

The **Ultimate** Guide to Long Form Content

What it is and how to write it to
improve your SEO efforts...



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About the author...



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Introduction

At The SEO Works, content is hugely important to improving our client's online visibility.

Google loves information. More and more businesses are realising the potential in publishing quality guides and articles on their websites: it captures interest, traffic and ultimately can develop both brand awareness and conversions.

However, just publishing content isn't enough. You need your content to be found and to be recognised as having value by search engine bots.

This is where long form content comes in. Long form content helps you to be found, makes it easier to rank in results pages and ultimately drives traffic to your website.

It's not always easy to get right, so read this guide to perfect your long form content and help drive traffic to your website.



If you need more help...

Content strategy and content creation is one of the core things that we offer in helping our clients get more visibility and leads online. Get in touch for a free consultation today by calling **0800 292 2410** or visiting **www.seoworks.co.uk/contact-us**

We hope you find this guide helpful!

What is long form content?

The actual length of long form content varies. A standard blog post should be around 1000 words, which means long form content is 1500+. However, it's becoming more and more common to see long form content of 3000 or even 5000 words.

If the thought of all that time makes you sweat a little under the collar, I'm going to break down why it's worth it and, perhaps more importantly, how you go about hitting those high numbers.

Surely shorter is better?

We all know the claims that people's attention spans are getting shorter. Surely in a world of instant answers and immediate information, shorter articles are better?

There is still a demand for short articles, but it's websites like BuzzFeed and BBC News that have the visibility and following to pull them off. They can deliver snappy 500 word articles and don't have to worry about how they'll be found.

The average business, however, doesn't have that kind of visibility.

Instead, you have to earn it.

Short will rarely get you seen in the search results. People are busy so you do have to be concise to keep their interest, but there are ways of achieving this while still playing to Google's algorithm and what the search engines want to see. I'll go into this in more detail later on.

Not that many years ago, you probably would've been under the impression that blogs should be around 500 words long. Even as recently as 2013 this was considered best practice.

Back then, digital content marketing wasn't as common, less businesses were using blogs to drive traffic and short posts were good enough to rank and be found.

However, search engines quickly came upon a problem. Users were searching for information and finding lots of poorly-written and short (although well optimised) blog posts.

People weren't satisfied with the results.

There is still a demand for short articles, but it's websites like BuzzFeed and BBC News that have the visibility to pull them off.

Short content won't get you seen in the search results. Instead, you have to earn it.

The Google algorithm change

Google changed their algorithms to value high quality content that's well-written and packed with information in a major update called "Panda".

This has only become more apparent in recent years. Google constantly changes the algorithms and these continue to favour high quality pieces that are full of information — and that does mean long.



Competing to be seen

When you're writing long form articles, don't expect people to read the entire thing. When you've written the ultimate guide on screwdrivers, for example, the average person probably won't read all 5000 words.

However, that high word count, and ultimately the relevance it produces, is going to get your article seen in the search engine results pages (SERPs) and then users can skip around the article to look for the information they want.

Long form content allows you to compete. You have to write high quality information that's better than the competition.

What's the value?

It's not just competing in the SERPs (search engine results pages) that gives long form content its value. Read on to find out what else it offers.

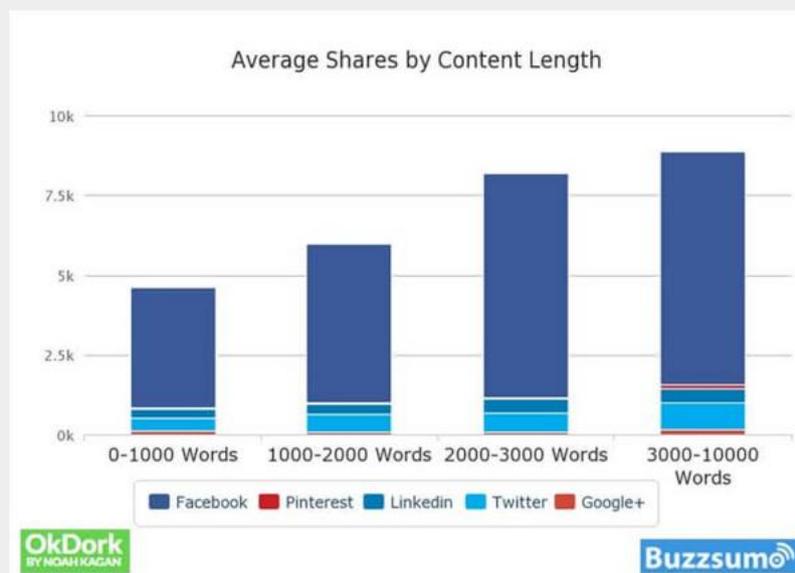
1. Getting found

This one should by now be clear. Google loves information. Its algorithms have been designed to favour high quality content that provides value to the user. One of the best ways to demonstrate to Google that your content is information-rich is through length (combined with quality, of course!). Long form content is more likely to rank and therefore it gives you the best chance of being found.

To clarify, that doesn't mean rambling. We've already said that people are busy and attention spans can be short: long form content should still be concise, but it should also contain loads of information that's relevant to the topic. For example, long form content can be used to create long lists of ideas. I'll talk more about this later.

2. Generating backlinks & shares

Buzzsumo (with OkDork) analysed the number of shares articles get against their word count. This was published a few years ago, but is still found by leading authorities in the SEO world to have remained accurate. They found that the longer an article was the more people shared it:



Shares by content length graph. Source: OKDork

The longer an article and the more information it contains, the more people are going to reference it or show it to others.

It can work for you too. If you put together a really long guide on how to look after a brand new oven, you can send it to your customers when they buy a new oven. If people ask questions that are answered in your article, you can summarise the answer to them as well as giving them a link to the blog.

If an article is packed with information, it's going to be of value to people, which means it's more likely to be shared.

The more an article is shared, the more likely it is to naturally generate backlinks. For example, the OkDork article I've referenced above provided helpful information to me. I wanted to talk about it and therefore linked back to their original blog. A nice, natural backlink.

3. Promotion

Everyone knows that social media is important. Keeping your LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter up-to-date is great, but it's not easy to do without anything to promote.

Blog posts are great material to share on your social media channels to get people to engage with your brand. They make a nice change of tone from sharing your products or services.

Long form content can develop this further as it tends to perform better. More people share it (as we discussed above) and more people engage with it. You can use it to start conversations or get people asking questions.

It's not just through social media that you can promote long form content; email marketing can also be a viable channel, depending on how your business already uses email marketing.

You can also promote your long blogs by getting in contact with people that might be interested in it. You could ask for feedback on your article, or invite them to use your graphic on their own website if they would find it helpful.

Long form content opens a lot of doors for link building and promoting yourself.

The longer an article and the more it contains, the more people are going to reference it or show it to others.

In social media it makes a nice change of tone from sharing your products or services. Use it to generate engagement and start conversations.

4. Generating relevance

Talking extensively and thoroughly about a topic is going to produce a blog that's highly relevant for a certain subject within your industry.

You will naturally include more keyword variations and longer tail keywords in longer content than you could in shorter content. Longer articles therefore naturally include a better, and wider ranging, set of keywords that are relevant to the subject.

This is partly why they rank so well in the SERPs.

However, you can use this relevance to support other pages on your website. By linking to another page internally, you pass on some of the blog's authority and relevance.

For example, if you've written a 3000 word guide on traditional Japanese tea brewing, you should link to your product, traditional Japanese tea leaves. The relevance in the blog helps Google to understand what the product page is about and might boost the keywords for that product. Skip to more on the power of interlinking in your long form content.

Now we understand the benefits, let's get to the juicy bit... **how to write it!**



How to write long form content

Hopefully you can see that long form content is the best way to get your brand and message seen. It's worth spending the same amount of time writing one longer piece of content, rather than two or three less thorough articles.

Now, however, you have a different problem: how do you write it? Follow the steps below and you will be able to get started.

1. Pick the right topic

This is the place you've got to start. Not every topic warrants a long article, which will make it very difficult to write a lot of words on it. Pick a topic on which you know there's a lot that can be said.

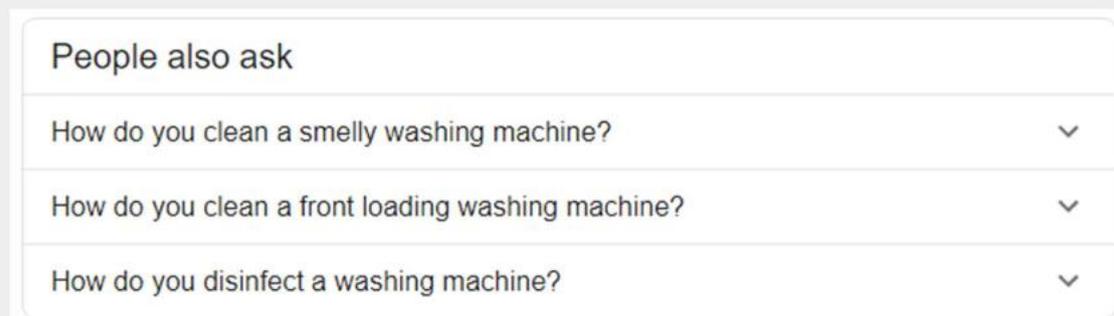
This might mean broadening out your topic. For example, 'How to Harvest Potatoes' is going to be a much shorter article than 'How to Grow & Harvest Potatoes'. Consider whether there's a different angle on your topic that could mean you can be more thorough.

Tips for choosing a topic:

If you're struggling to think of any topics, look for inspiration on your competitors' blogs. What do they share on their social media that gets a lot of traction?

You can also use various online tools to help you. Answer The Public allows you to put in a keyword and see what people have asked relating to it. Be careful though: it will show you all questions and results, not just the popular ones!

Searching for a topic or keyword in Google might generate a 'people also ask' information box with relevant questions. This can be a great place to look for additional ideas for your blog. For example, searching for 'how to clean a washing machine' shows:



How to clean a washing machine Google snippet

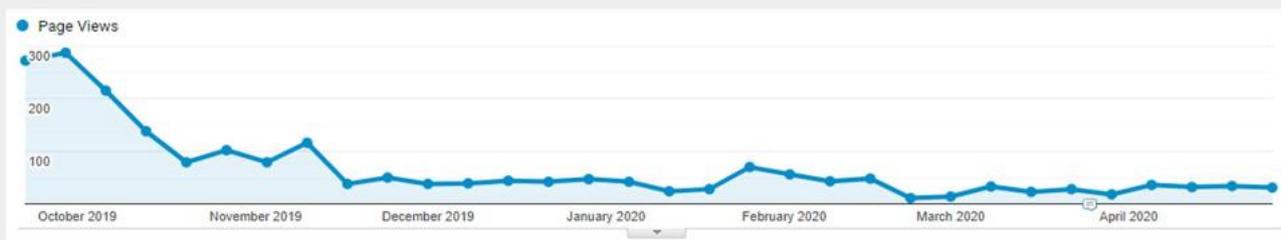
You could then make sure you also include a section on disinfecting your washing machine.

Use search volume tools like Ahrefs, Google Adwords keyword planner, or the free Ubersuggest to get an idea of search volumes around different terms. This will ensure that you're writing content that people are looking for.

Transform old articles:

Another way to generate content ideas is to look back on old articles you published several years back. If they were short and didn't cover the topic thoroughly, you could rework them and make them into more comprehensive guides.

This can be particularly effective if you find articles that were once popular on your website, but are no longer being found by users. Use Search Console or Google Analytics to see what articles were popular. You might be able to filter the URL to show /blog/ strings, depending on how your website is set up.



Searching for once popular articles using Google Analytics

2. Make it unique (or at least better than the competition)

Once you've chosen your topic, take a look at what already ranks in the SERPs for it. How long are those articles? Do they include videos, infographics or images? What points do they discuss?

The real way to rank in the SERPs is to analyse what everyone else is doing. Then do the same, only make yours that bit better!

This technique will show you what kind of factors Google favours for that search term and will mean you can tailor your content to what you already know works well.

However, you have to do it better than the competition if you want to appear in the search results! This could mean making it longer, talking about an extra subject that they missed off, including a video where they didn't... there are all sorts of ways to make content better.

Don't worry about being completely different to what's already out there. While your content needs to be your own, not directly copied, it doesn't need to discuss entirely different things — as long as you make an effort to do it more thoroughly than they have!

3. Be Thorough

This is the biggest trick to writing long form content. You can't write 3000 words on a topic without being thorough! Use Google's 'people also ask' and other tools to consider every angle on the topic you've picked.

What other questions might people want to know? Is there a way to break the header down into a few, more simple points rather than one point that's harder to understand? Do lots of research on the topic, even if you think you know it already, to make sure there's nothing you've missed.

Take this whitepaper as an example. I could've taken out all these tips on how to write long form content and instead given you one paragraph of bullet points with each of the titles instead. Like this:

How to write long form content:

- Pick the right topic
- Be thorough
- Use subheaders
- Don't ramble
- Use internal linking
- Include pictures

It wouldn't have been as thorough nor as helpful. It also would make this article a lot shorter!

The more thorough you can be, the easier it will be to write a longer article without rambling. Quality is more important than quantity, so produce information that's helpful and doesn't repeat itself.

As you're brainstorming the subtopics you're going to discuss in your article — based on your own ideas, how the competition has done it and results from different tools — you'll need to ensure that you've got a plan for how the article is going to flow as a whole.

4. Structure and Subheaders

You might be able to get away with lack of structure in a 500 word blog, but in a 2000 word article it's essential that it follows a clear structure. People won't want to read the whole thing, so having a good structure means it's a lot simpler for a user to find the information they want. This makes it easier to keep people's attention.

Do lots of research on the topic, even if you think you know it all, to make sure there's nothing you've missed.

The more thorough you can be, the easier it will be to write a longer article without rambling. As you're brainstorming the subtopics you'll need to plan for how the article is going to flow as a whole.

Headers are your heroes. They break up content visually, so it's easier to read, but they also guide you as you write the article.

When you're putting your plan together, start by jotting down all your headers and subheaders and breaking down each section. You can then view all the subtopics together and check they make sense in that order, or you can move things around if the structure could be improved.

You can then go through and fill in information underneath each header, building your article up.



5. Don't Ramble

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: don't ramble. At the end of the day, quality is still more important than quantity.

What you're aiming for is a high-quality, long blog, which means it's packed with relevant and useful information in every paragraph.

If you've run out of things to say, and you don't think the topic can be explored from any other angles, then stop. Google recognises quality and your user will recognise it too. You don't want to put people (or bots!) off by rambling for another 1000 words.

Remember what we discussed at the beginning: people are fickle and have short attention spans. This doesn't mean we should avoid long form content, but it does mean you need to remain concise throughout.

6. Give The User A Break

I don't mean handing them a KitKat half way through: cut the user a break by making it easy for them to navigate around the article without having to read it all.

Clear titles help a lot with this, but you can also add 'skip to' cues at the beginning, or even throughout the article. This means a user can get to the information that's most relevant to them and it's easier for you to hold their attention.

To do this, add `<a>` links in relevant places.
Use: `` at the top of your sections. Then add links on relevant anchor texts in your article with this code:
`Skip To Section 1`.

Linking is important to ensure you're making the most of your content, as well as show that it's of a high quality.

It's worth linking out to one or two high quality websites. Internal linking to other pages on your site passes on authority from one page to another.

7. Linking

When you've got a long article with lots of information, there's loads of opportunities for both external and internal linking. Both of these are important to ensure you're making the most of your content, as well as showing that it's of a high quality.

External Linking

It's worth linking out to one or two high quality websites. Don't link to low quality domains, as this won't help your article, but by linking to high quality websites, it indicates to Google (and your users!) that you know how to find good sources to back up your articles — another little indication that your content is good quality.

Link to places that build on your own content, without competing with it!

Internal Linking

When you're writing lots of content on a topic, you're creating a page that's extremely relevant to a certain subject. If there are other places on your website that are linked to this topic, you should link to them!

Internal linking passes on authority and relevance from one page to another. They help bots connect the dots and understand that a certain product or category is also relevant to the subject. It's a great way to boost rankings on other pages.

You can also link to other articles on your website that are connected, giving a user access to even more information. This makes it even more likely they'll come back to you in the future.

Be sure to link to relevant pages and use keyword anchor texts on your links. The higher up in the page content you link, the more authority it passes on. The strongest link is in the first paragraph.

8) Add images

Images should really not be optional in any form of online articles, but especially with long form content. Without pictures, your content will be impossible to read.

They help break up the text to make it easier to read, help the user skip through the article to find the sections that are relevant and can support the ideas you've written about in the content.

Remember to add relevant alt tags to all your images. These should describe what the image shows, but also, where possible, include relevant keywords.

If your budgets don't stretch to taking your own pictures or commercially licensed images, there are lots of free stock image sites you can use. Some examples we can recommend are Pexels, Unsplash and Pixabay. Just try to pick something that naturally fits your article and isn't too clichéd.





Conclusion

Writing long form content should be a key part of your online marketing strategy. It takes time to create good quality content, but by investing in it you will reap the rewards by making your site more relevant to end users and also Google.

A key part of your online marketing strategy

If this sounds like a lot to do, remember that long form content gets your brand found, can generate links and is extremely valuable to your business!

Time well spent

It's worth investing your time and budget into writing long, high-quality content that you can then promote. A long term strategy will in turn create more engagement, opportunities for promotion, and relevant traffic to your site.

Getting further support

If you don't have time to write long form, SEO-optimised content, get in touch with The SEO Works. Our campaigns are tailored to your business's needs to generate more traffic to your website. Call us on **0800 292 2410** or visit **www.seoworks.co.uk/contact-us**

About The SEO Works

The SEO Works is a multiple award-winning digital agency. We're a friendly and experienced team of experts who have been helping businesses grow online for over 12 years.



SEO & Content



Paid Advertising



Websites

Working collaboratively, we deliver results by understanding your industry and aspirations and creating a strategy to reach your customers online.

As a Google qualified partner, we've been recognised as one of the best Marketing agencies not only in the UK, but Europe too.

