. But how do you apply this strategy to your website?

Adopting the topic cluster strategy involves these key steps:

1. **Define Your Content Topics or Themes**
2. **Map Out Your Subtopics**
3. **Audit & Categorize Existing Content**
4. **Create Your Topic Cluster Content**
5. **Measure, Optimize, Repeat**



Define Your Content Topics or Themes

When developing content strategies for our clients, we start with one simple question: What do you want to be known for?

For example, we recently onboarded a new client that sells innovative curtain rod brackets.

We used this question and a few prompts to brainstorm topic themes.

To start generating ideas for your topic clusters, start here:

- **Your products or services:** You want to be known for your flagship product, so that's an easy place to start. This client already ranked for its core product, "curtain rod brackets," which now serves as a core content theme.

- **Use cases:** Why do customers use your product or benefit from your service? In our client example, we used this prompt to agree upon the content subtopic, “how to hang curtains.”
- **Pain points your product or service solves:** What does your target audience struggle with? If you have a unique product, many people won’t know to search for your solution. In this case, consider the pain points your product or service addresses.
- **Profitable paid keywords:** Your paid and organic strategies should work together. Evaluate high-ROI paid keywords to uncover content opportunities.

Always validate your topics with keyword research to ensure you’re focused on the variation with the highest traffic potential. Use a spreadsheet to organize your topic clusters, or consider a free tool like Blueprint SEO.

Using Blueprint SEO, you can document your topics and search for existing URLs to assign as the topic page (a.k.a. pillar content).

2

Map Out Your Subtopics

Now that you’ve settled on a few topic clusters, it’s time to strategize your subtopics to support each content theme.

As a reminder, subtopics are related, long-tail queries that will serve as the primary focus for your supporting content. Be wary not to choose subtopics that have the same meaning (like “dog hydration symptoms” and “dog hydration signs”).

So how do you come up with unique subtopics?

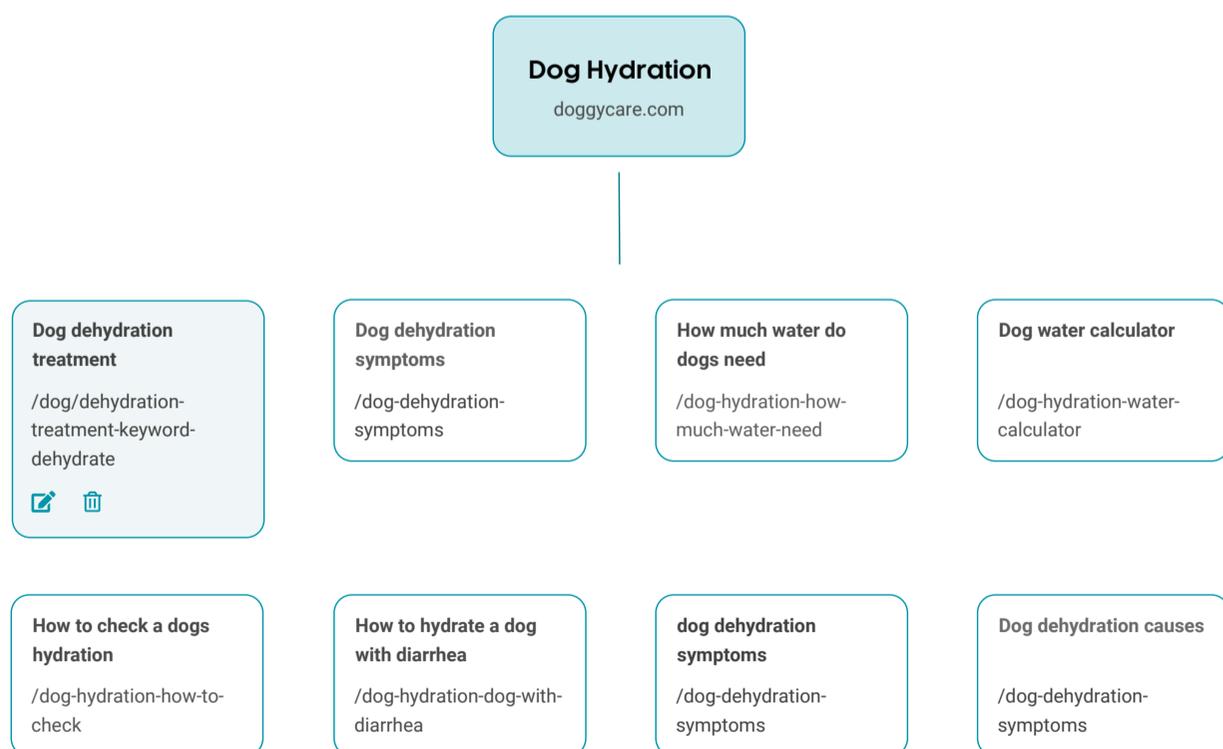
The best content ideas come from real user pain points. Here are sources of inspiration for your subtopics:

- **Meet with sales or customer support:** Compile a list of frequently asked questions around your topic.
- **Adopt the persona mindset:** Brainstorm questions your target audience might have regarding your core topic. Go to forums like Quora or reddit, and search for your topic to see the types of questions people are asking. Or, target the problems your audience faces to get in front of people just beginning their search.
- **Use keyword tools to find related keywords:** Put your core topic into an SEO tool like SEMrush or Answer the Public to find related, medium-tail keywords.

Similar to step 1, use SEO tools to compare search volume. Prioritize your subtopics based on their relevance to your offering and traffic potential. Add your subtopics to your spreadsheet or Blueprint SEO.

Here's an example topic cluster targeting "dog hydration" in Blueprint SEO:

Figure 4.1
Example Topic Cluster for "dog hydration"



3

Audit & Categorize Existing Content

You've defined your topics and subtopics.

But before embarking on new content creation, don't overlook what you already have.

REMEMBER

There's no place for slim, low-value site content that no one visits. It can actually hurt your site authority.

In this step, you'll categorize your existing content into the topics you set in step 1. Through this process, you might discover weak or overlapping content to improve later and new content to create.

To begin your audit, you need a list of existing URLs. You can export URLs using filters in Google Analytics. Or, use Blueprint SEO, which crawls your website and allows you to easily search for and categorize URLs into topics.

Once you have your URLs, export them to a Google Sheet. Or, use Blueprint SEO to document your strategy:

- 1. Assign URLs to a relevant topic cluster:** Already have content around your topic? Note the topic cluster that each existing URL belongs to.
- 2. Define a unique subtopic for each URL:** Every page within your topic cluster should have a unique subtopic (or keyword). When selecting a subtopic, refer to your subtopics ideas or target keywords for that page.

- 3. Identify weak or overlapping content:** Evaluate your pages with the lowest number of organic visitors first. Note whether the page is low value or overlaps with other content. Later, you can choose to 301 redirect or optimize these pages.

If your website is newer, sorting through your content could take minutes. For more robust sites, this process could take months.

Chip away at this task for a few hours each week, and you'll have a clear blueprint for organizing your content into topic clusters in no time.



Create Your Topic Cluster Content

You've defined your topic cluster strategy and organized existing content.

Now it's time to create content to fill out your topic cluster strategy and build authority.

This phase includes optimizing content for your newly defined topics and subtopics and creating content to fill the gaps.

Follow these steps to put your topic cluster strategy into action:

- 1. Prioritize your content optimizations:** It's typically faster to increase rankings for existing content than start fresh. Identify the most important content to improve, and optimize each page for your new subtopics. Look to expand the content, add targeted subheadings and incorporate new research to help boost search rankings. And don't forget to update the publish date!

- 2. Eliminate low-value content:** Weak content can hurt your organic performance. To clean these up, 301 redirect low-value or unnecessary pages to a related topic page.
- 3. Develop new content to support your strategy:** You've brainstormed dozens of subtopic ideas — now it's time to create content that doesn't yet exist. Prioritize content creation for these pages based on their potential search volume and importance to your organization. Strive to produce well-researched content that fully addresses the topic and related questions.

5

Measure, Optimize, Repeat

Beyond creating content, measuring organic performance and optimizing content are the most impactful steps for growing your organic presence.

Performing weekly and monthly check-ins on SEO and behavioral metrics can reveal critical areas for improvement.

Organic ranking and traffic movements are two critical metrics that indicate how authoritative and helpful your content is to users.

To find content optimization opportunities, look for pages that have recently increased in rankings but aren't in position 1-3.

REMEMBER

During the optimization process, aim to answer the search intent better than top-ranking competitors by enriching your content with new stats, adding context or filling content gaps.

Evaluating performance trends across topics can also point you to popular and potentially high-converting topics.

Use a tool like Blueprint SEO to measure metrics like organic traffic, time on page and bounce rate across topics. You can easily see how your strategy translates to organic traffic, which topics and subtopics are most popular and which need improvement.

By repeating this process, you'll have a clear blueprint for building topic authority and producing tangible results.



Manage your topic clusters like a pro with Blueprint

Organizing your content around topics doesn't have to be complicated.

Blueprint SEO is a free tool that helps you create your topic cluster strategy and measure organic performance.

[GET FREE ACCESS](#)