

# How MarketMuse Content Optimization Software Helped Neil Patel Double His Traffic and Rankings in 2017



Neil Patel's name has become almost synonymous with content marketing. If you're a digital marketer and you don't know who he is, you're doing something wrong. He's the content guru who you want talking about and using your product. In this case study, we'll outline how he doubled his organic traffic with MarketMuse.

Late last year, we had multiple meetings with Neil's team where we showed them how to use MarketMuse, and after a successful test, they wanted to use MarketMuse content optimization software on the entire NeilPatel.com site. Within a few months of optimizing his content for topical authority, they started seeing major results.

Topical authority is at the core of our philosophy because search algorithms are becoming increasingly sophisticated at semantic analysis, putting topic comprehensiveness and searcher task accomplishment at the forefront of any good content strategy.

The combination of MarketMuse's strategy and Neil's long-form content was an ideal recipe for achieving organic search growth by optimizing existing content. Here, we'll detail the process.

**TL;DR: Neil Patel's content team updated 400 blog posts using MarketMuse content optimization software, resulting in:**

- 100%+ increase in ranking keywords
- 2X+ organic traffic from ranking improvements

First, here's some background:

## Who is Neil Patel?

If you're a content marketer, you likely already know who Neil Patel is: the co-founder of [Crazy Egg](#) and KISSmetrics, and a prolific author who gives marketers and entrepreneurs advice on how to grow their business. You could call him the unofficial King of Content, as he's mastered the art of long-form and pretty much every other type of content you can think of, including videos, podcasts, and e-books.

## What is MarketMuse?

MarketMuse is an AI-based platform to accelerate content planning, creation and optimization. The MarketMuse platform identifies content quality issues on a site and builds blueprints that show exactly how to write to cover a topic comprehensively. Successful brands use MarketMuse to measure and improve content quality, realizing 5X+ gains in search performance.

Neil Patel has championed MarketMuse as a great way to [analyze content quality, depth, and performance](#) and has highlighted the effectiveness of MarketMuse on [his podcast](#). It was a natural next step for his team of experts to take advantage of MarketMuse's unique capabilities to perform a site-wide audit and prioritize the best content optimization opportunities. Here's the story of how our teams worked together to maximize the impact of his entire content inventory.

## Some Background

In December 2016, Neil's Senior Vice President (and friend of MarketMuse) started to update Neil's blog posts and pillar content using our platform. Of course, Neil already had high rankings for a large number of keywords, as well as a strong backlink profile. But since there's always room for improvement – and because the blog is such an important part of his business – Patel's manager wanted to see how a comprehensive content inventory and sweeping update could further boost metrics, including keyword ranking, traffic, and backlinks.

## Our Solution

Updating more than 400 blog posts is no easy task, particularly when assessing each piece of content from scratch. This is where MarketMuse's automation is essential. By March 2017, Patel's manager and a team of subject-matter experts updated over 400 blog posts, using MarketMuse "recipe cards" – or briefs that give specific recommendations on word count, which topics to expand upon, and sections to add that will differentiate the post from top-ranking content.

Here's a step-by-step guide on how Patel's team carried out their blog update:

### 1. Prioritize Pages

With over 400 posts to update, it's helpful to know where to start. Using MarketMuse's content planning software, we identified the potential of each post in Patel's content inventory. The platform analyzed the content quality, breadth and depth of coverage, authority, competitive cohorts, and traffic potential to determine the content that would have the highest likelihood of success through topic-centric optimization with MarketMuse.

Prioritizing posts in order of their potential to improve is the most efficient way to approach an update of this size because you're front-loading content that will make the biggest impact. Once you know where to begin, you can start researching topics for each page.

## 2. Research Focus Topics

One of the key differentiators of MarketMuse is that we analyze topics and intent before keywords. This gives you a much broader list of terms and topics to mention in your content, placing emphasis on comprehensive topic coverage and common user goals. (That stated, many of the same techniques you would use to determine a good target keyword are also applicable in defining a focus topic. You'll want to look at your existing coverage, demand, competition, and difficulty metrics.)

For each piece, Neil Patel's team identified a focus topic, then researched it using our Content Analyzer. With MarketMuse's SaaS solution, you can enter your topic to generate a list of related topics and term variants, as well as a detailed list of competing pages and their Content Depth score. Our proprietary scoring measures how well each post has covered a focus topic. Looking at the Content Analyzer results, the team was ready to turn the data into recipe cards (a.k.a. content briefs).

## 3. Create Recipe Cards

Turning Content Analyzer data into briefs that are easy for writers to follow was a key step – and it's also pretty easy with the MarketMuse platform, which provides recommendations using [predictive artificial intelligence](#). When working on a large volume of posts and a team of several writers, these recipe cards were essential to producing consistent, reliable results.

For each post, there was a content brief that told the writers the:

- Focus topic
- Word Count
- Minimum MarketMuse Content Score (per the Content Analyzer)
- Number of times each topic and related topics should be mentioned
- Term variants
- Objective of the post
- Heading/subheading recommendations
- Common questions to address

The briefs are customizable, and there was more information included for Patel's content, but that's the bulk of the changes involved in the effort. Without MarketMuse, creating briefs for all 400 posts would have to be done manually and taken thousands of hours – just to make the briefs.

## 4. Update Content

With recipe cards in hand, Patel's writers went to work on updating his posts with a focus on topic comprehensiveness. As mentioned, Neil's posts already tend to dive deep, so identifying those areas for improvement required a specialized platform like MarketMuse. In a matter of a few months, the writers had updated all targeted posts with data-based recommendations and began to realize the benefits immediately.

We compared some of the old posts to the updated versions using the [DiffChecker](#) and the [WayBack Machine](#). We also referred back to the recipe cards used during the December update. Next, we'll walk through some examples of how blog posts were updated, and the changes that resulted.

Earlier this year, Neil attributed some of this increase in traffic and rankings to a URL format change. The pillar content that was updated as part of the effort had amazing growth *without a URL change* and new ranking keywords from the MarketMuse-enabled recommendations are directly associated with the content updates. We show that by combining these best practice initiatives, Neil's team of experts proved the value of focusing on content quality and search engine optimization.

## Results

In **December 2016**, before the MarketMuse update, NeilPatel.com ranked for about **43,300 keywords**. These are impressive starting numbers, and it's no surprise because Neil has always been known for writing interesting, in-depth content.

In **August 2017**, about seven months after the updates were complete, **Patel's site ranked for 92,400 keywords and more than doubled the monthly visitors**.

We wanted to get into the details and pulled some specific examples of the posts that were updated with MarketMuse's workflow. Let's examine a couple of blog posts and pillar pages:

## Example 1

### Example 1 10 Tools That Will Get You More Backlinks

#### Recipe card recommendations

RELATED TOPIC	ADDED
backlink check	4
backlink checker	1
search engine	1
checker tool	3
backlink checker tool	1
free backlink	4
seo tool	3
backlink tool	7
incoming link	10
backlink tools	8
search engine optimization	2
natural link	2
link popularity	7
building strategy	7
link building strategy	7

#### OLD URL

<http://neilpatel.com/2016/06/21/10-tools-that-will-get-you-more-backlinks/>

#### NEW URL

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/10-tools-that-will-get-you-more-backlinks/>

 MarketMuse

[See it at neilpatel.com](https://neilpatel.com)

Doing a simple search of both the old and new post shows that the instructions were followed to a T – “backlink check” was added, “incoming link” was added, and so on. Here’s a snapshot of the difference between just the first paragraphs:



<p>Written by Neil Patel on June 21, 2016</p>	
grow rankings	1. grow rankings
Do you have an SEO strategy for pushing your website to the top of the search engines?	2. Do you have an SEO strategy for pushing your website to the top of the search engines?
In addition to creating high quality content, it's imperative to focus some time and energy on link building.	3. 4. In addition to creating high-quality content, it's imperative to focus some time and energy on a savvy link building strategy.
On the plus side, the more content that you create, the greater chance there is that you will naturally receive backlinks. Conversely, there is no guarantee that this will generate the results that you are chasing.	5. Whether you're guest posting on other websites or stealing your competitors' backlinks, you need a game plan. 6. On the plus side, the more content that you create, the greater chance there is that you will naturally receive incoming links. Conversely, there is no guarantee that this will generate the results that you are chasing.
Gone are the days when you could build low-quality backlinks to your website as a means of boosting your website's rankings. Do this today and you'll end up causing more harm than good.	7. 8. Gone are the days when you could build low-quality backlinks to your website as a means of boosting your website rankings. Do this today and you'll end up causing more harm than good to your SEO strategy
Since backlinks remain a top search engine ranking factor, now's the time to implement a strategy that you can trust.	9. 10. Since incoming links remain a top search engine ranking factor, now's the time to implement a building strategy that you can trust.
What's the best approach for doing so? This depends on the type of website you have, the strategy that you are using and your overall view on SEO.	11. 12. What's the best approach for this link building strategy? This depends on the type of website you have, the strategy that you are using and your overall view on SEO.
Regardless of where you stand, it's important to spend time learning more about the many link building tools that are helping other marketing professionals generate positive results.	13. 14. Regardless of where you stand, it's important to spend time learning more about the many backlink tools that are helping other marketing professionals generate positive results for their search engine rankings.
Download this checklist of 10 tools that will get you more backlinks.	15. 16. Download this checklist of 10 tools that will get you more incoming links and better link popularity.
Below, you'll find a list of 10 tools that can help you get more backlinks. When used the right way, one or more of these could have a big impact on your website's rankings.	17. 18. Below, you'll find a list of 10 tools that can help your building strategy. When used the right way, one or more of these could have a big impact on your website's rankings.
1. Check My Links	19. 20. 1. Check My Links
As a Google Chrome extension, this is one of the easiest to use tools for building backlinks.	21. 22. As a Google Chrome extension, this is one of the easiest to use backlink tools for SEO strategy.
One of the best ways to generate high quality inbound links is to pinpoint broken links on other websites, reach out to the appropriate party and suggest that it be replaced with one to your site.	23. 24. One of the best ways to generate high quality incoming links is to pinpoint broken links on other websites, reach out to the appropriate party and suggest that it be replaced with one to your site.
Check My Links allows you to speed up this process. With the extension enabled, you can quickly check the status of each link on a webpage. While most will show up as green, or active, some will be displayed red. These are the ones that are broken. These are the ones that provide you with a backlink opportunity.	25. 26. Check My Links allows you to speed up the process by working as a backlink checker. With the extension enabled, you can quickly so a backlink check on a webpage. While most will show up as green, or active, some will be displayed red. These are the broken external links. These are the ones that provide you with an opportunity to improve your own link popularity. 27. 28. ...

See the full side-by-side comparison here: <https://www.diffchecker.com/tGchahKZ>

DiffChecker shows you exactly what was deleted and added to a piece of content. The content in red is the old, while the content in green is the updated post. Red highlighted text on the left identifies deleted content, and green highlights on the right show you the added text.

Now, the good part: Using [SEMrush](#), we found that the update resulted in a massive increase ranking for keywords related to "backlink." Adding these key terms to the **post increased ranking for 38 keywords and added 229 new rankings**. The post rose from the 12<sup>th</sup> position in SERPs for "backlinking tool" to number one, and it went from 52 in the "best backlink builder" SERP to position three.

## Example 2

Example 2

Beginner's Guide: How to Build a Killer Instagram Following and Increase Your Sales

Recipe card recommendations

RELATED TOPIC	ADDED
instagram account	4
social media	1
instagram follower	6
instagram followers	9
more followers	3
instagram photo	3
more instagram followers	1
popular hashtag	7
social network	5
instagram hashtag	3
free instagram	6
free instagram follower	6
free instagram followers	9
instagram feed	3
social networks	5

OLD URL

<http://neilpatel.com/2016/04/03/beginners-guide-how-to-build-a-killer-instagram-following-and-increase-your-sales/>

NEW URL

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/beginners-guide-how-to-build-a-killer-instagram-following-and-increase-your-sales/>

MarketMuse

[See it at neilpatel.com](https://neilpatel.com)

Again, doing a simple command+F can show you that "Instagram followers" and "popular hashtag" were each added to the post, and "free Instagram followers" was added.

This post was edited heavily, and here's is a snapshot of just one small section of the before-and-after:



264. Otherwise, you'll only see a short-term increase in your <b>Instagram</b> engagement, but your new followers won't convert into additional sales.	264. Otherwise, you'll only see a short-term increase in your engagement, but your new <b>free Instagram</b> followers won't convert into additional sales.
265. <b>Moreover, if you integrate less popular hashtags in your posts, then you'll appear at the top of the search feeds for them. Scout low-competition Instagram hashtags (much like targeting long-tail keywords in your blog posts).</b>	265. <b>Moreover, if you integrate less popular hashtags in your posts, then you'll appear at the top of the search feeds for them. Scout low-competition Instagram hashtags (much like targeting long-tail keywords in your blog posts).</b>
266. <b>Insellycan uses a variety of Instagram hashtags in their updates, including popular ones (like #fashion), moderately popular ones (like #fashiondaily) and less popular ones (like #fashiontrend).</b>	266. <b>Insellycan uses a variety of Instagram hashtags in their updates, including popular ones (like #fashion), moderately popular ones (like #fashiondaily) and less popular ones (like #fashiontrend).</b>
267. <b>image14 1</b>	267. <b>image14 1</b>
268. <b>You can also scout for relevant popular hashtags by your product and brand categories and then group them in Evernote. Richard runs an eCommerce business and he uses this technique to efficiently obtain more engagement from the free Instagram platform.</b>	268. <b>You can also scout for relevant popular hashtags by your product and brand categories and then group them in Evernote. Richard runs an eCommerce business and he uses this technique to efficiently obtain more engagement from the free Instagram platform.</b>
269. <b>image17 2</b>	269. <b>image17 2</b>
270. <b>Pro Tip: Have you not been previously using relevant Instagram hashtags in your posts?</b>	270. <b>Pro Tip: Have you not been previously using relevant Instagram hashtags in your posts?</b>
271. No worries.	271. No worries.

See the full side-by-side comparison here: <https://www.diffchecker.com/ptq58Tiw>

According to SEMrush, this Beginner's Guide to Instagram doubled in the number of ranking keywords – from **221 in December 2016** to **453 in August 2017** – and the position of existing keywords improved substantially. Before the update, the post ranked ninth for "build Instagram followers," and now it's number four.

It ranked 45 for the search term "starting out on Instagram," but it's currently in the ninth spot. Notable new rankings include "Instagram build followers" (number two on SERPs) and "how to get following on Instagram" (seventh place). The post currently holds a top 10 position on 21 relevant SERPs.

These blog posts both saw marked improvements over the December-August period. There is an undeniable correlation between the topics MarketMuse recommended and the increase in keyword rankings.

Patel's pillar pages – which are in-depth, authoritative pages that cover a site's focus topics comprehensively – aren't housed on the blog, so their URLs stayed the same during the update. When you look at the changes that were made and the rankings that were gained, the correlations are similar to those of the blog posts.

## Example 3

Example 3

# SEO Made Simple: A Step-by-Step Guide

URL

<https://neilpatel.com/what-is-seo/>

### Recipe card recommendations

RELATED TOPIC	ADDED
search engine optimization	5
on-page seo	2
meta description	2
content	1
search	7
search engines	2
site	1
engines	2
search engine	9
engine	9
meta	1
optimization	5



[See it at neilpatel.com](https://neilpatel.com)

The recommendations we provided entailed just subtle changes, but they reaped big rewards. As you can see above there were just a handful of topics missing from the original pillar page. Here are just a few paragraphs:

Why?	150. Why?
151. Because a Google customer is <b>happy</b> , when he finds the result that serves his needs in the best way.	151. Because a Google search engine customer is <b>happy</b> when he finds the result that serves his needs in the best way.
152. When you Google "quick and easy homemade mac and <b>cheese</b> ", Google will put all its energy into delivering to you what Google believes is the best recipe for homemade mac and cheese (that takes little time and uses few ingredients) on the entire <b>web</b> .	152. When you Google "quick and easy homemade mac and <b>cheese</b> ," Google will put all its energy into delivering to you what Google believes is the best recipe for homemade mac and cheese (that takes little time and uses few ingredients) on the entire <b>web</b> .
153. It doesn't look for the quickest recipe, the easiest recipe, or throws out a bunch of online shops for frozen dinners.	153. It doesn't look for the quickest recipe, the easiest recipe, or throw out a bunch of online shops for frozen dinners.
154. Google always tries to give you the best possible experience by directing you to the greatest content it can find.	154. Google always tries to give you the best possible experience by directing you to the greatest content it can find.
155. This means your number one job to do well with SEO is to produce great content.	155. This means your number one job to do well with SEO is to produce great content.

See the full side-by-side comparison here: <https://www.diffchecker.com/U7k6uKJK>

This pillar page went from about **890 ranking keywords in Dec. 2017** to **1,135 ranking keywords in Aug. 2017**. But the **traffic to the page increased by 10X**.

In this case, the update increased the post's relevance to search queries *and* improved ranking for some high-volume terms, which ultimately boosted traffic. This is a perfect example of how just a few key changes can drastically improve the performance of your content, and how only a data-driven software platform can identify those topics that still need to be mentioned. For another static URL example, let's examine another pillar page that had a more dramatic content overhaul.

## Example 4

### Example 4 Facebook Advertising Made Simple: A Step-by- Step Guide

#### Recipe card recommendations

RELATED TOPIC	ADDED
ad	202
ads	50
campaigns	22
campaign	44
news feed	12
audience	54
audiences	20
cost	10
reach	11
social media	2
custom audience	19
people	42
ad campaign	13
power editor	3
lookalike audience	6

#### URL

<https://neilpatel.com/what-is-facebook-advertising/>

✦✦ MarketMuse

[See it at neilpatel.com](https://neilpatel.com)

This pillar page underwent a significant expansion. Patel's writers added entire sections to this post, not just paragraphs or sentences:

29. People just suck at making Facebook ads work for them.	29. People just suck at making Facebook ads work for them. They don't truly understand their target audience, so they place ads in the news feed of the wrong people, etc.
30.	30.
31. Today, I'll help you out with that.	31. Today, I'll help you out with that.
32.	32.
33. I'm going to show you a few examples of people who've been successful with Facebook ads and then walk you through setting up your first campaign without breaking a sweat.	33. I'm going to show you a few examples of people who've been successful with Facebook ads and then walk you through setting up your first campaign without breaking a sweat.
34.	34.
35. Even if you're a complete newbie, after reading this guide, you'll have a good grasp of Facebook ads.	35. Even if you're a complete newbie, after reading this guide, you'll have a good grasp of Facebook ads.
36.	36.
37. I mean it.	37. I mean it.
38.	38.
39. I'll start at the very beginning.	39. I'll start from the very beginning, but you can skip to any section below
40.	40.
41. Top Reasons To Advertise on Facebook	41. Top Reasons To Advertise on Facebook
42. Facebook Advertising Definition	42. Facebook Advertising Definition
43. Facebook Advertising Overview	43. Facebook Advertising Overview
44. 3 case studies from successful Facebook advertisers	44. 3 case studies from successful Facebook advertisers
45. How to Setup Your First Facebook Ad Campaign	45. How to Setup Your First Facebook Ad Campaign
46. How To Fail-Proof Your Facebook Ad Campaigns	46. How To Fail-Proof Your Facebook Ad Campaigns
47. Step 1: How to Create a Realistic Budget	47. Step 1: How to Create a Realistic Budget
48. Step 2: Create a Fan page	48. Step 2: Create a Fan page
49. Step 3: Create your first campaign	49. Step 3: Create your first campaign
50. Step 4: Create your ad set	50. Step 4: Create your ad set
51. Step 5: Create your first ad	51. Step 5: Create your first ad
52. Step 6: Create 2 more ads for A/B testing	52. Step 6: Create 2 more ads for A/B testing
53. Step 7: Wait for 24 hours	53. Step 7: Wait for 24 hours
54. Step 8: Kill the ads that don't work	54. Step 8: Kill the ads that don't work
55. Step 9 [Optional]: Increase your budget	55. Step 9 [Optional]: Increase your budget
56. Step 10 [Advanced]: Expand your reach with custom audiences; lookalike audiences	56. Step 10 [Advanced]: Expand your reach with custom audiences; lookalike audiences
57.	57.
58.	58.
59. Top Reasons To Advertise on Facebook	59. Top Reasons To Advertise on Facebook
60.	60.
61. You can't argue with results.	61. You can't argue with results.
62.	62.
63. Which means you can't deny Facebook ads.	63. Which means you can't deny Facebook ads.
64.	64.
65. They're super profitable. (If, and that's a big If, you know what you're doing.)	65. They're super profitable. (If, and that's a big If, you know what you're doing.)
66.	66.
67. Nearly all social media marketers (90%) consider Facebook advertising the most effective paid option out of all social networks, according to an eMarketer study.	67. Nearly all social media marketers (90%) consider Facebook advertising the most effective paid option out of all social networks, according to an eMarketer study.
68.	68.

See the full side-by-side comparison here: <https://www.diffchecker.com/Zc1ii2Zn>

The Facebook ads pillar page went from **1,700 ranking keywords before the update** to **3,900 ranking keywords in August 2017**. Plus, it's in the top 10 of SERPs for more than 200 of those terms. It ranks number 2 for "Facebook ads step by step" and went from position 13 to three for "understanding Facebook ads."

## Conclusion

From our perspective, the biggest "win" for SEO today – one which is also perhaps the most commonly missed – is how much websites can benefit from topic optimization over keyword optimization. There is too much emphasis placed on ranking for a limited list of "primary keywords," despite that most primary keywords on a comprehensive page bring only 10 percent, or less, of traffic. Luckily, there are efficient ways to update existing keyword-centric content to focus instead on key topics and concepts.

Sites like Neil Patel's do well by targeting high-volume keywords, but dig a little deeper and you'll see that it's other keywords – oft-overlooked low-volume terms – that bring in 90 percent of the traffic. Unfortunately, SEOs are still using keyword lists to show success, overlooking topical comprehensiveness. If you focus on writing for topics that people care about, topics that could potentially have 10 times the number of associated low-competition keywords, then you stop competing for the exact phrases your competition is going after and instead cast a wider net.

Neil's site improved because it went beyond the older thinking, and onto the new. The update is a perfect illustration of why content managers and SEOs must teach others to measure performance by page and topic, rather than exclusively by search traffic from keywords.



Management and clients of SEOs can be forgiven for living in the past: some of the largest blogs about SEO and some of the most influential bloggers are still devoting key editorial space to articles about the one-keyword win. Updating your blog to ensure that each post covers its focus topic comprehensively can help you turn old, under-performing content into that which brings in visitors and earns your site credibility and authority.

## Core Takeaways

- Updating your content is a win if you know how to do it effectively
- Optimize for user intent, topics, and comprehensiveness first, then fill in the gaps with keyword targets
- Even successful, In-depth content can be missing key topics that can boost rankings and other metrics

*Also, we'd like to give special thanks to Eric Van Buskirk at [Clickstream](#) and [Scott Hoffman](#) at [NeilPatel.com](#) for helping us out on this case study with supporting data and insights.*