

# How to Predict Search Intent and Seasonality

*Search Intent Whitepaper by Jacob King Stanley*

Search intent and seasonality are both critical to SEO. This whitepaper explains how to predict search intent and optimise for seasonality.

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## What is search intent in SEO?

Today we're deep diving into two of the most exciting topics in SEO: search intent and seasonality. Understanding both of these concepts is key to improving your SEO and digital marketing. We'll cover off what you need to know to get your seasonal SEO campaigns singing, and provide an in-depth look into search intent, the thing that drives every Google search and has shaped search engines into the incredible tools they are today. Let's get to it.

**Search intent** is the thought process behind a search. It's sometimes known as the 'Google moment'. Why is this person opening up their search engine? Perhaps they're searching for the answer to a specific question, or they're looking to purchase a product, or they want to get somewhere. So, what are the different kinds of search intent?

### The most common types of search intent

#### Informational search intent

An informational search seeks to answer a query. Informational searches are commonly categorised as 'top of funnel', meaning the searcher is learning about the topic and is not looking to purchase.

Here are some informational search intent examples:

- "Coronavirus"
- "Kim Kardashian net worth"
- "AFL scores"
- "Directions to Fitzroy"

## Investigative search intent

An investigative search is initiated to compare multiple options with the intent of making a commercial decision, based on links found on the search engine results page (SERP). This searcher is seeking to compare prices, reviews, or ratings that will move them closer to making their decision. Investigative searches can be classified as middle of the funnel – this person is reviewing options before making a final decision.

Here are some examples of investigative search intents:

- “Best SEO agency Melbourne”
- “Top 10 activities Sydney”
- “Cheapest car insurance”

## Transactional search intent

Transactional searches are made with the specific intent to make a purchase. Brand and product names with modifiers like “buy online” and “for sale” are common transactional searches. Transactional searches are usually bottom of the funnel—this searcher is ready to purchase.

Here are some examples of transactional search intent examples:

- “Buy hand sanitiser online”
- “Ebay discount code”
- “Guitar for sale”

## Navigational search intent

A navigational search is trying to navigate to a specific website or webpage. This searcher is using the search engine in place of typing out a URL. Navigational searches are typically short-tail and include a branded keyword.

Here are some navigational search intent examples:

- “StudioHawk blog”
- “Gmail”
- “Forbes 30 under 30”

## Local search intent / travel search intent

These are informational searches with a geographical focus. With more and more searches happening on mobile devices, many people conduct informational searches based on their current location (a localised search intent). Think walking directions from one point to another, or finding out what the best options are for a meal in a specific location. A good example is the “near me” search modifier; [“near me” searches have grown exponentially since 2015](#).

Examples of local search intents include:

- “Lunch near me”
- “Walking directions to Collins Street”
- “Closest petrol station”

## Summary

Understanding search intent allows us to better optimise our SEO execution. Billions of Google searches take place every day, and the majority of them can be attributed to one of the search intents we’ve described above. It’s the job of the search engine to infer the intent of each and every search. And it’s our job as SEO experts to keep up with Google’s search intent inferences, and the resulting SERPs. We’ll expand on that later.

Next, let’s dig into seasonality. Specifically, we want to understand how seasonality affects search intent, and thus the SERPs.

## What is seasonality in Search Engine Optimisation?

Seasonality in SEO refers to the fluctuations in search volumes for keywords and topics over time. As the name suggests, seasonality is affected by seasonal change, but it is also affected by other things, including time-based factors like annual holidays, or the time of day a search takes place. Other seasonal factors may be event-based, like the COVID-19 pandemic, elections, or large sporting events.

Valentine's Day brings huge spikes in searches for florists and chocolates, while December sees a surge in "gift ideas" searches in the lead up to Christmas. Google's autocomplete suggestions are often the first place a searcher will notice, and possibly look for, seasonal changes to results. A search beginning with 'e' will more likely complete to "easter" in March or April than at other times of year, and thus search volumes for easter-centric queries may increase based on autosuggest.

In the same way, a search performed for "hay fever" in Spring (the peak hay fever season, when demand for hay fever remedies is at its highest) might yield a different SERP to one in winter, when hay fever is not a common issue.

*Ecommerce sites in particular may experience rapid changes to rankings based on seasonal change.*

Our work has also shown that that commercial, high-volume keywords can cause a page to jump to the top of the rankings, only to drop out again just days later. [JR Oaks from Locomotive](#)



## How to use Google Trends for SEO

A whitepaper on seasonality wouldn't be complete without covering the seasonal powerhouse, [Google Trends](#). Trends is one of our favourite tools for performing market research, and generating and validating ideas. With its simple interface, we like to use Google Trends to get the big picture with search trends, before going more granular with keyword tools like SEMrush and Ahrefs. The Google Trends UI is visually bold and engaging, making it a great place to hang out and find inspiration.

So, how do you best use Google Trends for SEO? Here are a few of our favourite methods.

### Seasonality and Google Trends

As the name suggests, Google Trends is a powerful tool for analysing seasonal search trends. For eCommerce clients, it's especially important to know when your annual peaks and troughs in traffic are, because they're often directly tied to your revenue.

By default, Google Trends sets the date range to the 'past 12 months', but to get a better view of annual highs and lows, we suggest choosing 'past 5 years', or even '2004-present'. Zooming out like this provides a much clearer picture of annual peaks, and also has the added benefit of showing you when one-off peaks occur. Because if you were to check search volumes in a tight date range, it can be easy to fall into the trap of targeting keywords that have been extremely popular at one time, but are now trending downwards.

### Find timely content ideas with Trending Searches

We suggest using Google Trends to inform your content strategy and to assist in populating your content calendar. And if you need to find hot content ideas for your blog or a media client,

the Trending Search panel is a great place to start. Here, you can see a daily breakdown of trending topics and filter by location, or check the realtime panel and filter the data by category and location. The realtime panel also shows you a handy 24hr trend line that's great for seeing which way interest in a topic is going at a glance.

*When it comes to trend lines, remember—up and to the right will see you right!*

Location, location, location

Use the location feature to ensure you're checking relevant market data. If you have international clients or a globalised business, make sure you check seasonal changes in each of your relevant locations to ensure that you're targeting the right keywords.

For example, even if it's cold outside where you are, you don't want to be writing content about "best winter coats" for a client in the USA if they're in the middle of the northern hemisphere summer!

Check search volumes across multiple platforms and categories

You can check trend data for the following search types in Google Trends:

- Web Search
- Image Search
- Google Shopping
- Youtube Search

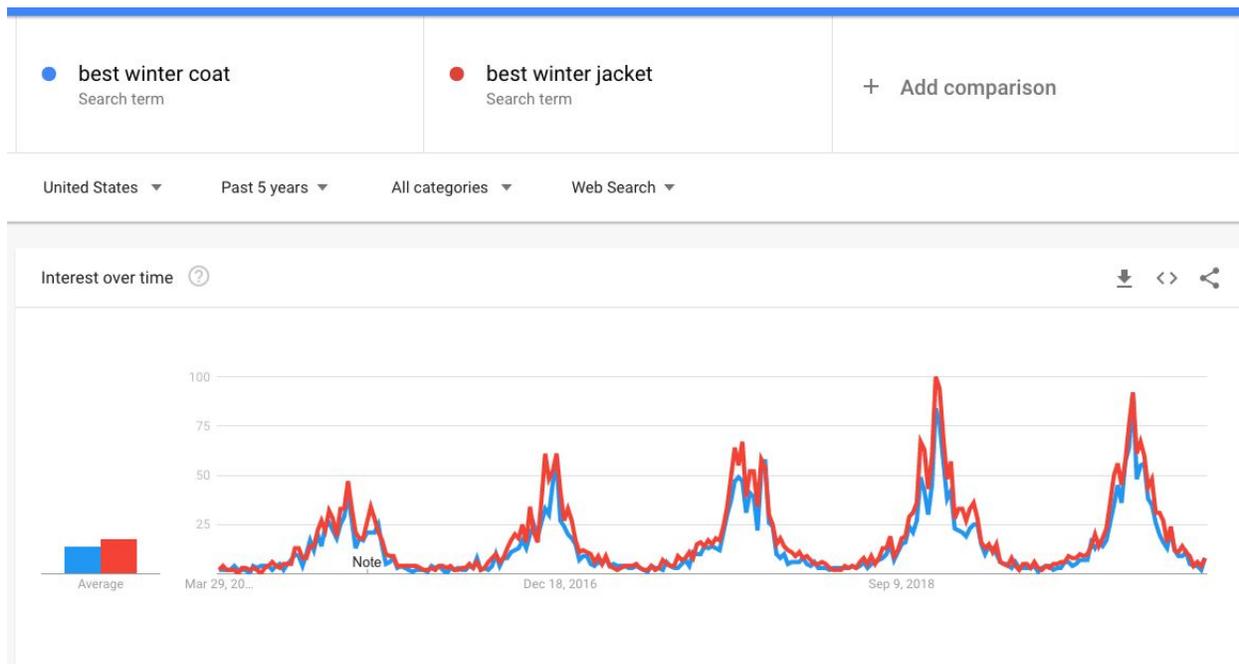
You can also filter by popular categories, including business and industrial, sports, health and real estate. These features give you the ability to get great keyword ideas for clients across multiple industries and locations, all in the one tool.

## Compare and Contrast

The compare feature in Google Trends is handy for checking the relative popularity of keywords and synonyms that are semantically the same, but have different spellings due to cultural or linguistic variances.

For example, we can see below that despite meaning the same thing, “winter jacket” consistently has a higher peak search volume than “winter coat” in the USA. There are many variants of English used all over the world, and quirks and unique spellings exist for each one.

Another example, “father christmas”, “santa claus” and “Kris Kringle” all refer to the same thing, but finding out which has the greatest search volume in your target market is important. We also suggest cross-referencing your keyphrases generated in Google Trends with your keyword tool to double check that you’re optimising for the most valuable keywords and variations possible.



*Semantic language variations can affect traffic potential. Source: Google Trends*

## Summary

A powerful tool whether you work in digital marketing, SEO or ecommerce, Google Trends provides you with the guidance you need when kicking off your seasonal campaigns. Using its various features, you can gauge where the market is at right now, and how things move over time. Used in conjunction with other keyword tools, it's a goldmine of inspiration and keyword ideas.

**Note:** Google Trends data is best used as a guide, not an exact reference. The method in which the data is calculated and scaled is aimed at simplifying the results, in order to generate an easily-digested trend line that broadly correlates to the search volume, rather than providing an absolute measure. For example, [Trends removes repeat searches in quick succession from the same user](#) in its data in order to provide a better overall experience.

Next, let's explore some ways you can optimise your keywords, content and strategies for seasonality.

## How to optimise for seasonality

### Review seasonal data

Before diving into your clients' seasonal data (if available), use Google Trends to get a high-level view of seasonal search trends. Test a few short-tail keywords relevant to your industry and note their annual peaks and troughs. From there, you can see the peak times you need to optimise for. Then, dive into your clients' seasonal data if possible, or perform a competitive analysis in SEMrush or Ahrefs to see where opportunities for growth exist. If your own data isn't giving you the whole picture, put your competitors' data to work for you.

### Fill in your content calendar

Once you've identified your seasonal peaks, mark a content calendar with every milestone, ensuring generous lead time is included for each campaign to allow for SEO work to be done. At StudioHawk, we like to have seasonal campaigns ready to go 3 months prior to our target date. This allows for rankings to grow in the lead up to the peak. More on that below.

## Execute Early

If you have an eCommerce client who wants to rank for specific keywords related to “Black Friday” and “Cyber Monday” in November, we suggest designing and rolling out their seasonal SEO strategies back in early June. In this example, we’d aim to finish work on the campaign and roll out at the end of August, giving ample time before the November target date.

## Update old Content

You can leverage the SEO equity in old content by updating it with new information and seasonal on-page optimisations to keywords and metadata. If you need a refresher on how to make sure your content is properly optimised, check out our post on [how to write a blog post that ranks](#).

*A good piece of content is probably filled with a ton of valuable snippets that can be chopped out for new social media posts or new blog topics.*

Thinking like this helps to extract maximum value from your old work and increase the potential for more backlinks with minimal effort.

## Summary

Ensuring that your SEO is optimised for seasonality takes a lot of careful planning, but the rewards are worth it, when it means you and your clients can be flying high on a wave of conversions while others are lagging behind. Get a firm grip on when your high and low seasons are, and prepare your seasonal SEO campaigns well ahead of time.

## Why it’s important to keep up with SERP updates

So we know a seasonal SEO strategy is a must. If you’re not optimising your SEO strategy for seasonality, you’re missing out on rankings, traffic, and potentially revenue. But there’s also the regular changes Google makes to the layout of its SERPs to factor in.

If you're looking at the SERPs one day and think "did Google change its look?", the answer is probably yes. Google iterates on its SERP layouts regularly. Part of being good at SEO means ensuring you keep up with the changes to each update, especially in the context of optimising for featured snippets, knowledge cards, local packs and other dynamic features that SEOs target on behalf of their clients. An example is when [Google recently changed the layout of its shopping feature.](#)

## Old school SERPs

Web Images Video Maps News Shopping Gmail more ▾ | Web History | My Account | Sign out

Google  Search [Advanced Search](#) [Preferences](#)

Web [Show options...](#) Results 1 - 10 of about 10,300,000 for [text shadow html](#). (0.18 seconds)

**Text**  
In the following example for **HTML**, the **text** content of all A elements acting as hyperlinks (whether visited or not) will be underlined: ...  
[www.w3.org/TR/CSS2/text.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

**How to make css drop shadow text. Drop shadow text.**  
The headline above is not a graphic, but **text** with the **CSS shadow** filter applied. You can code to your **html** directly inline or use it in a stylesheet like I ...  
[www.hyperurl.com/cssdropshadow.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

**CSS - text-shadow**  
The **text-shadow** declaration allows you to create a **text shadow**, i.e. a slightly moved, slightly blurred copy of a **text**. I assume it could be useful in ...  
[www.quirksmode.org/css/textshadow.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

**Creating Cross Browser Compatible CSS Text Shadows**  
In the example above, the **html** which I used to get the **text** shadowed across all browsers was `<p class="shadow" id="shadow_1">In shadow</p>` ...  
[www.workingwith.me.uk/.../css/cross-browser-drop-shadows](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

**CSS Text-Shadow in Safari, Opera, Firefox and other Web Browsers**  
The CSS 2 property **text-shadow** is supported in Safari since version 3 (also available for Windows), Opera since 9.5, Firefox since 3.1, Konqueror and iCab. ...  
[maetig.com/code/css/text-shadow.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

**Drop Shadow CSS**  
**text-shadow**. Wondering how it's done? Here are the **HTML** codes: `<span id="text"> text shadow </span>`. **CSS** codes: `#text{ font-size: 3em; /* optional, just to ...`  
[phoenity.com/newledge/drop\\_shadow/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

**HTML Text Shadow, And Webpage Templates.**  
3 posts - 3 authors - Last post: 11 Nov 2003  
First off, how do I simply add **shadow** to ordinary **text** in frontpage? like this: [http://www.tdwcian.com](#) Secondly, does anyone know of any ...  
[www.ozzu.com/.../html-text-shadow-and-webpage-templates-118905.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

**CSS text-shadow Fun: Realtime Lighting Demo - zachstronaut**  
22 Jun 2009 ... [http://www.zachstronaut.com/lab/text-shadow-box/text-shadow-box2.html](#). It gets kind of choppy in Safari with that gradient. ...  
[www.zachstronaut.com/.../css-text-shadow-lighting-demo.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

**Cross-browser text-shadow - CSS & (X)HTML - Kilian Valkhof**  
With my discovery of almost cross browser **text-shadow** something kept nagging me: It didn't work in Firefox. A couple of days ago I went back ...  
[kilianvalkhof.com/2008/css-xhtml/cross-browser-text-shadow/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

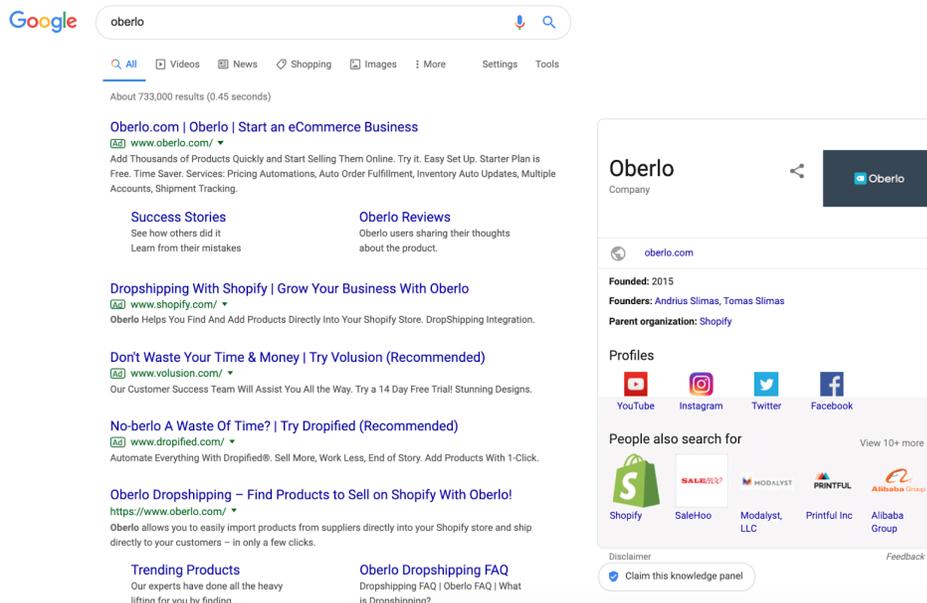
**Ajaxian » Fun with text-shadow**  
[http://www.zachstronaut.com/posts/2009/06/13/exploring-css-text-shadow.html](#). Comment by zachstronaut — June 29, 2009 ...  
[ajaxian.com/archives/fun-with-text-shadow](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Ⓞ](#) [ⓧ](#)

Searches related to **text shadow html**  
[css text shadow](#) [safari text shadow](#) [jquery text shadow](#) [css3 text shadow](#)  
[text shadow internet explorer](#) [mozilla text shadow](#) [font shadow html](#)

 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Next

[Add a result](#) - [See all my SearchWiki notes](#) - [See all notes for this SearchWiki](#) - [Learn more](#)

## New school SERPs



## How SERPs have evolved to match search intent

Google is constantly tinkering with its SERP designs in order to provide a more satisfying user experience. Over the last decade, Google has gone about achieving a better UX by diversifying the layout of its SERPs to include dynamic content that goes far beyond a page of 10 blue links that used to be the norm.

A SERP now may include any combination of dynamic features depending on the searcher's device, location, current seasonality, and the inferred search intent. All of these factors play into Google's designation of the optimal SERP for each search.

Since search intent inferences play a key role in how the algorithm serves up a SERP, it's important to consider your businesses' keywords and how to best optimise for each type of SERP feature your website ranks for.

At StudioHawk, we like to categorise keywords by search intent, so that we can target users at different stages of the funnel, informational keywords for top of funnel, and transactional keywords for bottom of funnel users.

For example, brick and mortar stores might want to optimise for the local packs that appear on the SERP above the organic listings, while eCommerce sites will want to look at transactional keyword optimisation to get the best shot at bringing in valuable transactional search traffic.

Another example is a properly optimised list post. These have a great chance of obtaining the featured snippet for informational searches for recipes or “top 10” posts. Read our post in the link following if you want to learn more about [how to optimise for featured snippets](#) and increase your chances of obtaining that hallowed “position zero”.

### How to keep up to date with SERP changes

As SERPs evolve constantly, it can be difficult to stay up to date with the latest iterations from the search engines, and how to best optimise for features as they evolve. Some good ways to keep abreast of SERP product updates are:

- Follow [Google's blog](#)
- Follow the [StudioHawk blog](#) and our [social media](#) where we'll keep you in the loop with important news from the world of SEO
- Follow the conversation on social media by following industry-specific hashtags like #SEO and #SERP

### Summary

It's important to stay on point with the changing layouts of the SERPs and the implications each change has for you and your clients. Reach out to your trusted [Google Partner agency](#) so they help you rank for as many dynamic SERP features as possible.

Data from 2019 suggests that [less than 50% of Google searches now result in a click](#), which is no accident. Google's intention behind its SERP work is to match the search intent more efficiently and, where possible, satisfy the search query on the SERP itself.

## Building a search intent keyword list

A keyword list categorised by search intent can greatly improve your content marketing. The better your understanding of the topics, queries and search intents of your prospects, the better your chances of resonating with them and converting them into customers. Having an intent-based list of keywords is a great way to build content that captures users along the various different stages of the customer journey. Here's how you go about it.

**Note:** the below is just one possible way of slicing this process, if you have a different approach or thoughts on how to improve it, leave a comment and let us know!

### Start with the basics

It's important to understand the core offerings of your business in order to effectively build a keyword list. Start with your branded terms and think of some short-tail keywords related to your products and services (in our case, we'd start with "SEO agency"). Then, plug them into Google and make note of some of the related searches and "people also search for" suggestions. You can also use autosuggest to get some ideas.

*Pro tip:* a simple, free way to expand your short-tail keywords into long-tail phrases is to plug a short phrase into the search box, and then see what pops up in the autocomplete suggestions as you cycle through the alphabet. E.g. start with "content calendar", then expand to "[content calendar] a..., b..., c..., etc" to see what pops up for each letter and find new variations and keyword ideas. Using the [Keywords Everywhere tool](#) will also give you a keyword's traffic and competition data at a glance, right in the autosuggest field itself.

### Define your search intent lexicon

Once you have your baseline key phrases, the next step is to establish what our modifier language looks like for each type of search intent. Using the search intent categories we outlined earlier, here's what your search intent lexicon might look like:

## Informational search structure

Informational queries are often questions, but may also be short-tail phrases containing branded terms. The modifiers for informational queries might include:

- *How to* [do the thing]
- *What is* [the thing]
- *When did* [the thing]

## Localised intent/travel intent search structure

- *Near me*
- [thing] *near* [place]
- [place name] *to* [place name] [drive time/flight time]

## Investigative search structure

- *Best* [product/service]
- [product 1] *vs* [product 2]
- [brand] *alternative*
- *Top 10* [things/places/activities]

## Transactional search structure

- *Buy* [product] *online*
- *Where to buy* [product]
- [brand name] *voucher*

## Navigational search modifiers

Ranking for navigational searches is both very difficult and generally not advisable; a person trying to navigate to “youtube” is probably only looking to access their youtube account. We don’t recommend targeting your competitors’ branded queries in your SEO strategy unless it’s for comparative purposes.

- If you want a quick search intent language reference, keep a copy of this table handy

| Search Intent     | Informational                          | Investigative   | Transactional  | Local/Travel  | Navigational |
|-------------------|--|---|--|---|--------------|
| Modifier Language | Who, what, when, where, why, how, find | Best, top 10, vs, versus, compare, comparison, reviews, alternative | Buy, buy online, shop online, voucher, coupon, [product name colour/size/quantity], [men's/women's/kid's product name] | Near me, in/near [place name], directions to, drive time, flight time, by car |              |

*Some common search modifiers categorised by search intent*

## Combine and test

Once you've got your core keywords and modifiers, it's time to start combining them into phrases. We recommend testing your key phrases with a keyword tool like Ahrefs or SEMrush to see which combinations yield the most valuable results. Dump all of this info into a spreadsheet and you've got yourself an abundance of keyphrases and content ideas to match any search intent.

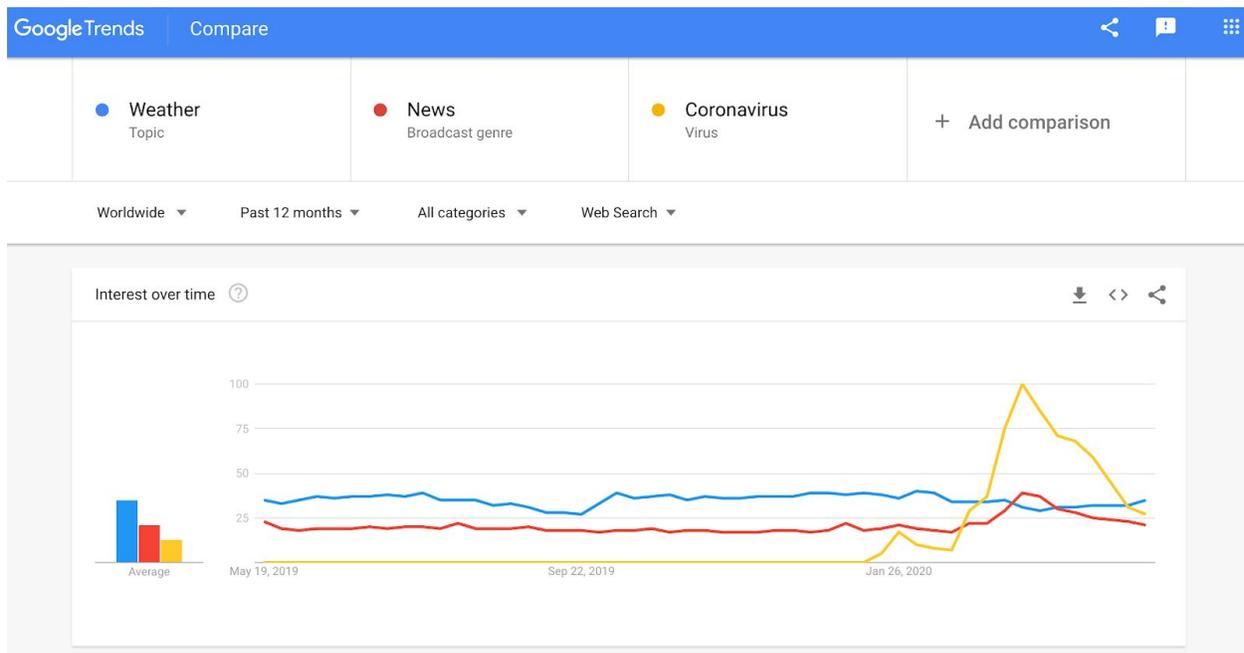
## Summary

Having a keyword bank that's based on search intent ensures you can meet your prospects with relevant content at any stage of the funnel, whether they're making that first informational search, comparing products or are ready to buy.





## Phase one: first iteration of Coronavirus SERP upgrades



*“Coronavirus” became the world’s most searched term in 2020. Source: Google Trends*

Google reacted to the new search intent by implementing an updated SERP layout for “coronavirus” keywords (and similar terms like “corona”) Initially, a January update to the SERP layout featured Google’s SOS Alerts (seen before in previous crises). Later, the search engine added knowledge panels featuring a World Health Organisation information video and outbreak data visualised on a map panel.

Schema.org followed suit on March 17, announcing that its [version 7.0 release](#) included new structured data vocabulary related to COVID-19. The vocabulary changes motivated by Coronavirus were:

- “SpecialAnnouncement” and its associated markup are designed to provide a platform for simple date-stamped, textual updates from governing bodies and local organisations. Initially, the “SpecialAnnouncement” type is optimised for Coronavirus-related updates.
- “eventAttendanceMode” is improved to allow for situations where an event has moved from a physical location to online only
- “CovidTestingFacility” was also added as a “MedicalClinic” type to signify a facility where testing for COVID-19 is available

Phase two: better implementation, official announcement

In March 2020, Google improved its SERP layout by streamlining its SOS Alert and WHO information panels into a dynamic knowledge panel that more efficiently answered the common search intents regarding the virus.

The image shows a screenshot of a Google search result for 'Coronavirus disease'. At the top, there is a red alert banner with a triangle icon and the text 'COVID-19 alert'. Below this, the title 'Coronavirus disease' is displayed. Underneath the title are four tabs: 'OVERVIEW', 'SYMPTOMS', 'PREVENTION', and 'TREATMENTS', with 'OVERVIEW' being the active tab. The main content area is divided into three sections: 1. 'Help and information' which contains two links: 'Coronavirus (COVID-19) health alert' from the Department of Health (health.gov.au) and 'Coronavirus information - Australia' from the Australian Government (australia.gov.au). 2. 'About' which provides a brief definition of COVID-19 as an infectious disease caused by a new virus, and describes its symptoms (cough, fever, difficulty breathing) and prevention methods (hand washing, avoiding face touching, and avoiding close contact). 3. 'HOW IT SPREADS' which explains that the virus spreads primarily through contact with an infected person (coughing or sneezing) or by touching a contaminated surface. At the bottom of the panel, there is a link 'Learn more on who.int', a disclaimer 'For informational purposes only. Consult your local medical authority for advice.', and the source 'Source: World Health Organization' with a 'Learn more' link.

Feedback

*Google's Coronavirus SERP knowledge panel addresses multiple search intents*

This SERP format freed up more screen real estate for news results and organic listings.

Google outlined its process on its blog in an [official statement](#) about the SERP updates:

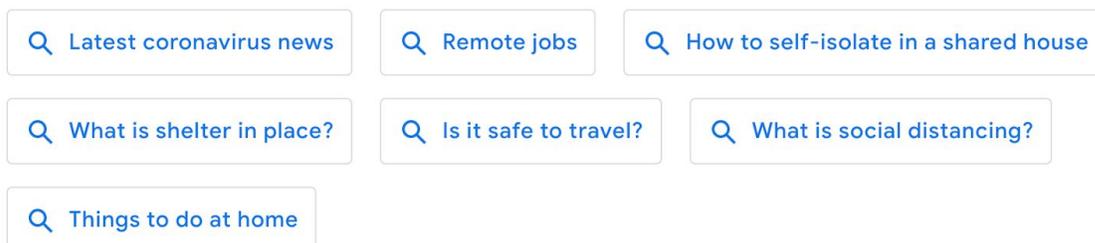
“Now, as we continue to see people’s information needs expanding, we’re introducing a more comprehensive experience for COVID-19 in Search, providing easy access to authoritative information from health authorities alongside new data and visualizations.”

“*Easy access to authoritative information*” could be the perfect Google elevator pitch, and it neatly sums up their approach to the SERPs.

Google also added a dedicated [COVID-19 website](#) which provided valuable resources for the most searched terms. Visitors received the same knowledge panel as shown on the SERP, plus an expanded SOS alert panel, data visualisations, and resources for those in self-isolation and working from home.

Google’s COVID-19 website also outlined a few of the most popular “people also search for” terms related to COVID-19, as these do not appear on the SERP as they do for regular queries. These searches provide us with valuable insights into the emerging search intents as they shift. Remote work, self-isolation and adapting to life in the home became high-volume search topics in 2020.

Common searches related to coronavirus (COVID-19)



*The most commonly searched terms in the early stages of the Coronavirus pandemic*

## Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a timely case study into Google's approach to matching search intent, and how they roll out the changes to the SERPs to match the latent intent. These SERP changes reflect Google's attitude towards search intent which remains unchanged: provide the most valuable, timely information possible in the most easily-digested format.

Next, let's take a look into sentiment, the general perception of a brand. We'll look into how Google changes its SERPs based on sentiment, and how you can take control of your online reputation using tools and manual techniques.

## What is SERP Sentiment?

As SEO specialists, it's a core part of our business to have a deep understanding of how our clients' brands are perceived by the public. There's the SEO aspect that we at StudioHawk specialise in, but there's also a more broad concept that we also need to be across: sentiment. Now, let's dive into sentiment and how it influences the SERPs.

## More about SERP Sentiment

Sentiment is the general feeling towards a brand. In the context of SEO, sentiment can refer to the sentiments of links displayed on the SERPs. When people plug some branded keywords into Google, are the results favourable? Is there a positive, neutral, or negative prevailing sentiment in the links? Asking these questions allows us to analyse the impact of links and their potential impacts on our brand's perception.

Since we know that one of Google's ranking factors is to provide its users with authoritative information, it follows that the SERPs tend to rank content that originates from high authority domains/URLs, with high rates of engagement; a lot of shares, engagements and backlinks. And if there's a negative sentiment in the media towards a particular brand, it's likely to correlate to the results on the SERPs too.

Understanding what the general sentiment is towards your clients' brands, and how Google influences that sentiment in its SERP layouts, is particularly important in online reputation management, a concept we'll cover in more detail below. Given the right metrics to interpret online sentiment, it's possible to understand the prevailing sentiment, and also to control it.

### **Summary**

Having an understanding of the prevailing sentiment towards your brand is an important part of your digital marketing strategy. If there's a neutral or negative sentiment present, it can seriously affect conversions, sales and acquisition costs. At StudioHawk we like to use a tool like Chatmeter Pulse to gauge online sentiment.

Next, let's look at some practical ways you can manage your online reputation.

## Online Reputation Management

Online reputation management is the process of interpreting, analysing and managing the online sentiment towards a particular brand. By understanding the prevailing sentiment present in the SERPs for branded keywords, we can understand what kind of sentiment there is towards our brand. Understanding SERP sentiment is a great way to gauge where traffic and conversions might be being lost.

### Performing a Sentiment Analysis

[A study by Search Engine Land](#) suggests that user sentiment can be broken down into three categories: positive sentiment, neutral sentiment and negative sentiment. Using these metrics, we can perform a sentiment analysis and understand the overriding sentiment of the results found on page one—the only SERP page 95% of users look at.

**So, what is a sentiment analysis?** A sentiment analysis means analysing pieces of content such as online reviews (we suggest using one of the tools described below for this), and the prevailing sentiment on the SERPs.

Once you've categorised sentiment types into positive, neutral and negative, you can analyse the links ranking for your branded keywords and online mentions and categorise them by sentiment. You can use a sentiment analysis tool such as [Chatmeter Pulse](#) or [SEMrush Brand Monitor](#) to gauge prevailing sentiment.

We're also going to go further than that and follow Search Engine Land's sentiment scoring metrics for interpreting and scoring the overall sentiment of any SERP. We love this concept because it allows you to calculate a sentiment value for any SERP that you or your clients are targeting.

At a glance, the three stages of performing a SERP sentiment analysis are:

1. Establish a baseline
  - Decide the branded keywords and variations you will you analyse
  - Figure out what is positive, neutral and negative (with client input)
2. Assign each page 1 SERP position a weighted score
  - Positions 1-3 get higher weighting than 4-10
3. Calculate the overall page 1 SERP sentiment score
  - Maximum SERP score: 100
  - Deduct pre-assigned number of points for every negative or neutral link

Here's each step of the process in more detail.

Step 1: Establish a baseline

In order to show progress, you need to find your starting point. What does the general sentiment on page 1 say about you or your clients' brands? Plug in your branded keywords, and see what the links are like on page 1. Are there any negative or neutral reviews, articles or other links that could be detrimental to your brand?

We've outlined Search Engine Land's scoring method below.

Step 2: Assign each SERP position a weighted score

1. Each SERP can attain a total possible score of 100 points. So, a perfect SERP page displaying only positive sentiment would result in a sentiment score of 100
2. Each neutral or negative mention reduces the score by a predetermined amount, depending on the position it ranks in

**Note:** Whether you want to follow this scoring system exactly or try your own twist, the combined score of positions 1-3 (the positions with the highest CTRs) should make up the majority of the available score—100. Position 1 should also have more weighting than position 2, which has more weighting than position 3, and so on.

In the example below, we decided positions 1-3 were worth a combined 80 points. The most valuable position, position 1, is worth 45 points; position 2 is worth 20 points, and position 3 is worth 15 points. The remaining 20 points are then divided amongst the remaining page 1 SERP results, in decreasing amounts from position 4 downwards. We now have a page where each search result has a numerical value based on its sentiment. Then, we can calculate the total page score.



### Step 3: Calculate your SERP sentiment score

As above, a maximum score of 100 is available for a SERP, if only positive results are present. For each neutral result, we deduct half of the available score from its total. For negative results, we deduct the total score. Next, go through each result on the SERP and categorise it by sentiment, noting the score. Then tally up the combined score of the whole page, and voila! You have not only a clear picture of what the sentiment on this SERP is, but a neat score to visualise it with. Using this method, you can then run comparative analyses on your target keywords and topics to see which ones need work.

### Controlling the digital narrative

Each time a user does a search for a branded keyword and clicks a link with a negative sentiment, their trust in the brand is diminished. And the more negative content there is on page one of the SERPs, the more people are exposed to it, entering it into a downwards spiral.

Once we understand what the general sentiment is, and where it's coming from (which websites and links), we can go to work on improvements. We call this controlling the digital narrative. How do we do that? By generating more positive sentiment from high-authority pages. More quality backlinks. More positive engagements through social media. All of these things contribute to the digital perception of you or your clients' brand and thus its SEO performance. If you have clients that need to improve their user reviews, or push some negative press off page one of the SERPs, consider a campaign to change the prevailing sentiment.

## **Here are a few ideas for turning the tide of sentiment in your favour.**

### Outreach

A big one. Positive backlinks, you want ‘em—”dofollow” links from relevant, high-authority sites. Quality, not quantity. High quality content that’s designed to delight your audience will attract positive shares and engagements. You could also find other brands that align with your niche and offer to collaborate on content that’s valuable to both audiences.

### Responsive Service

Great customer service can help your SEO by solving issues in a timely manner and avoiding the dreaded 1-star reviews that can seriously dent the online image of your business. Address any neutral/negative reviews with a reply that’s non-confrontational, consistent with your brand, and represents your business in a positive light.

### Proactive PR

Try to be proactive with your digital PR efforts. Ideally, you want to be mentioned by popular influencers and publications in your industry and ensuring that there’s an abundance of positive press online so that when people search for your brand, the links they click portray your brand in a positive light. When it comes to branded keywords, some search results will be from news sites and high authority publications, so you want that press to be positive as much as possible.

## **Summary**

Hopefully you found this guide to sentiment analysis useful. If you have your own metrics or system for tracking sentiment, or a favourite sentiment analysis tool, we’d love to hear about it! Leave a reply in the comments section, or [Tweet us](#) with your ideas.

Next, let’s dive even further into search intent. We’ll get an understanding of latent search intent, and how you can best react to it, or even predict it.

## What is latent search intent?

**Latent search intent** refers to the developing norms in search intent. Latent search intent affects how Google displays its SERPs, and it can be shaped by economic, political and cultural factors, and the news cycle. For example, if a brand or topic is grabbing all the headlines in the news and is getting a lot of searches, Google receives the increased search volume as a signal that the latent search intent is shifting, and this might result in a different SERP to match the new search intent. If a topic is generating a lot of media buzz, Google might start serving more news articles near the top of the SERP.

Understanding latent search intents allows us to get a better understanding of where Google might go next, and if possible, make ourselves the first point of call when search volumes shift.

The old marketing saying goes, “when others zig, you zag”, and if you want to stand out from the pack, it remains true today. Now, this doesn’t mean we’ve lost our marbles and are recommending that you stop optimising for high-volume keywords or give up on acquiring backlinks. But what it does mean is that if you want to get ahead of everyone—perhaps even Google—you might need to be willing to take some (calculated) risks, or at least run some experimental scenarios on your SEO optimisations. We’ve outlined one way to predict search intent in the following section.

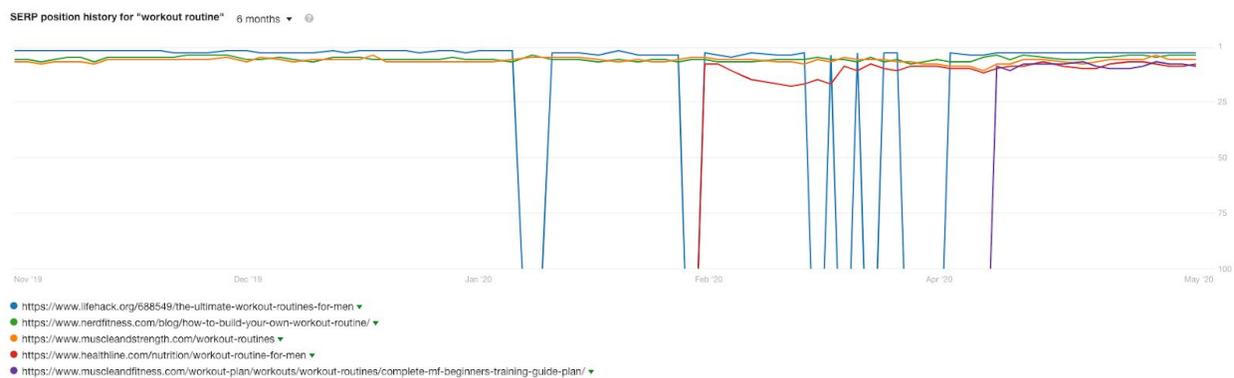
## How to predict search intent

So, we know that Google is constantly iterating on its SERPs to better match latent search intents. How might we predict where search intent is going next? One example might be work-from-home informational and transactional searches becoming more common as the general population adjusts to isolation measures in 2020, with more people shifting away from traditional office life and into remote work.

## How SERPs shift with sentiment and search intent

1. Studies have shown that Google adjusts SERPs for keywords not only based on seasonality, but also based on shifts in sentiment and search intent
2. You can adjust your SEO optimisations to react to changes in latent search intent (lower difficulty), or to match a predicted change in search intent (higher difficulty)
3. Monitoring the prevailing sentiment and testing different methods for predicting latent search intent is recommended before changing any of your clients' SEO optimisations

While many techniques in SEO rely on using competitor data, when it comes to getting in front of the current trend, it's more about analysing where search intents are at right now, and making informed predictions as to where and when they might shift. Predicting future intents relies on getting a feel for the emerging topics and keywords in your industry. The exciting part is that by predicting future search trends, it's possible to stay ahead of your competitors and be the first to optimise for where the search volume is *going*. As you can see in the image below, increased volatility in the SERPs (which could be based on an event, a new market trend, or many other factors) can lead to new pages entering the top 5 rankings from out of nowhere.



*Ahrefs Keywords Explorer showing increased SERP volatility for "workout routine"*

## Predicting search intent: the theory

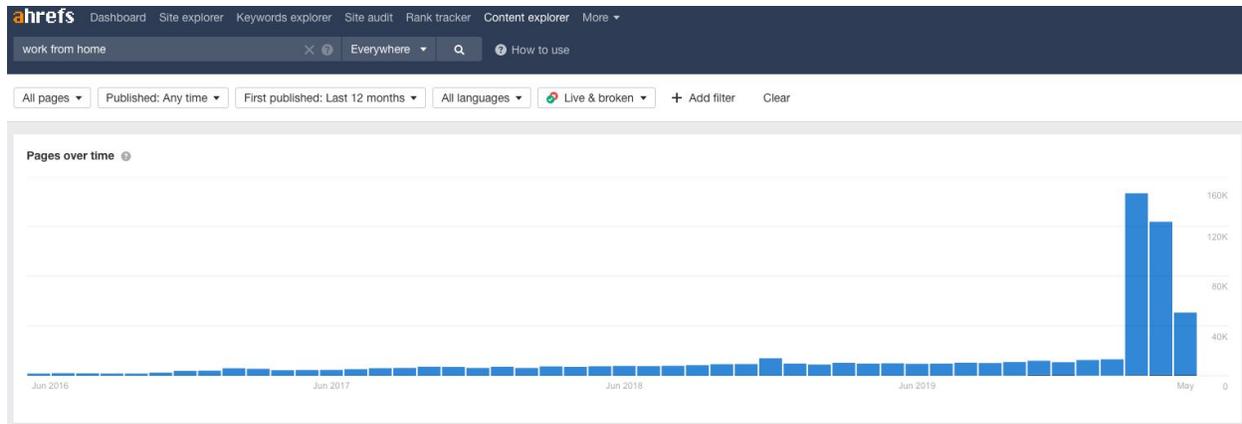
By analysing sentiment in the SERPs, SERP volatility, sales data, and market trend data, it's possible to predict where the search volume might be headed in future. Of course, no prediction will be 100% accurate.

If we understand the relationship between latent intent and Google's SERPs, monitor commercial keywords for SERP volatility, we can be ready and waiting with content, services and products that capture emerging keywords or search intents. Typically, the most volatile keywords are news-related, but this is not always the case. Commercial keywords can also have volatile SERP positioning based on latent search intent, as our Black Friday/Cyber Monday data has shown.

Using a keyword tool like SEMrush, Keywords Everywhere or Ahrefs, we can find long tail keyword suggestions relating to our products and services, and using a sentiment analysis tool, we can see what customers are saying in their reviews and online mentions. Combined with a SERP sentiment analysis, you can get the insights needed to make some informed predictions about your audience's search intents, their key drivers and what they want to see next. The next step then is to create new content, products or services to serve emerging market demands and their associated keywords. We've outlined two approaches you can try below.

### **1. The reactive approach** (*lower risk*)

The reactive approach follows the traditional SEO approach of targeting an existing search volume. When you're being reactive with your SEO, you want to be quick to optimise for keywords as they gain volume or increase in volatility. This approach requires monitoring SERP volatility for your target keywords, and closely monitoring search trends and sentiment. You could set up alerts in your keyword tool or a Google alert, so that you're notified when things are happening with your keywords.



*Ahrefs Content Explorer displaying huge spikes in volume for content about working from home*

## 2. The predictive approach (higher risk)

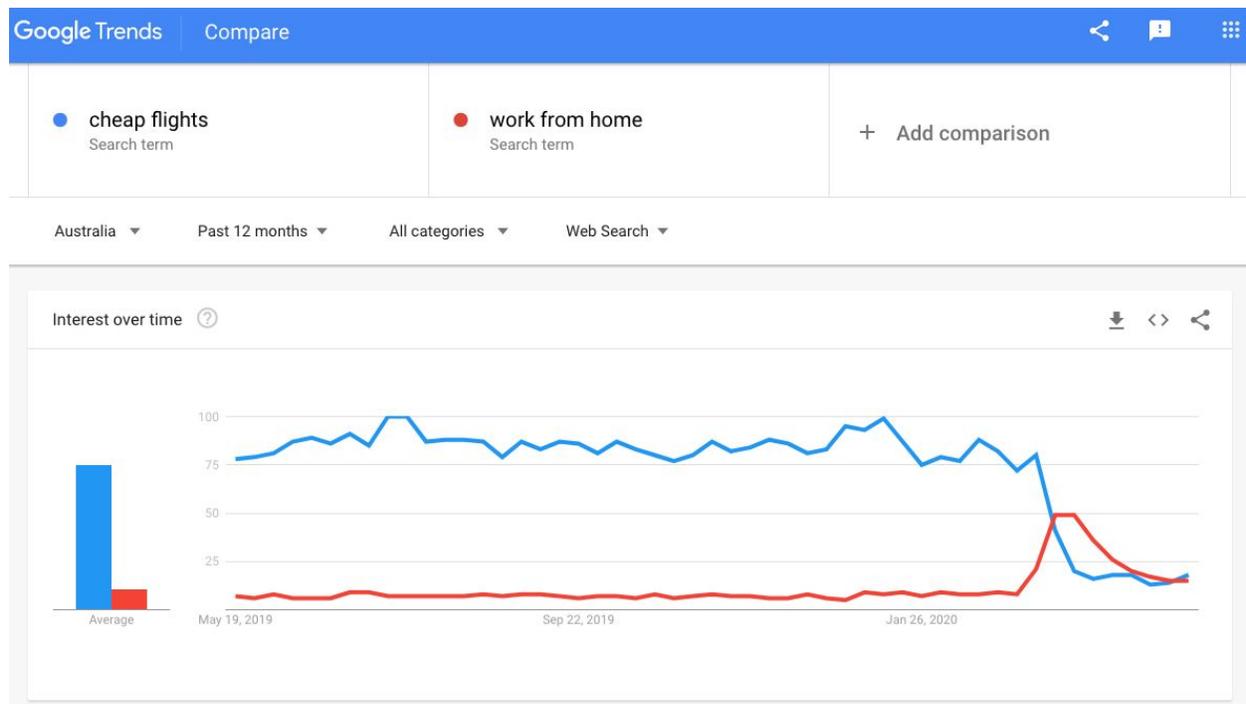
The predictive approach is to optimise for a predicted future search volume. Your prediction could be based on trends, sentiment analysis, surveys, SERP volatility, customer feedback—any combination of data that leads you to believe that there’s a change coming, or a gap in the market that hasn’t been cornered by a competitor. This approach requires a deep knowledge of your industry, your product and service offerings, your strengths and weaknesses, and a taste for risk! Creating a product or service based on a hypothetical demand isn’t for everyone, after all.

Make sure you’re confident of these things before starting work on optimising for a predicted demand:

1. You’ve identified a market demand or growing sentiment that isn’t yet being optimised for
2. You have some data that backs up your estimations
3. You have already, or have the capacity to create a product or service to match the predicted search intent

*Note: the predictive approach potentially requires a significant amount of work to be done based on predictions. We don’t recommend this technique for the risk averse or without validating your predictions and methods beforehand.*

Here’s a quick example showing the volatility of search volumes based on shifts in latent search intent. Can you think of any search topics that might be on the rise in your industry? If so, could you find any data that validates your theory?



*Searches plummet for the usually competitive “cheap flights”, while “work from home” searches surged in 2020*

**Further reading:**

If you’re keen to learn more about predicting search intent, we suggest diving into [this study from Rayneronomics](#).

## Summary

A solid understanding of latent search intent and SERP volatility around a given topic means you can stay ahead of market trends. While predicting a future search trend could be a risky strategy if applied incorrectly, it's also one that could reap you some nice traffic and conversions without having to chase after hundreds, or even thousands of links in order to outrank your competitors. And of course, you can always just try the reactive approach, and create timely, high quality content for an existing search volume.

## Final Thoughts

Understanding search intent means you can really nail your SEO and content marketing. An SEO strategy that matches different search intents allows you to maximise your organic traffic potential. Likewise, being prepared for seasonal changes means that you're putting yourself in the strongest position possible, whether you have an online store or a business that's seasonal.

We're strong believers that a well optimised SEO strategy is one of the highest ROI strategies a business can employ.

So, when you're planning your next SEO campaign, remember to **think of the four S's**: