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A Human-Centered SEO Approach to Creating Higher Ranking Content for Public Relations using a Content Clustering Method

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Rationale

The most successful PR practitioners know that writing is an essential skill that helps build relationships with various target audiences including reporters, influencers, and customers. As PR educators, it is our responsibility to prepare our students with the necessary writing skills to thrive in a digitally driven environment. To that end, it is critical we teach the importance of using search engine optimization (SEO) and artificial intelligence (AI) when developing content. This assignment teaches students how to optimize content for search engines using content clustering and the PESO Model.

One of the underlying principles of our work in content creation is to consider the idea of how SEO works in relation to what and why people are searching online. This is to understand the searcher's intent and to make it easier for them to find what they are searching for. AI plays an important role in this process. We have seen AI find its way into customer

service, online search and more recently the crafting of articles. These advances give rise to a new phenomenon for communicators: "content intelligence" (Fu et al., 2020). Brandon Andersen (2016), chief strategist at Ceralytics, defines content intelligence as "the science of identifying and predicting the content topics and themes that provide the most value to your audiences. It answers the question, 'What content should I write?'" (para. 1).

Content intelligence focuses on high-value content creation and the hyper-targeting of audiences. Current research would suggest one of the most challenging tasks of SEO experts and copywriters is creating or maintaining the balance between the creative element, search optimization, and connecting with a target audience (Fu et al., 2020). In today's digitally expanding environment, we must teach our students how to develop content using SEO, keyword techniques and AI.

Student Learning Goals

1) Develop a content creation strategy based on the importance of internet search, SEO, and AI; 2) Learn how to use and implement the content map.

Connection to PR Practice and/or Theory

With this in mind, we present the content cluster strategy and activity (Appendix A). Content clusters are a relatively new concept in SEO content strategy. A content cluster approach adopts topic modeling and internal linking to improve the human-centered user experience of content to boost search performance. Using Google's website quality standards "E-A-T" (Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) in addition to "YMYL" topics (Your Money, Your Life) this assignment uses search algorithms to develop a series of articles around the same topic or theme (Shepard, 2020). With audience search intents in mind, this GIFT is structured to teach students how to develop content using the content clustering model by implementing SEO and AI principles (Appendix B/C) (Dietrich, 2021).

Evidence of Learning Outcomes/Assessment

After completing this exercise together, the class engages in discussions to connect the premise behind search and AI, the incorporation of the PESO Model, and students' own content development experiences. Students are excited to talk about their process. Overall, students felt this lesson helped them understand more clearly how to develop better content. They commented that the lesson put the course material into context. Beyond the theoretical and moving into the applicable, this assignment allows students to apply the material they learned to their own content creation by putting into practice the content cluster model.

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Appendix A: Assignment

This lesson is taught as part of a unit on creating targeted messaging with key audiences in mind. Once the instructor has discussed the type of content students will be developing, it's time to shift gears and discuss the content plan using content clustering driven by SEO and AI.

First, think of clusters as networks of related content. Like a mind map or a concept map (Novak & Musonda, 1991), both popular graphical tools for organizing and representing knowledge. In the center or at the top is your organization's main topic. The main topic should be the most important keyword or phrase found in the content creation exercise. This could be narrow or broad in scope. From here, branch out to related subtopics and again into supportive topics. As the map begins to fill in, the final circles are "where the content lives." This could be a blog, but it also could be an Instagram, Twitter feed, TikTok account, or website any form of media from the PESO Model (Dietrich, 2020).

Teaching students the content cluster method helps them distinguish the relationship between ideas. Students should be able to differentiate how their ideas fit together, paying particular attention to where there is an abundance of ideas. Here is an example for the following goal: create a content cluster for visiting San Diego using the PESO Model Content

Map.

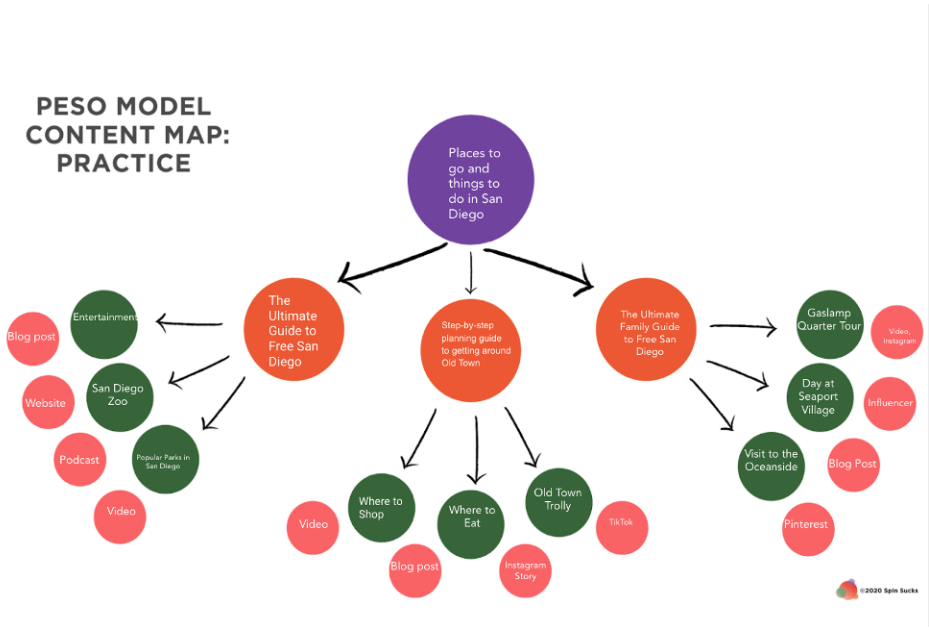
Exercise/Activity: For this example, our main topic is places to go and things to do in San Diego.

Content creation always begins with building a comprehensive list of keywords. Content clusters are a series of behaviorally constructed rationales that are used to develop and deliver meaningful content based on keyword strategy (Luttrell & Masiclat, 2019). The parameters are established on Google's search intents – I want to know, I want to go, I want to do, I want to buy. As an example, the professor offers this: *if I'm a tourist and I'm planning a trip to San Diego I might search "Where should we go in San Diego?" or "What is there to do in San Diego?*"

First, instruct your students to develop a searchable list of keywords by conducting basic Google searches of core keywords surrounding the topic of San Diego. For each search, read the top five URLs to pull out related keywords and concepts. An important aspect to this exercise is to pay significant attention to the "related searches'' keywords at the bottom of Google's search engine results page (SERP). These related searchers give a glimpse into the minds of what others are searching. In the same way that Amazon provides customers with "frequently bought together" or "other customers purchased'' help, students understand the related searches box is performing in the same way. By using algorithms and the science of AI, Google is essentially providing topics that are important and relevant to these search parameters.

Using the example of the tourist visiting San Diego the instructor lists possible search questions: "Where should we go in San Diego?" and "What is there to do in San Diego?"

In this example, the instructor has used both the "do" and "go" search parameters of Google. When one searches "San Diego + Things to Do" they get results that include La Jolla, at night, with kids, Old Town. By adding "October" to our search we've constricted our search further and then receive results that include "festivals," "events" and "fall." Asking where we should "go" provides results including "events," "free," "San Diego Zoo." By digging deep, we can see people are searching for events related to parades, festivals, and even Legoland.



Here is a list of the three content clustering ideas based on this search:

Content Idea 1

The Ultimate Guide to Free San Diego

Content Idea 2

The Ultimate Family Guide to Free San Diego

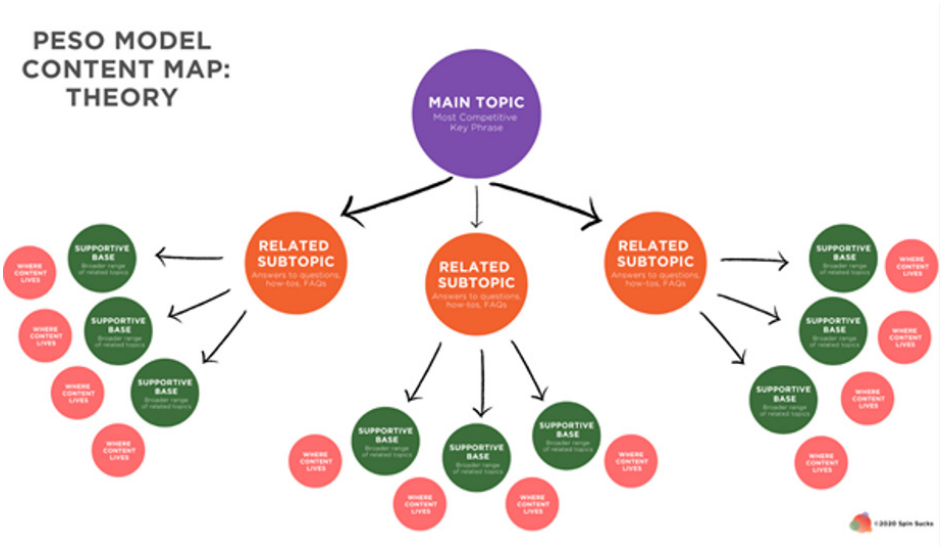
Content Idea 3

Step-by-step planning guide to getting around Old Town

- Where to shop
- Where to eat
- Old Town Trolly

Using the PESO Model Content map, in building out content idea 3, you can see that our activity branched out into the content topics of where to shop, where to eat, and the Old Town Trolly. The final bubbles in the content cluster map illustrate where content will be shared and promoted. This could include websites, videos, or social media channels.

Appendix B: Peso Model Content Map Theory



Appendix C: Peso Model Content Map Practice