SEO for the Brave: Simple Strategies to Rule Search- sample copy

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Chapter 1: What Even Is SEO?

What SEO Is and How Search Engines Work

"You can build the best lemonade stand in town—but if it's hidden in a back alley, no one's buying your lemonade." This quote encapsulates the essence of what Search Engine Optimization (SEO) seeks to address. Without effective SEO strategies, even the most exceptional content can remain unseen, much like that lemonade stand tucked away from the bustling streets. SEO is the key to ensuring that your website is discoverable by those actively searching for your products or services. In a digital landscape filled with competition, visibility becomes paramount, and that's where SEO comes into play.

SEO serves as the solution to this visibility problem. By optimizing your website and its content, you can improve your chances of appearing in search engine results, thereby attracting potential customers. It's not just about being present online; it's about ensuring that your presence is prominent when it matters most. In the next sections, we will delve deeper into the various components of SEO and how they contribute to your online success.

The Purpose of SEO: Visibility, Traffic, Trust

Let's break down the fundamental purposes of SEO into three essential components: visibility, traffic, and trust. First and foremost, visibility is crucial; you want to be *seen* when someone searches for what you offer. SEO enhances your website's visibility on search engines like Google and even Bing, ensuring that your site appears in relevant search results. For instance, if you are a personal trainer in Tampa and someone types in *"best personal trainer near me"*, having your website show up on the first page increases the likelihood that this person will click on your link, explore your offerings, and ultimately book your services.

Next, traffic is a vital aspect of SEO. It not only elevates your visibility but also directs potential customers to your *doorstep*, which, in this case, is your website. Unlike traditional advertisements that require payment for each click, organic traffic generated through effective SEO practices continues to flow without ongoing costs. Think of SEO as a snowball; it may take some initial effort to get rolling, but once it gains momentum, it continues to grow larger and larger.

Lastly, trust is an invaluable currency in the digital landscape. People inherently trust Google to deliver relevant results. When your website ranks high in search results, you gain a portion of that trust by association. It's akin to being recommended by the world's most knowledgeable librarian, who vouches for your credibility. This trust can translate into higher conversion rates as potential customers feel more secure in choosing your offerings.

Debunking SEO Myths

"Isn't SEO just stuffing keywords everywhere?" This common misconception is far from the truth. Such outdated practices ceased to be effective long ago, around 2006, when search engines became more sophisticated in recognizing quality content. *"Can't I just hire someone on Fiverr to do it once and be done?"* While you could potentially hire someone for a one-time task, real SEO is an ongoing process, much like physical fitness. You don't achieve lasting results by going to the gym just once.

"I need to go viral to win at SEO." This viewpoint is misguided. Unlike the quick success often seen on platforms like TikTok, SEO is a slow, steady, and strategic effort that pays off over time. The focus should be on developing a sustainable strategy rather than chasing fleeting moments of virality, which can lead to disappointment and frustration.

A 5-Minute Explanation: How Search Engines *Actually* Work

Imagine Google as the world's fastest matchmaker, tasked with connecting users to the most relevant information. The process begins with **crawling**, where Google deploys small bots, often referred to as "spiders," to explore your website. These bots click on links and gather information about your content, assessing its relevance. Following this, the information collected is entered into a vast library known as Google's index, which is where all the data is stored for future reference.

The final step is **ranking**. When users enter a search query, Google scans its entire index to identify the best matches, presenting them in a specific order based on relevance and quality. The ultimate goal of this intricate process is to showcase the **most helpful, trustworthy, and relevant content** at the top of search results, ensuring that users find what they are looking for without frustration.

Here's a simple analogy: Let's say you Google *"easy banana bread recipe"*. Google's objective is to provide you with a recipe that meets your expectations, which includes: a site that loads quickly (as no one enjoys waiting), a website that appears legitimate and free of intrusive pop-ups, and clear and concise answers without excessive narrative unless it's genuinely engaging. This encapsulates the essence of SEO and its role in enhancing user experience.

Takeaway Exercise: Talk to Google Like a Customer

To truly understand your customers' needs, engage in a simple exercise. Write down three Google searches that you would use if you were looking for your own business without any prior knowledge of its existence. This exercise will help you think like a customer rather than adopting a purely marketing perspective. By framing your understanding in this manner, you can identify the language and terms that potential clients may use.

Pro Tip: SEO Is a Strategy, Not a Shortcut

If there's one takeaway from this chapter, let it be this: SEO is how people discover you when they are unaware of your existence—yet. This realization is immensely powerful, as it opens doors to new opportunities for your business. In the chapters to come, we will delve into the tools, tactics, and strategies that simplify SEO, while also emphasizing the importance of hiring an expert. An expert can elevate your efforts from *fine* to *freaking effective*, ensuring that your online presence is optimized for success.

SEO Snapshot Starter- INTENT

Help business owners quickly define what they want from SEO, who they're competing against, and what parts of their site to prioritize first.

Website Goals

What does "success" look like for your website? PROMPT: Why do you want more traffic? What do you hope people do when they land on your page?
Examples: Get more online orders, get more appointments, build a newsletter list, etc.

My website goals are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Top 3 Competitors Online

Who is showing up when your ideal customer searches for what you offer? PROMPT: Google a few of your most important keywords. Who keeps showing up on page 1?

Top 3 competitors (name + website):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Current Traffic (a rough guess is ok!)

How many people visit your site in a month?   PROMPT: If you use Google Analytics or Search Console, or your web provider has analytics, jot down rough monthly traffic. If not, can you guess how many visit in a month?

Estimated visitors/ Month:

Main Traffic Source:

How is it going? Are these results what you expected to see?

Key Pages to Optimize First

Where should we focus first to move the needle?

Priority Pages (URL or Name):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Chapter 2: AI Tools for Keyword Research

Not everyone wants to spend hours wrestling with complex SEO tools or wrestling with endless spreadsheets. Fortunately, AI tools like ChatGPT and others provide a quick and efficient way to get unstuck—provided you know how to formulate the right questions. With the right prompts, these tools can save you significant time and effort, making your keyword research more effective.

"Smart shortcuts for smarter SEO: With the right AI tools and prompts, you can skip the spreadsheets and get straight to insights—right from your laptop or phone."

Here are some practical, real-world applications of how you can leverage AI when you find yourself struggling with keyword research:

1. Brainstorm Fresh Keyword Ideas

Prompt to Use: "Give me 10 keyword ideas for a yoga instructor specializing in beginner classes in Austin, TX." By using this prompt, AI will generate a list of keywords based on real-world language that potential clients might actually use. This can lead to more relevant traffic to your site.

Bonus: You can also ask for keyword variations by using a follow-up prompt like: "Now give me variations that include words like 'gentle,' 'introductory,' and 'relaxing.'" This approach allows you to expand your keyword pool further and capture a wider audience.

2. Simplify or Translate Industry Jargon

If you find yourself using complex industry terms that may alienate potential customers, AI can assist in translating these terms into more customer-friendly language. **Prompt to Use:** "Rewrite 'neuromuscular massage' in simpler words a customer might search for." The results could include suggestions like 'back pain massage' or 'deep tissue massage for athletes,' which are far more beneficial for your SEO strategy.

3. Find Related Keywords and Content Ideas

Sometimes, you might be too close to your business to recognize what else people could be searching for. **Prompt to Use:** "What are common questions people ask about starting a gluten-free diet?" The AI can generate a list of relevant questions you can use to create blog posts, FAQs, or service page content, all while seamlessly incorporating valuable SEO keywords.

4. Check Keyword Search Intent

Intent refers to the motivation behind a search query. Understanding this can be crucial for targeting the right audience. Are they ready to buy? Are they just doing research? Are they searching specifically for local businesses? **Prompt to Use:** "Is the keyword 'best running shoes' more informational or transactional?" The answer is likely **transactional**, indicating that the searcher is closer to making a purchase decision.

Understanding keyword intent matters significantly. If your goal is to attract *clients*, it's essential to focus on transactional keywords rather than solely informational ones. This strategic approach will yield better results in terms of conversions.

5. Fix Common Technical Mistakes Early

SEO encompasses more than just keywords; it also involves technical aspects that can impact your website's performance. AI can assist in identifying basic technical issues, such as:

- Missing alt text
- Missing meta descriptions
- Broken internal links

Prompt to Use: "Give me a simple checklist to audit my website for SEO basics." By following the suggestions provided, you can either tackle these issues yourself or determine if it's time to consult a professional.

AI Is a Tool, Not a Strategy

Here's the truth: AI tools can significantly enhance your efficiency by helping you brainstorm ideas faster, work smarter, and rectify minor problems before they escalate. However, it's important to recognize their limitations. While AI can offer insights, it won't possess the nuanced understanding of your specific customers that you do.

Moreover, AI cannot construct a comprehensive keyword strategy tailored to your unique business goals. It isn't a substitute for human strategy, intuition, and experience. *"Think of AI like a compass. It points you in the right direction, but you still need a map to get to treasure."*

This is where an SEO expert can play a pivotal role. They can assist in building your strategy, optimizing your site, and accelerating your ranking process in a more effective manner.

Next up: Let's roll up our sleeves and create your **First 10 Keywords**.

Bonus AI Prompt Cheat Sheet: SEO Keyword Help

Utilize these prompts with ChatGPT, Gemini, or other AI tools to save time and uncover new SEO opportunities. Simply copy and paste these prompts, then customize them according to your business needs.

Prompt #1: Brainstorm High-Intent Keywords
Give me 10 keyword phrases a customer might search for if they were ready to buy [your product or service], including location if relevant.

Example: Give me 10 keyword phrases a customer might search for if they were ready to buy handmade organic candles in Portland, Oregon.

Optional Add-On Prompts:

- What are some "People Also Ask" questions related to [keyword]?
- Is the keyword [keyword] informational, navigational, or transactional?
- What are related long-tail keywords for [core keyword]?

Use this cheat sheet any time you hit a wall or to validate your strategy before bringing in an expert.

Chapter Takeaway: Let AI Be Your SEO Sidekick—Not Your Strategy

AI tools like ChatGPT can *absolutely* help you break through analysis paralysis, brainstorm smarter, and alleviate the headaches associated with spreadsheets. However, it's essential to remember that AI lacks the insight into your unique voice, your customers' deepest fears, and the distinguishing features that set *your* business apart.

Use AI to make tangible progress, but don't confuse quick wins with a comprehensive strategy. If you find yourself in any of the following situations:

- You don't know which keywords will attract genuine customers, not just clicks…
- You feel overwhelmed when trying to transform AI-generated ideas into actual website content…
- Or you want results faster than trial-and-error can provide...

At that point, it may be time to stop the DIY approach and consult a professional (hi, that's me 👋).

My First 10 Keywords
INTENT

Brainstorm beginner keyword targets for your business or website. This worksheet helps you think about what people are actually searching for—and how to prioritize what to focus on first.

Instructions:

Write down up to 10 keyword ideas related to your business, products, or services. For each one, identify: - Intent: Is the searcher looking for information or ready to buy something? (Informational vs. Commercial) - Volume (estimate): How many people search for this term monthly? (Use tools like Ubersuggest, Google Ads, or Semrush) - Priority: How important is this keyword to your goals? (High, Medium, Low)

Keyword Idea	Intent	Volume Estimate	Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Notes

Keyword Priority Matrix
INTENT

Help pick the best keywords to focus on by comparing search volume, ranking difficulty, and alignment with your goals.

Instructions:

List your top keyword candidates, then rate each one by:

- Volume: Are people actually searching for it? (Low / Medium / High)
- Difficulty: How hard is it to rank for? (Easy / Moderate / Hard)
- Intent Match: Does it match what your ideal customer is looking for?
- Uniqueness: Is this keyword something YOU can uniquely rank for?

Keyword	Volume (L/M/H)	Difficulty(E/M/H)	Intent Match	Unique to Me

**Tips:**

Look for keywords with:

- Medium to high volume

 - Low to medium difficulty

- Strong intent match

- Unique advantage (your product, expertise, story, etc.)

My Top 3 Keyword Picks:

Chapter 3: On-Page SEO 101 – Help Google Help You

"Your website might be beautiful—but if Google can't read it, it's like hanging a gorgeous sign in the woods." This statement highlights the importance of what exists *on* your actual web pages: headlines, images, links, and the text that users engage with. On-page SEO is essential for both **search engines** and **human visitors** to understand the content and relevance of your page.

The best part? No coding is required to implement effective on-page SEO. With just a few well-informed decisions and perhaps a little assistance from AI or your preferred SEO partner (👋 that's me), you can significantly enhance your site's performance.
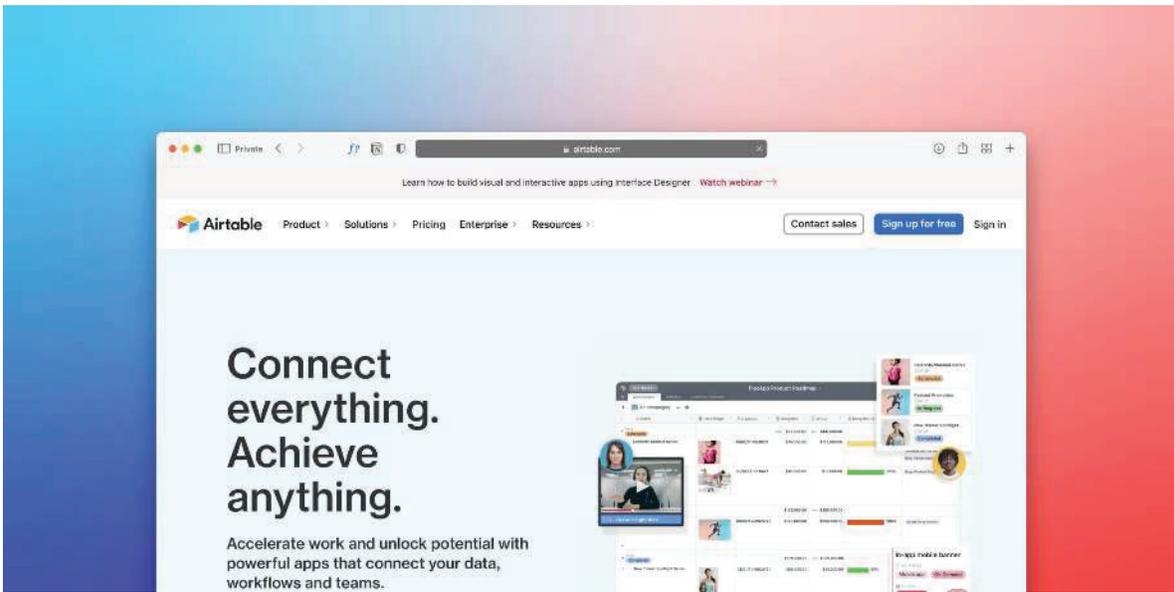
What Is On-Page SEO?

On-page SEO focuses on optimizing *individual pages* on your website to achieve specific objectives, such as: increasing visibility in Google search results, attracting the right audience, and clearly communicating what you offer. This optimization encompasses various elements, including:

- Your **page headline** (the prominent title that visitors see)
- The **title displayed in search results**
- **Section headings** throughout the page
- **Links** directing to other relevant pages
- The **images** you use and how they are labeled
- The **words** within your content, especially keywords

If it exists on the page, it has the potential to impact your SEO strategy.

1. The Title Tag (The One That Shows in Google)

The title tag is the **clickable link** that appears when your page shows up in a Google search. Its significance cannot be overstated; it is one of the first things both Google and searchers read, and it must be engaging and relevant.

✅ **Tip:** Keep your title concise, ideally under 60 characters, and place your main keyword towards the beginning. This strategy will enhance your chances of ranking well.

❌ Bad: "Home"
✅ Better: "Handmade Soy Candles | Free Shipping – Bliss & Flame"

2. Meta Description (Your Mini Sales Pitch)

The meta description is the brief sentence that appears beneath the title in search results. Although it doesn't have a direct impact on rankings, it plays a crucial role in influencing clicks.
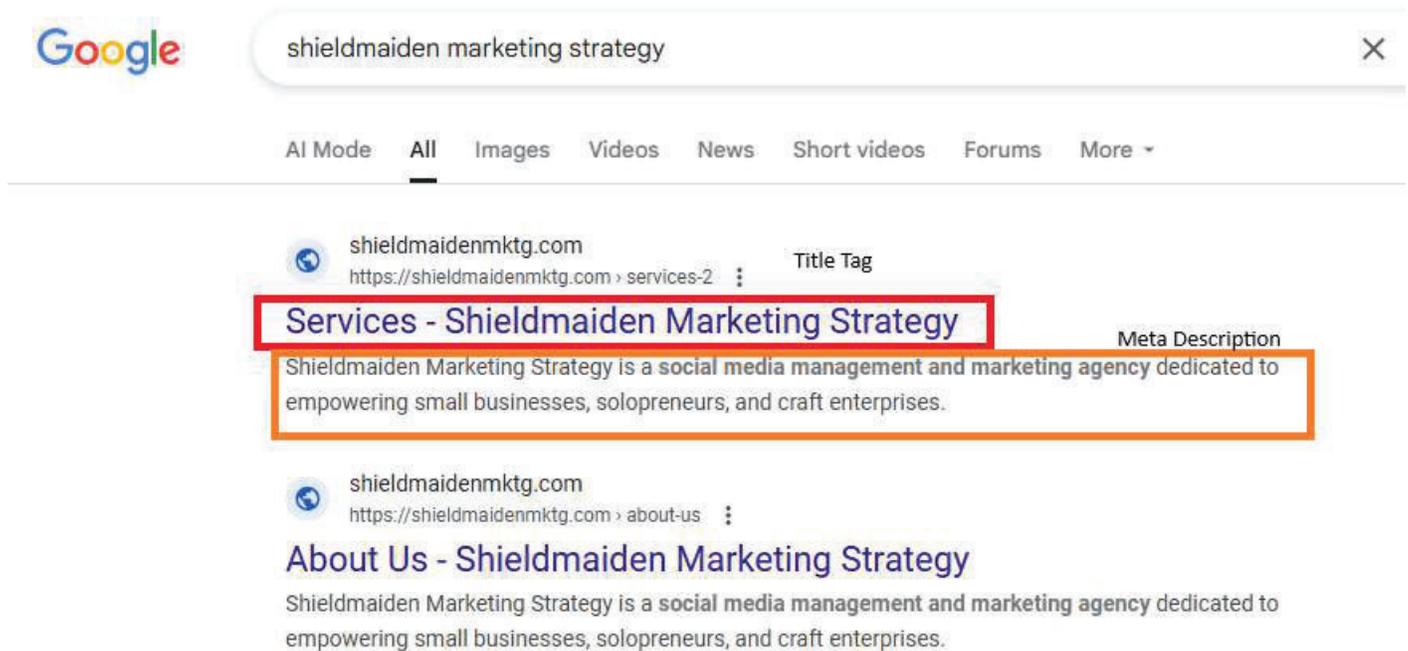
✅ **Tip:** Keep the meta description under 160 characters and ensure it sounds like a helpful preview of your content.

Example:

"Shop handmade soy candles crafted with essential oils. Clean, calming, and delivered to your door."

Try this AI prompt:

"Write a meta description for a page about gluten-free birthday cakes in Austin."

3. Page Headline and Section Headers

Think of your web page like a book, where:

Page headline (H1) = the book title (only one is needed!)

Section headers (H2) = chapter titles

Subheaders (H3) = paragraphs within a chapter.

✅ Use keywords where appropriate, but avoid forcing them into your content. Prioritize readability and user experience.

4. Clean URLs & Smart Links

Page URL should be simple and readable. For example, avoid lengthy and confusing URLs like this:

❌ Bad: yoursite.com/page?id=23984
✅ Good: yoursite.com/gluten-free-cakes

✅ Tip: Use hyphens instead of underscores and include your keyword if it fits naturally within the URL.

Internal Links

Link to other valuable pages on your site using clear, natural phrases. For instance:
"Looking for more recipes? Check out our vegan dessert guide."

AI prompt:
"What are 3 related blog posts I should link to from my page about healthy breakfasts?"

5. Where to Place Keywords (Without Being Annoying)

Utilize your main keyword in the following areas:

- The **page headline**
- The **title tag**
- The **first paragraph**
- A couple of section headers
- The **URL**
- **Image descriptions** (if it fits naturally)

Avoid keyword stuffing; instead, focus on being "helpful" rather than "repetitive."

Real-Life Example: Samantha's Soap Shop

Samantha had a fantastic product, but her web page was not getting the attention it deserved. Here's what we improved:

Before:

Title: "Product #143"
 URL: samanthassoaps.com/store/bar143
 Image: "IMG_3921.jpg"
 No description or links

After:

Title: "Lavender Goat Milk Soap – Soothing & Handmade"

Meta: "Gentle lavender goat milk soap made with nourishing oils. Perfect for sensitive skin."

URL: samanthassoaps.com/lavender-goat-milk-soap

Image alt text: "handmade lavender goat milk soap bar on wooden tray"

Internal link: "Looking for a gift set? Check out our lavender spa bundle."

📈 Result: Within six weeks, she ranked on the first page for "lavender goat milk soap," and her sales saw a remarkable increase of 25%.

🤖 AI Can Speed This Up

Try prompts like:

"Write a Google title tag for my handmade beard oil page."

"Suggest 3 internal links for a blog post about beginner yoga."

"Rewrite this paragraph to include the phrase 'eco-friendly pet shampoo.'"

6. SERPs: How to Show Up and Stand Out

 Getting on page one of Google is the goal—but what part of that page matters just as much. That's where SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) come in.

SERPs are the results Google shows when someone types in a query. And it's not just a list of links anymore.

You've seen them: featured snippets, FAQs, "People Also Ask" boxes, star ratings, maps, videos, even image carousels.

Each one is a chance for your content to grab attention—and clicks.

Why SERPs Matter:

Visibility: Rich results stand out more than plain blue links.

Click-Throughs: A featured snippet can steal clicks even from the #1 ranking.

Trust: When your content is chosen by Google to answer a question, it earns credibility.

How to Write for SERP Features:

Answer Clear Questions

Use H2 or H3 headings with question-style phrases like:

"What is [your topic]?"

"How do I [solve a problem]?"

Then answer directly below in 2–3 concise sentences.

Use Lists and Steps

Google loves bulleted or numbered lists.

Example:

How to clean a cast iron pan: Rinse with warm water Scrub with salt Dry completely Oil lightly

Add FAQ Sections Write an FAQ with real customer questions.

Use simple, structured formatting: Q: Is goat milk soap good for sensitive skin? A: Yes! It's gentle, moisturizing, and less likely to irritate.

Use Schema (Optional but Powerful) Tools like Yoast SEO or RankMath (on WordPress) help you add schema markup. This is code that signals to Google that your content includes things like FAQs, reviews, recipes, or how-to steps.

Pro Tip: Think like your customer. What would you ask Google? Then make sure your page answers that—in a way Google can easily quote. Want to win the snippet? Write the best, clearest, most direct answer on the internet.

Worksheet- Page Optimization Plan
INTENT

Optimize one specific page on your website using key on-page SEO elements. This worksheet helps you audit what's there, identify fixes, and rewrite it for better performance.

Instructions:

Choose a page (homepage, product, blog post, etc.). Fill in each section with your current content, whether it needs work, and your new improved version.

Area	My Current Content	Fix Needed (Y/N)	New/Updated Content
Page Title (H1)			
Title Tag (search)			
Meta Description			
URL			
Section Headers (H2s)			
Keyword Placement			

Worksheet- SERP Features Snapshot
INTENT

Spot rich results (like videos, featured snippets, People Also Ask, etc.) on Google and identify opportunities to upgrade your content for visibility.

Instructions:

1. Google your top keyword or phrase.

2. Look at the search results—what extra features show up besides regular links?

3. Take notes and look for content types or schema (FAQ, video, list, etc.) you could add to your own page.

Keyword Searched	URL You Searched For	SERP Features Found (PAA, Video, Map etc)	Opportunity Noted (FAQ? Video?)

Chapter 4: Getting Noticed – Off-Page SEO & Backlinks

"Building your website is like throwing a great party. But off-page SEO is what actually *gets people to show up.*" You can possess the most well-optimized website in existence, yet if no one is aware of its presence, it remains ineffective. This scenario is akin to shouting into an empty void—your efforts go unnoticed.

This is why **off-page SEO** is critical. It's the mechanism through which you establish credibility, trust, and authority in your niche, demonstrating to both Google and potential users that your website is worthy of attention.

🌟 **Unlock the Full Story –**

SEO for the Brave: Simple Strategies to Rule Search.

 You've had a taste of the first three chapters — now imagine what you'll gain when you access the full journey.

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Lynda Holt is a marketing strategist, SEO educator, and unapologetic champion of small business owners. As the founder of Shieldmaiden Marketing Strategy, Lynda brings over two decades of experience in branding, digital strategy, and entrepreneurship—blending sharp insight with a generous dose of real-talk.

A marketing professional turned business coach, she's worked with everyone from solopreneurs and local artisans to higher ed institutions and national nonprofits. Her superpower? Translating overwhelming marketing concepts into smart, doable actions that actually get results. When she's not crafting keyword-rich content or teaching teams how to outsmart Google without losing their soul, you'll find her exploring Viking history, mentoring young entrepreneurs, or sipping coffee on her back porch in upstate New York. Learn more, book a strategy session, or grab more resources at ShieldmaidenMktg.com

SEO for the Brave

SHIELD MAIDEN

— MARKETING STRATEGIES —

In "SEO for the Brave," discover the essential strategies for mastering SEO without succumbing to the allure of fleeting virality. This guide demystifies how search engines work, offering practical tips for optimizing your website and utilizing AI as a powerful tool, not a crutch. Learn to build meaningful backlinks while enhancing your online presence, ensuring that your content is not just seen, but truly resonates with your audience. https://shieldmaidenmktg.com/