similarweb

Google's Ranking Anatomy Dissecting 90+ Ranking Signals

Actionable lessons gleaned from the Google leak to strengthen your SEO strategy



The body of this report:

Get ready to dissect the ranking factors, or jump to the sections you're most interested in.

| > Chapter 1: Site-wide ranking factors: (<u>Topical Authority</u> , <u>Site Authority</u> , <u>Brand Strength</u>) | 3-26 |
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Site-wide factors > Topical authority

1.1 **Topical Authority**

SEO professionals have long debated the concept of topical authority and its existence within Google's algorithms. According to current understanding and known ranking factors, topical authority evaluates a website's content based on its depth, breadth, and expertise in covering a specific topic or knowledge domain.

Topical Authority

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

DEFINITION

Topical authority is a measure of a website's perceived expertise and credibility in a specific subject area or niche. It shows how well a site covers a particular topic, providing comprehensive and valuable information to users.

Topical authority aims to quantify how authoritative and comprehensive a site's content is within its chosen niche or entity. It goes beyond simply counting keywords or backlinks.

Topical Authority ranking signals:

- \rightarrow Site Focus Score: Measures how much a site is focused on a specific topic.
- Site Radius: Measures how closely individual page topics align \rightarrow with the overall site's topical focus. In simpler terms, Google determines a central theme for your website, then evaluates how well each page fits that theme.
- **Site Embeddings:** Compressed representations of site/page \rightarrow content in vector space, assigning a topic to the site.
- Connectedness: Represents how much the entity is \rightarrow connected/related to other entities in the document. This signal influences the topicality score but is not completely aligned with it.

Topical Authority

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

Topical Authority ranking signals (cont.):

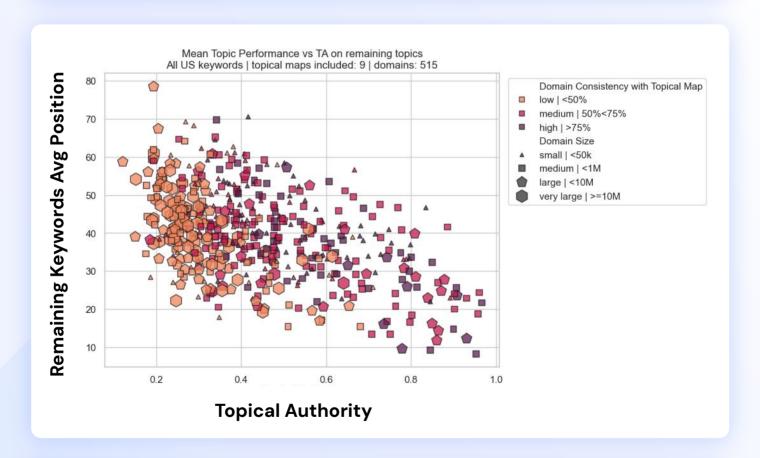
- DocScore: Measures how well the document scores for the \rightarrow entity, serving as a relative ranking signal between different documents for an entity.
- Normalized Topicality: Refers to a normalized representation \rightarrow of the topicality score in the range [0, 1], representing the proportion of the document that talks about the entity.
- Relevance Score: Generated by a machine learning entity \rightarrow classifier, similar to topicality but ML-based.

Topical Authority: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

FOLLOW THE EXPERT: 11 SURFER

The data team at **Surfer** set out to demonstrate that websites that cover one topic comprehensively have an advantage in the search results when compared to sites that cover many topics. The underlying assumption was that even smaller websites can outrank larger sites if they focus their efforts on a single, clearly-defined topic.

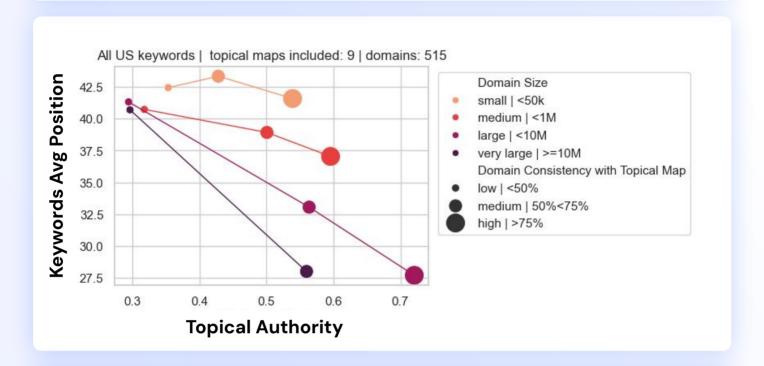


The above data demonstrates a correlation between the Topical Authority Score and keyword position. This graph shows that small, medium, and large domains that cover one topic consistently have better positions and higher authority.

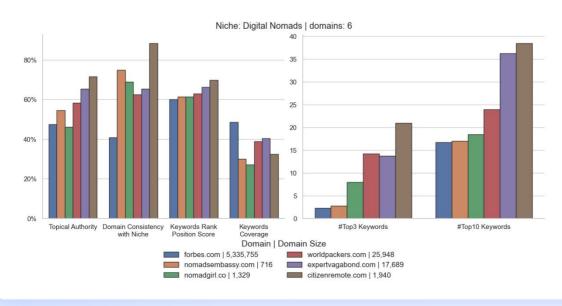
Topical Authority: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

Here is another look at the same data:



For example, despite Forbes' extensive content on digital nomads, data indicates that in this niche, more specialized websites with consistent content outperform Forbes in top 3 rankings, even while ranking for fewer keywords overall.



Topical authority SEO takeaways

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

Google analyzes your entire site's content to determine its primary subject matter, creating a comprehensive topical profile. It then assesses how each individual page supports or deviates from this central theme.

When planning or optimizing a site, you should:

- Conduct thorough research and focus on topically relevant content
- Incorporate a clear topical hierarchy into your site architecture

FOLLOW THE EXPERT:

According to Jakub Sadowski, the data shows that specialized single-topic websites outperform large, multi-topic websites like Forbes, even if they rank for fewer keywords. This suggests that if you want to beat a bigger site like Forbes, you should consistently create content that focuses on a single topic.



Jakub Sadowski Surfer, Product Manager

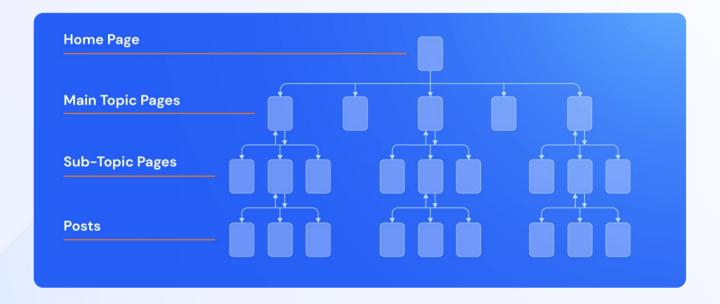
How to build topical authority

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

Topical authority refers to the expertise and credibility of a website in a particular topic or knowledge domain. Google patents and industry research indicate that the best way to achieve topical authority is to cover your chosen topic more thoroughly than your competitors by creating content that answers as many user intents as possible.

However, quantity alone isn't sufficient. You must develop a clear topical hierarchy reflected in your:

- **URL** structure
- Internal linking
- Breadcrumb navigation
- Main menu organization



This structured approach helps both search engines and users to understand:

- What content your site covers
- How your content is structured, including topics and subtopics

Building topical authority with Similarweb

Site-wide factors > Topical authority



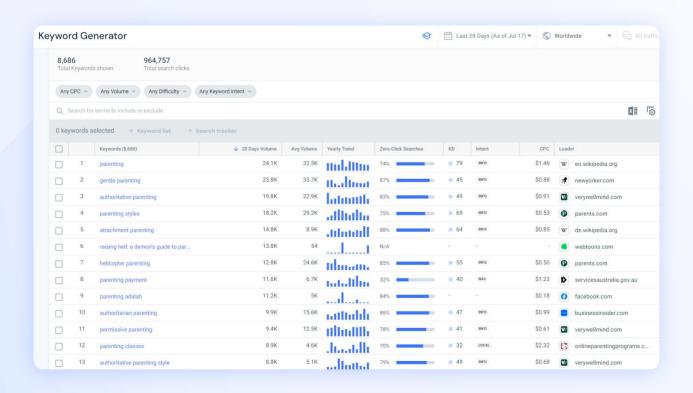
Find all the keywords in your niche

Method #1: There are two ways to find a comprehensive list of niche-related keywords:

Use the Similarweb Keyword Generator Enter a seed keyword into the Similarweb Keyword Generator to see a comprehensive list of keywords. Once you have your comprehensive list, use filters to zero in on the best keywords for your site.

You can then expand your keyword lists using the:

- Related Keywords report
- **Questions Queries report**

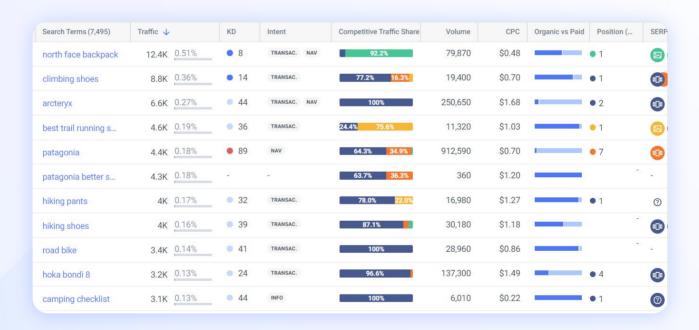


Building topical authority with Similarweb

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

Method #2: Use the Similarweb competitor analysis tools Since SEO is competitive by its very nature, you should examine the keywords your most successful competitors are targeting.

By using the Similarweb Keyword Gap tool, you'll get a clear picture of the keywords the top sites in your niche are targeting.



Building topical authority with Similarweb (cont.)

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

02

Structure your keywords

Just having a comprehensive list of keywords is not enough. Your next crucial step is to build out a topical hierarchy of keywords.

Step 1: Sort your keywords into broad categories

Using your keyword list, sort your keywords into broad categories. For example, if you are researching the topic of online marketing, your broad categories might be:

Affiliate marketing Digital marketing **SEO** Content marketing Social media marketing **PPC**

Think of these broad categories as the subcategories. You can use them to define your URL folder structure.



Step 2: Divide categories into clusters

Now that you have a list of keywords sorted by category, each keyword list should be sorted into topical clusters.

Using the online marketing niche mentioned above, let's break down the SEO category further based on SEO keywords:

SEO tools Keyword research **Backlinks** Off-page SEO On-page SEO |

Building topical authority with Similarweb (cont.)

Site-wide factors > Topical authority

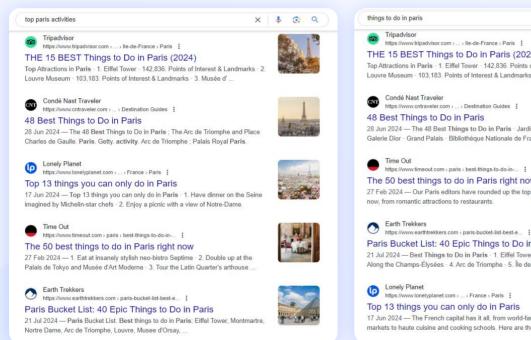


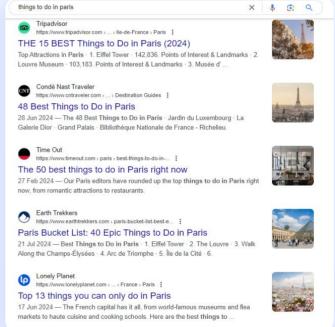
Divide terms by search intent

Since people are unique, they tend to find many ways to search for the same thing. The result is you are likely to find many keywords with the same user intent. Group all keywords that have the same intent together. This will ensure you don't create duplicate content.

For instance:

- Things to do in Paris
- Top Paris activities
- Best things to do in Paris





04

Create a content plan

With your keywords segmented into topics, subtopics, and clusters, create a content plan targeting one cluster at a time. Start with low-competition clusters to achieve quick traffic wins and build your site's topical authority.

Site-wide factors > Site authority

1.2 Site Authority

Site authority metrics have been a known factor in SEO for some time, as Google uses site-wide metrics to adjust rankings during Core updates. While backlinks have long been recognized as a content quality signal, we also see backlinks as part of the site-wide quality metrics. In this section, we cover some of the interesting site authority metrics we found.

Site Authority

Site-wide factors > Site authority

DEFINITION

Site Authority is a metric that impacts a website's ability to rank relevant content in organic search results within its market niche.

Site Authority ranking signals:

- SiteLinkOut: Measures the quality and relevance of all the site's \rightarrow outbound links to establish if the site links out to reputable external sources.
- SiteLinkIn: Measures links from other authoritative sources. \rightarrow These inbound links can enhance the site's authority and improve its search engine rankings.
- SitePR (PageRank): Measures the site's importance based on \rightarrow the number of quality links pointing to it.
- Site Quality Standard Deviation (Stddev): Is a site authority \rightarrow signal that evaluates whether a site has consistent quality across its pages.
- Racter Score: Measures the quality of automatically generated \rightarrow content on the site.

Site Authority: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Site authority

FOLLOW THE EXPERT:

According to Andreas Voniatis: Google SERP #1 rankings generally increase with every unit increase in Site Authority. This relationship is exponential—higher Site Authority yields disproportionately larger ranking benefits, especially at the upper end of the scale.





Andreas Voniatis Artios

Site Authority: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Site authority

We see the same pattern repeat in almost any industry.



IT MSP



The legal sector



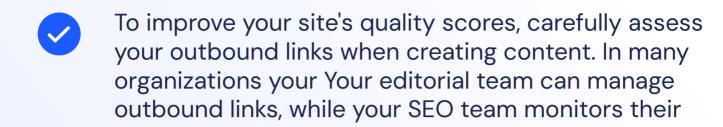
HR SAAS



Site Authority SEO takeaways

performance and impact.

Site-wide factors > Site authority



To maximize the benefits of inbound links, focus on acquiring them from high-quality domains. This means taking a quality over quantity approach, including sources like newsjacking and digital PR.

Optimize content across your entire website. Low-quality content in any section can impact the site's overall quality assessment. This means working with your editorial team to audit content periodically.

The Racter score suggests that Al-generated content can be used effectively if it meets high-quality standards. This involves comparing Al-generated content with top-performing Google results for your target keywords.

How to build site authority in three easy steps

Site-wide factors > Site authority

You can build or boost your site authority by building high quality links:



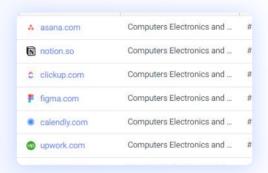
Analyze competitors' backlinks in your niche:

Identify websites that frequently link to multiple competitors. These sites are more likely to link to your content as well, given their history of referencing resources in your field.

Analyzing your competitor's link profiles with Similarweb

Identify your main competitors

The Similarweb Similar Sites report will show your closest competitors by analyzing audience, keywords, and links.



Find your best link opportunities

Spot sites that link multiple times to your competitors. These are your best quick win opportunities.



Analyze your highest performing

Using the URL filter, you can see all the URLs linking to pages that have earned the most backlinks.

| | 400 10 11 11 0 7 1 1 10 1 17 00 |
|---|--|
| 2 | 13 Best Cellulite Creams, Tested and Reviewed for 20 |
| | www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/skin-care/advice/g3614/best |
| 3 | Browse Over 160 July 4th Sales to Shop This Weeken |
| | fashionista.com/2019/07/best-july-4-sales-clothing-beauty-2019 |
| 4 | The 14 Best Sunburn Relief Product |
| * | www.health.com/beauty/best-sunburn-relief |
| 5 | The 14 Best Sunburn Relief Product |
| | www.health.com/beauty/best-sunburn-relief |
| 6 | The 14 Best Sunburn Relief Product |
| 0 | www.health.com/beauty/best-sunburn-relief |
| 7 | 20 Best Acne Body Washes for Bacne and Breakouts i |
| | www.seventeen.com/beauty/makeup-skincare/g28266948/be |

How to easily build site authority

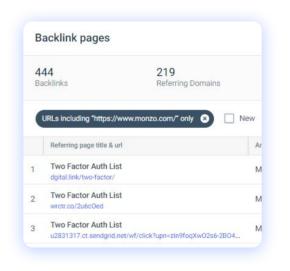
Site-wide factors > Site authority



Create valuable linkable assets:

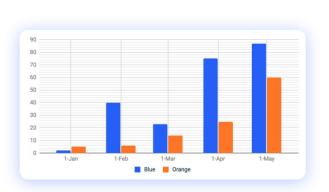
Based on your analysis, try to understand which assets acquire the most links. Are they free tools, data visualizations, or informative content? Identify patterns in what others consistently link to, then create superior versions of these assets.

Find URLs with a large volume of links Using the Similarweb Backlink Pages report, apply the Target URL filter to identify URLs that have attracted the most links.



Analyze the content

Click through to the URL to identify key elements that make the page engaging—like unique data, in-depth research, or interactive features. Reverse engineer these insights to create your own content with similar qualities, ensuring it stands out, offers value, and encourages natural backlinks.



Site-wide factors > Brand strength

1.3 **Brand Strength**

One standout from the Google leak is that to do well in search, building a brand matters. This means search marketing has changed its nature. It used to be a discovery engine that could be used to build up other channels. But now, people find you on other channels, prefer your content in search, and give you a boost in search. In other words, other marketing channels can boost your organic traffic.

"For most small and medium businesses and newer creators/publishers, SEO is likely to show poor results until you've established credibility, navigational demand, and a strong reputation among a sizable audience."



Brand strength

Site-wide factors > Brand strength

DEFINITION

Brand Authority is a signal used to promote authoritative brands. It's derived from quality metrics that include:

- **Branded aueries**
- Quality and trust
- Engagement

Brand Authority ranking signals:

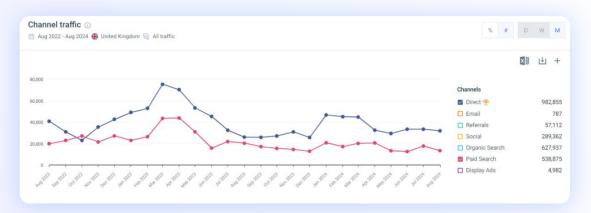
- Brand Query Factor: Measures how often a brand is queried. \rightarrow Higher brand query frequency can lead to better rankings for branded searches.
- \rightarrow **Brand Trust Factor:** Measures the trustworthiness of a brand based on various quality and trust signals. Higher trust factors can lead to better rankings.
- Brand Engagement Metrics: Includes user engagement factors such as click-through rates (CTR) and user interactions with the brand's content. Higher engagement can positively influence rankings.

Brand strength: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Brand strength

What increases branded searches?

Traditionally brand awareness grows with publicity and spend - think big PR campaigns, TV advertising etc. In the digital world, the same principle applies - when analyzing websites with high PPC spend (or social and display) we see an interesting correlation: direct traffic also grows.



In the example above, we see whenever there is a peak in PPC traffic there is a direct correlation in direct traffic. This indicates that the more visible your brand is, the more people become curious and directly search for your brand and enter your site directly.

Most interestingly, the growth in direct traffic has its own follow-on: with direct traffic growth you also see a rise in organic traffic. You can therefore equate brand awareness growth with SEO impact.



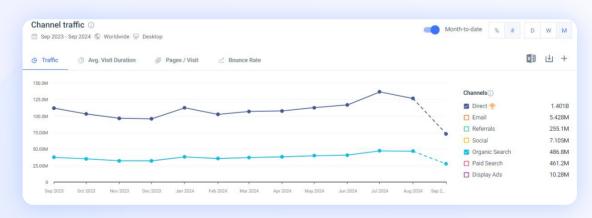
Brand strength: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Brand strength

Even large, well-recognized sites with substantial advertising budgets, such as booking.com, experience an increase in direct traffic when they increase their ad spend, see below:



And again, we see that same correlation with direct traffic and organic traffic growth.

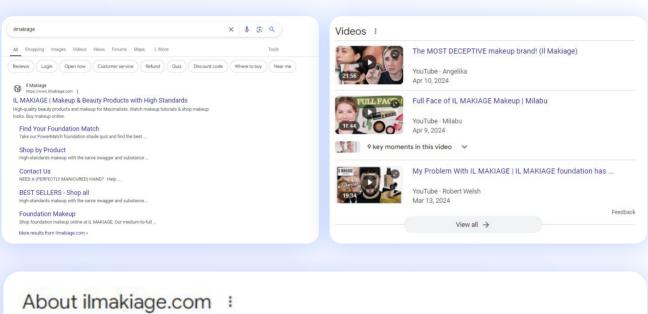


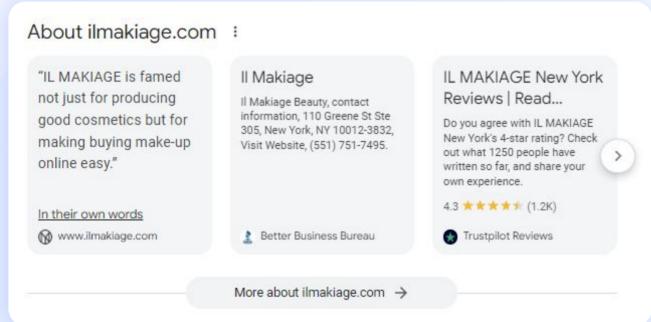
Brand strength: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Brand strength

How to increase revenue through branded searches

Once people are Googling your brand, you have control over how you show up by optimizing your brand SERP. We cover how to optimize your brand SERP in section 2 in the Knowledge Panel section





Brand strength SEO takeaways

Site-wide factors > Brand strength

While SEOs generally overlook branded keywords, we now see that brand strength is a ranking factor.

By collaborating with marketing leaders, you can provide strategic guidance based on trends and performance in branded keyword searches.



Review your competitors to see what marketing channels they are investing in, analyzing the impact on organic searches.



Invest in marketing strategies that increase brand recognition to drive more branded searches. The best way to achieve this is through marketing on multiple channels.



Enhance your website's usability and design to increase user engagement. This involves creating intuitive navigation through clear menus, strategic internal linking, and breadcrumbs.

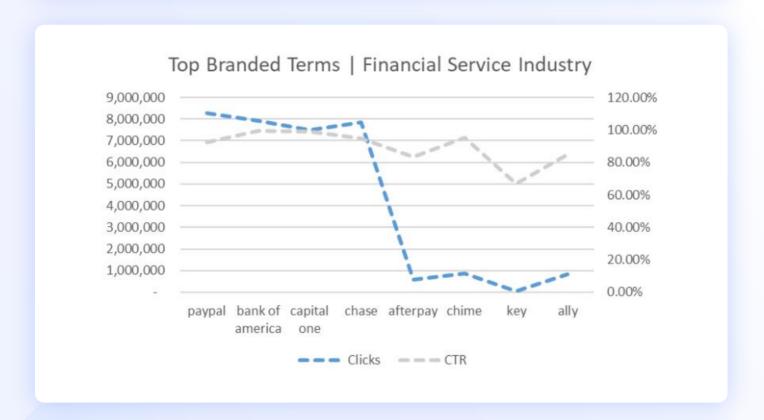


Showcase customer testimonials, security badges, and clear contact information. This builds trust with users and search engines, enhancing your Brand Trust Factor.

Brand Strength: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Brand Strength

Using Similarweb data, we set out to demonstrate the Brand **Engagement** signal and show that brands with higher CTRs have an advantage over sites with less engagement.



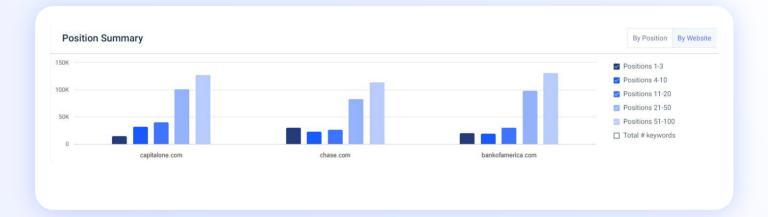
The above data we see that smaller sites in the financial service industry like Chime and Key Bank have some of the lowest click through rates for their main branded keywords when comparing to bigger players like Chase and Bank of America.

Brand Strength: The data speaks

Site-wide factors > Brand Strength

Looking at ranking distribution, we also see that the top players in the finance industry with the highest branded CTRs have strong organic visibility.

This indicates that brands with the highest engagement metrics(CTR) also dominate in top-ranking positions for competitive finance keywords.



On the other hand, below we see that the smaller brands with the lowest branded click through rates have the weakest SERP visibility.



How to measure brand strength with Similarweb

Site-wide factors > Brand strength

Since one of the ways Google measures brand strength is to analyze how often users search for your brand, it pays to track your branded keywords. There are two ways to do that using the Similarweb Website analysis tool.

01

Looking at Branded vs. Non-branded keywords in the Website performance overview will give you a quick snapshot into how frequently users are searching for your brand in comparison to all of your other keywords.

Pro tip: Compare your site with your competitors to see which site has a stronger brand presence online.





02

You can see how users search for your brand and your competitors using the branded filter in the Website explorer Keywords report.

Pro tip: Don't just look for branded terms. Try to find opportunities by looking at keyword modifiers, such as:

- [Brand] pricing
- [Brand] reviews
- [Brand] return policy



How to measure brand strength with Similarweb

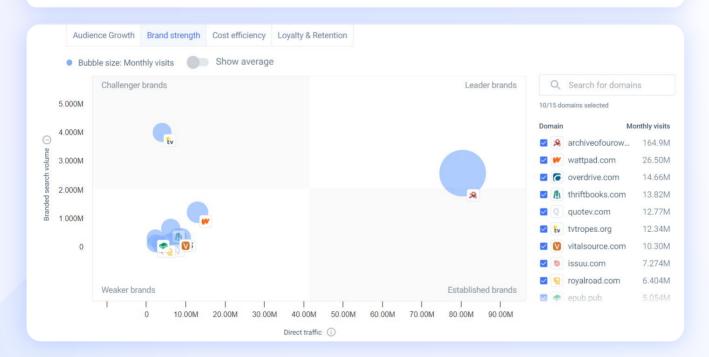
Site-wide factors > Brand strength

SEO strategies have traditionally focused on capturing organic market share through non-branded keywords, rather than emphasizing brand development. Now that we see brand is a significant element in ranking websites, SEOs should incorporate brand measurement into their skillset and strategies.

The two most powerful brand signals to measure are:

- Direct traffic
- Branded traffic

Using the Similarweb Players report, let's examine the biggest brands in the Books and Literature industry.



TVTropes.org emerges as a challenger brand, characterized by low direct traffic but high volumes of branded search.

In contrast, ArchiveOfOurOwn.org stands out as a leader brand, boasting high volumes of both branded search and direct traffic.

The remaining competitors fall into the weaker brands quadrant, achieving lower amounts of both direct and branded traffic.

Another way to measure brand strength is to look at cost efficiency.

Coming soon

Well done, you've made it through the first two sections of this book. We are currently working on the next few sections. You don't need to do anything - we'll send the complete book when they are published.

Here is what's in store:

Section 2: On-page ranking factors

Learn the key on-page SEO elements that impact your rankings, from content optimization to technical tweaks.

Section 3: User behavior metrics

Discover how Google measures user interactions and what you should do about it.

Section 4: Off-page factors

Is there more to off-page SEO than just links? TL;DR: There sure is!

Section 5: Local factors

We dive into the details of Google's local ranking factors. And there are a lot!

All the data you need to crack Google's genetic code



With real user data that updates daily **KEYWORD RESEARCH**

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BACKLINK ANALYSIS Backed by a database of 360tr. links

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