The complete guide to Pillar Pages

Create content that converts

ESM INBOUND

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Just an extra-long blog post or a savvy marketing tool? Pillar pages are the newest buzz word in the world of inbound marketing, but what actually are they? Should everyone be using them? And how do you create one? Here we explore the benefits pillar pages could bring to your business.

> "Seeing much, suffering much, and studying much are the three pillars of learning."
>
> Benjamin Disraeli
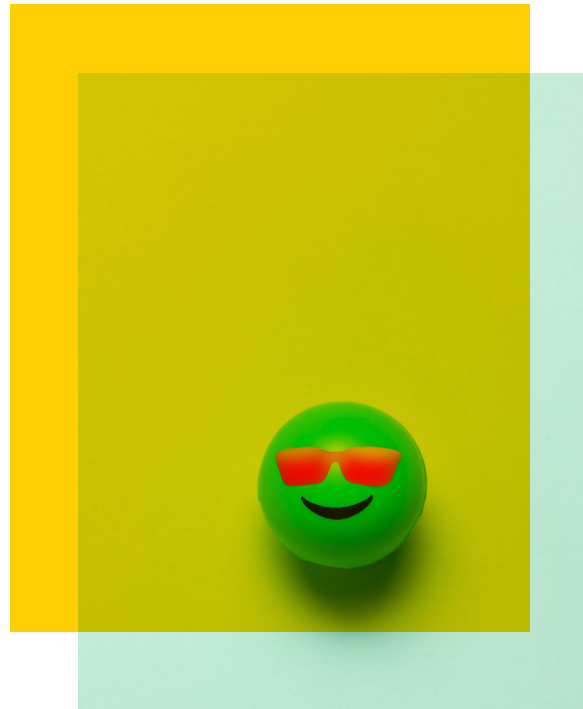
Benjamin Disraeli wasn't wrong when he said this, indeed, it could be the philosophy of many businesses today. Your pillar page needs to be a beacon of learning for your readers – a place where they can find things out that only you can teach. So if you want to shout about, you've also got the beginnings of a pillar page.

Chapter 1
What is a pillar page?

There's a lot of talk around pillar pages at the moment. Perhaps you've been teetering on the edge of creating one for a while, knowing your business would benefit from one, especially as HubSpot has put their keyword tool to bed. Or maybe you haven't heard of this new phenomenon of the SEO content world and need to learn everything from the ground up?

Either way, this pillar page – on pillar pages (see what we did there?) – should help guide you, answer any questions and help you decide if your business is ready for a pillar page (hint: it probably is).

A good way to understand pillar pages is to imagine a food festival. The main reason you've gone – the core topic – is to try different foods from around the world and get a tasty dinner. There's one big long street with tents along it, where you see pizza, Chinese food, curry, sushi and paella. But off this main thoroughfare there are smaller alleyways, lined with dessert stalls, gin tasting stalls, doughnuts and chocolates (anyone else feeling hungry?!) – or sub topics. So you leave the main food street, and you veer off into the alleyway to try some sweet treats.

Once you're finished there, you follow the signs back to the main street and carry on your journey down the core food festival, until you come to another side street, explore that avenue, then come back to the main street again – ad infinitum.

Put simply, a pillar page is a single, long website page that covers one particular topic in depth. We call this one key topic a 'core topic'. The core topic links to several 'sub topics' so readers can find out further information in depth, but these pages always link back to the original pillar page. The purpose is to make you an authority on this topic, meaning that more traffic is driven to your page and, therefore, your website. Your pillar page will boost your search engine visibility by better organising your content into related 'clusters'.

For example

If you were a business who specialised in pet care, you might choose to write a pillar page on 'owning your first dog'. This is your 'core topic'. In this pillar page, you'd break the sections down into more in-depth, concentrated topics such as:
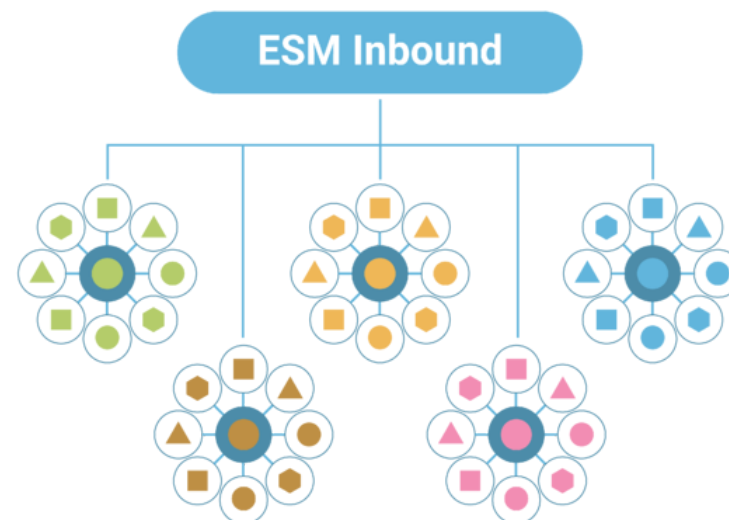
Section 1: Finding the right breeder
Section 2: Training your puppy
Section 3: Eating and drinking
Section 4: Socialising with other dogs
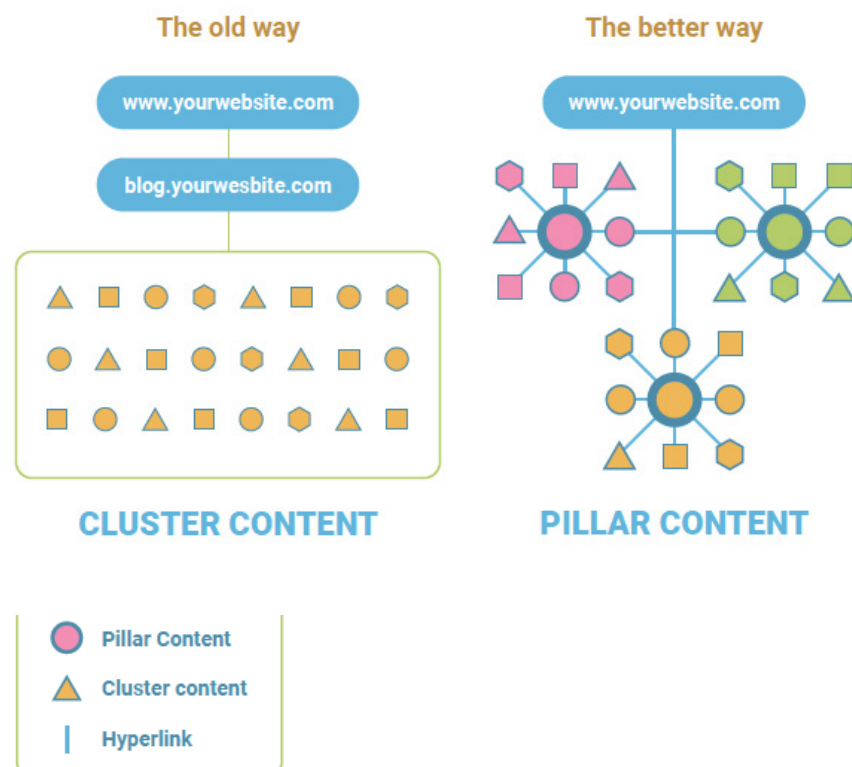Section 5: Finding the right vet

These are called your 'sub topics'. They all relate to the core topic, but offer opportunities to go further into detail, linking to external relevant materials in the meantime.

So why not just write a series of blog posts about all of the sub topics? Well, if you constantly churn out blog posts on your website, using variations on the same topic and variations on the same long-tail keywords to try and capture every possible searched item, your content becomes repetitive and disorganised.

Instead of your blog posts consistently attracting engagement, your posts get lost in a boggy, oversaturated field of similar blog posts, all fighting for attention in Google. The search engine has also changed its algorithm recently to prefer topic-based content, making pillar pages a necessity for those who want to maintain a high SERP (Search Engine Results Page) ranking.

The pillar page is the content guru's solution to organisation. So instead of brilliant blog posts 'floating around' without being anchored to anything, you have a pillar page as the 'home' to keep them all linked to. Your pillar page offers in-depth advice, education and tips to help the reader, but meanwhile hyperlinks to 'cluster pages' around that topic.

The old way

www.yourwebsite.com

blog.yourwesbite.com

CLUSTER CONTENT

The better way

www.yourwebsite.com

PILLAR CONTENT

Pillar Content
Cluster content
Hyperlink

For example

You create your pillar page on 'owning your first dog'. When you come to write 'Section 1: Finding the right breeder', you write lots of interesting facts and advice about this sub topic. As you write, however, you start to link to external blog posts you've written on this topic. For example, you might already have 3 blog posts ready to be published that link to this topic called:

• Our guide to the top 10 UK dog breeders
• 5 things to avoid when finding your dog breeder
• Does your puppy have its full health checks? Questions to ask before you buy.

You want to link to these blog posts in Section 1. Whichever words you hyperlink from on your pillar page, must be the same words that you hyperlink in the blog post, back to the pillar page. This will ensure that when one page performs well, the entire topic cluster will be boosted in Google. The more connections you set up between the same words in your content, the more trusted you will become as an authority on

For example

- You use the phrase 'top 10 dog breeders' in your pillar page
- You hyperlink this phrase to the blog post titled 'Our guide to the top 10 UK dog breeders'
- Wherever you've used the phrase 'top 10 dog breeders' in your blog post, you redirect back to the pillar page with a hyperlink.

As HubSpot explains:

> "A pillar page without a content cluster is actually just a page."

Remember:

The aim of your pillar page is to get more people finding your content and linking through to even more of your content through well-organised links. If your page is just a page, there's no guarantee anyone new will find your content, making it a fruitless task.

Activity 1:

Write a list of big, core topics you could create pillar pages on. Try to think of five core topics you think your business is an authority on, has existing content for, or could easily create more content about.

Big core topic ideas

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Chapter 2
When to create a pillar page?

So when do you know if you're ready to create a pillar page? Well, do you consider yourself an expert at something? Do you have knowledge about your field that would be helpful to others? Have you discovered a new, exciting way to do something that other people seem to struggle with? Do you know which problems you solve for your customers? Then you're ready to build a pillar page.

Remember:

The aim of your pillar page is to get more people finding your content and linking through to even more of your content through well-organised links. If your page is just a page, there's no guarantee anyone new will find your content, making it a fruitless task.

Ways to check you're ready for a pillar page:

1 Is there adequate search volume for the topic you're trying to rank for?

Visiting Google Trends will allow you to see the number of searches for a particular keyword. Alternatively, you could make use of HubSpot's Content Strategy tool to gather this information.

2 Do you have any existing content that covers this core topic?

Look back through your blog, social media, quizzes and lead magnets – such as ebooks – can any of these be repurposed for a new audience, or updated in light of more current information?

3 Is the topic something you want to cover in detail?

Do you feel as though you're a fountain of knowledge on a particular topic –a subject you enjoy talking about – and could help others understand it better? If you answer yes to the above, then it's a sure sign you're ready to start creating pillar page content. But pillar pages are weighty wads of content, which can be overwhelming for busy businesses. How is the average company supposed to find time to create a piece of content with over 3000 words and around 22 links points towards cluster content? The key is to use content you already have.

"By auditing the content you already have, you'll soon realise you have a lot more that can be reworked than you realised: recycling old content instead of reinventing the wheel is a much better option."

Top Tip

Make sure you check your key metrics on this existing content to make sure you are repurposing already high-performing content: look at things like:

- Page views
- Shares
- Comments
- Click-through rates
- Conversion rates.

Collect this important information together, review it and work out where the gaps are – this is a great basis to start with. If you've got plenty of interesting content already, then it's time to create your first pillar page!

For example

You could repurpose one of the following:

- An existing content offer you already have, such as an ebook, checklist, case study, video guide or workbook.

- Already-published content, such as a blog-post series, questionnaire, social media discussion or landing pages.

> "Ideas are like rabbits.
> You get a couple and learn how
> to handle them, and pretty soon
> you have a dozen.""

John Steinbeck certainly knew how to come up with an idea or two. But if you're not sure you're up to the pillar page equivalent of 'Of Mice and Men' just yet, then there's a few tricks you can try to generate ideas. Coming up with viable ideas is any writer's biggest challenge, so dedicating enough time to the content-planning stage ahead of getting stuck in is an important step not to be missed.

We've already touched on cluster topics: now it's time to think of your own.

Activity 2:

Create your own clusters. Using the five core topics you thought about in Activity 1, try to write eight sub topics of cluster content foreach one. Set it out in the same format as the di-agram, to help you visualise how the content would connect together.

Topic Clusters

● Pillar Content   ▲ Cluster Content   —— Hyperlink
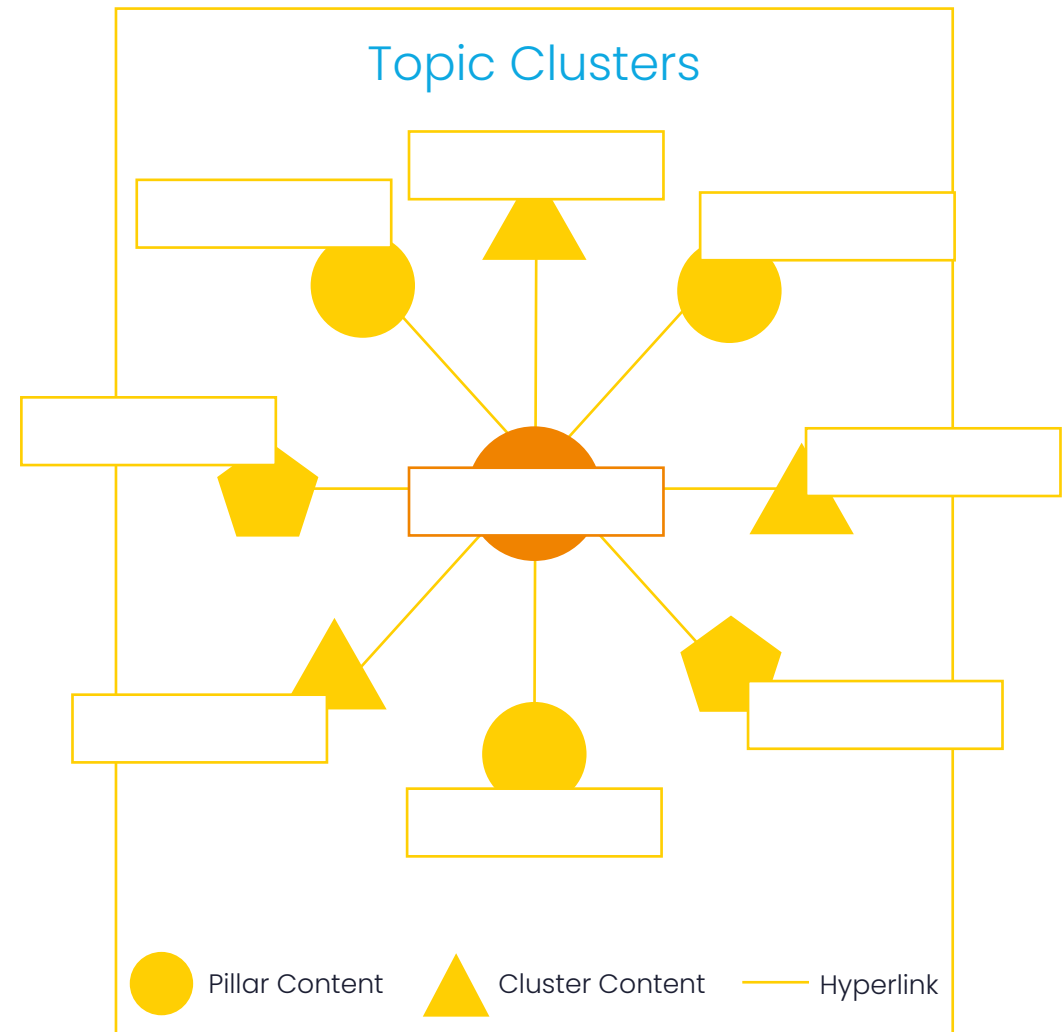
How did you do? Did you complete the task? If so, you've just created yourself five new pillar page ideas with up to eight sub topics to dive into more deeply on hyperlinked pages. That's a lot of content! And if you organise the content appropriately, as outlined in Chapter 1, Google will love you for it.

Still struggling to create ideas for pillar pages? Sometimes even the best marketers find themselves short of inspiration. When your main purpose is to create content for your business, day in, day out, having an "off day" isn't really an option (particularly if you are the content writer). Alternatively, perhaps you're more strategy minded or don't see yourself as a 'creative type', yet you know your business would really benefit from having some pillar page content.

Top Tip

If you struggle to find the words yourself, feature colleagues, local experts, former colleagues, social media influencers, podcasters, friends, family and anyone who has something smart to say about your topic of choice! Social proof is one of the most powerful things you can use as a marketer, so don't just do all the hard work yourself: reach out to some of those fantastic contacts you have (or even use quotes from famous people in history...) to further illustrate your points.

Here are some more ideas to help you find inspiration for pillar page content:

- Write a list of things to avoid in your sector
- Combine old, outdated blog posts into a new updated pillar page
- Write an A-Z guide about a topic on which you are an expert
- Create 'must do' or 'bucket list' style content
- Write about a survey you've conducted and the results
- Create a top 10 list about something you know really well
- Write about inspiration and link to your business
- Show a step-by-step or 'how to' demonstration
- Predict future trends and back each one up
- Clarify the top 10 industry misconceptions
- Create a calendar of upcoming events and discuss each in detail
- Write 'A Buyer's Guide To...'
- Create a list of 'lessons learned' since you first set out in business.

Chapter 4
Types of pillar pages

Once you've decided on your killer content idea, planned what you'll write about and sub divided it into sub topics, it's time to decide which format your pillar page will take. There are generally two schools of thought when it comes to formatting pillar pages: the x10 and the Resource. Both have their charms and both are valuable options to consider – you need to choose which one you feel most

The x10 Content Pillar Page

What is it?
This style of pillar page is similar to an ungated ebook and the more widely used of the two. The content is owned almost entirely by the creator and is an opportunity to deep dive into a core topic e.g. The Beginner's Guide to Wedding Dress Shopping. The reason it's called 'x10' is that you need to be asking yourself 'How can I create something 10 times better than what anyone else is currently doing and try to stand out?"

When to use it
If you have content that is a combination of:

- High quality – you've dotted your Is, crossed your Ts and created original content
- Trustworthy – do all the hard work for them: research, research, research
- Useful – give them tips they can modify and use straight away
- Interesting – teach them something they don't already know
- Remarkable – something that will stay with the audience after reading it
- Problem solving – offer accurate information and maybe even some resources
- Inspirational – encourage the reader to take some kind of action
- Emotional – evoking a response such as anger, surprise or humour
- Unique – make your pillar page full of unexpected twists, like a good novel.

The x10 Content Pillar Page

Advantages

Your own content is front and centre stage. Not only does this mean you are established as an authority on your topic, but it means you aren't in danger of plagiarising anyone else's work and getting into trouble with Google for it. Google loves original, organised content, so if you're creating a x10 pillar page, there should be plenty forsearch engines to adore about your website

Disadvantages

It's a lot of work! Creating 3000+ words of original, well-researched, well-crafted content requires a lot of hard work and the expertise of an experienced writer. If you've already got content you can repurpose – such as an ebook – then great, but if you're starting from scratch, it's a lot of copy to produce in one go.
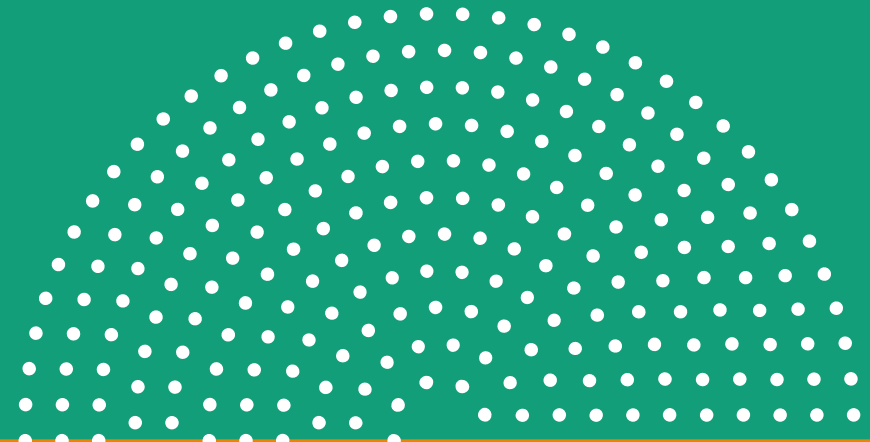
The Resource Pillar Page

What is it?
The resource pillar page is the less common of the two types. This is because it hyperlinks to external content, as well as internal which doesn't guarantee the user will return to your original page. This is a hotchpotch of fascinating information from across the web, all in one place, making it a 'bookmark-able' reference page that readers will keep coming back to, rather than reading once and being done with it. For example, 'House-Searching Tips for First-Time Buyers.'

When to use it
If you have content that is a combination of: comfortable with, and which suits your content, writing style and customers the best.

- The points from the x10 section still apply – the quality of writing still has to be
- great – but it's not necessary to have the same volume of content
- Organised links to internal and external materials on a core topic
- Lots of great knowledge about useful websites outside of your own
- Sections that are easy to navigate and click on.

The Resource Pillar Page

Advantages

This type of pillar page improves SEO, even though many of the links may send people off your site, which is not optimal for your business. You can generate inbound links from the sources you include on the pages that are yours, but not on the ones that belong to other people.

Disadvantages

Your own voice will not come through as strongly as in a x10 pillar page as there simply isn't as much content from you on the page. The majority of your content will be hyperlinked elsewhere like a huge catalogue of interesting and useful bookmarks for your reader. Rather than celebrating your own knowledge, it acts as a research project you've done on behalf of your audience.

Chapter 5
When to create a pillar page

"It's the job that's never started as takes longest to finish."

J. R. R. Tolkien wasn't kidding – actually getting started can be the hardest part when commencing a new, unfamiliar project. We've broken the steps down into seven easy chunks (and if you've stayed with us this far, taking part in the activities in the sections above, you've already completed some of them!)

1. Choose a core topic

2. Identify sub-topic clusters

3. Create and optimise the content pillar page

4. Repurpose the pillar page into a downloadable offer

5. Create blog posts for the sub-topic cluster content

6. Link relevant content to the pillar page

7. Create a conversion path to access the pillar page from your website

More about Step 3

If you've got a design team, this is the point where they can work their magic: you will simply hand over your written, image, podcast and video content to them, and they'll upload it to your website to make it look gorgeous. If, however, your job doesn't stop at content and it's actually you who will be building the page, there's a few tips to follow along the way:

- Using your content management system, such as HubSpot, simply add a new landing page to your existing website, ensuring it's a full-width website page.
- Name your page after your pillar page content and begin to edit –this is the fun part!
- Create (or paste in) your copy and other content such as images and videos, according to your branding guidelines – this needs to look like a totally integrated and purpose-built page from your company, not a rip-off of somebody else's.

In Chapter 6, you'll find out more about the best practices for formatting and layout of your pillar page – from navigation options to how to use headers.

...and Step 4 (we're racing through!)

The old saying goes that you can't please everyone... but maybe you can. The website pillar page format won't suit everyone – give them the option of a PDF to download & keep everyone happy.

Top Tip

To optimise the pillar page, you need a conversion opportunity near the top. This is like any other landing page on your site – you have to give the reader the opportunity to gain something from you in exchange for a few details. Instead of removing the navigation bar, as if best practice on standard landing pages, you can leave this on in a pillar page, and simply insert a form which asks for 2-3 fields, such as name and email address. Alternatively, you could add a chatbot or pop-up form to the page to offer this same download opportunity.

The offer should be a PDF page or ebook version of the pillar page – despite the fact the user has to give you their details, PDFs are still surprisingly popular and many visitors to your site will prefer to have a "physical" downloaded copy of your pillar page, rather than browsing the page itself. Giving the option for download right at the top means you're keeping everyone happy, whether they want to download or simply bookmark your page to keep coming back to later online.

Step 5 – The pillar page is only the beginning!

This is a fluid, ever-changing behemoth – the thing about the pillar page is that it's never 'done'.

If you're someone who loves a to-do list you can meticulously tick off, your sensibilities may be challenged by the pillar page!

It will be ever growing, ever changing and ever creating more work..

The first job in this ever expanding list, is to create the blog posts that will hold the sub topic cluster content.

Remember:

Without external links to related content, which then hyperlink back to the pillar page, you just have a really long webpage... which no-one will find, and no-one will want to read, if they do.

Step 6 – Link, link, link!

Using your blog, steadily build up content relating to each chapter in your pillar page. This rich, original, helpful content is essential for Google to identify you as an authority on your topic and help build you as the one-stop shop for your core topic.

This can't be done overnight – who has enough time to write, upload and hyperlink 25+ blog posts at the same time as creating a 3000+ word pillar page?

Instead, organise your internally created links in the following ways:

- Identify any blog posts you already have published which related to various sections of your pillar page.
- Go back into your CMS and add a new hyperlink to the old post, taking readers to your pillar page through a key word or phrase.
- Link this same key word to the blog post, when it appears in your pillar page – and there you have a two-way link, creating neat and tidy clusters for Google to organise your content by.
- There are bound to be lots of gaps in your existing content: note these down.
- Create a plan so that, over the coming months, you can build new content into your blog schedule which links to the pillar page, gradually filling in the sub-topic gaps you've identified.
- Now link to external valuable content too – it isn't all about you!
- It's important to hyperlink to useful, helpful, accurate content from other sites, too (but remember to carefully vet the sites you promote: they are a reflection of you and your business,
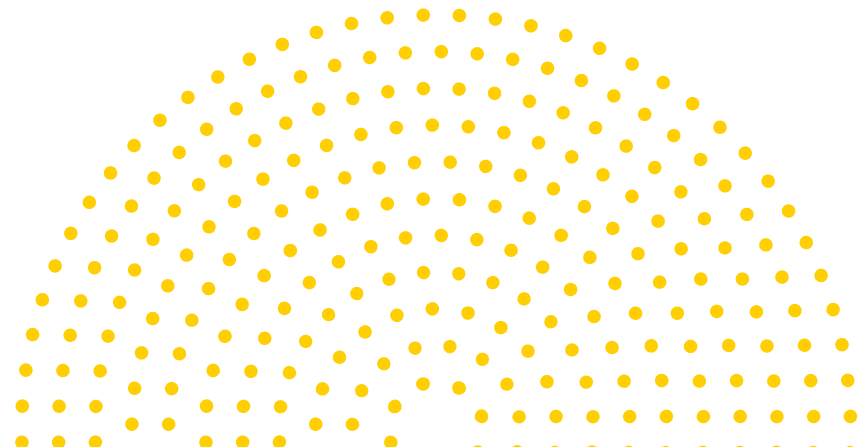
Step7 – We made it!

So where does your pillar page appear on your website and how do people find it? You'll need to create a conversion path to access the pillar page from your website. This can be done by:

- Updating the navigation menu to have a 'Resources' tab
- On the sub menu, as well as 'blog' and any other resources you have – checklists, ebooks, quizzes – create a 'pillar pages' tab
- Plus, updating the CTAs of existing blog posts and Lead Flows will help create a pathway to your pillar page.
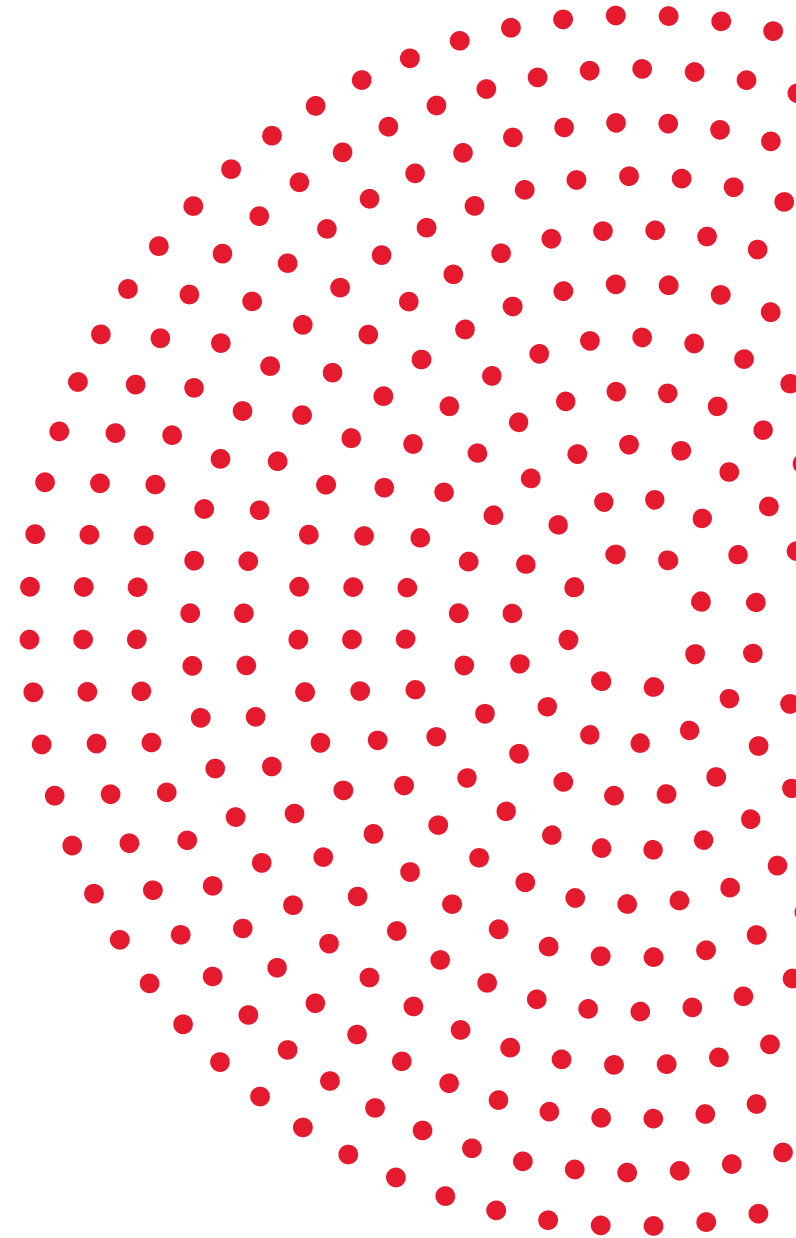
Chapter 6
Top tips for pillar page layout

And finally (drum roll please)...

There are a few best practices you'll need to check you're using on your pillar page. Without these, your page might not function as effectively as it could, meaning all that hard work is being wasted. You might have already implemented some of these tips – some have been mentioned in previous chapters – while others may have passed you by.

Activity 3:

Use the following points as a checklist, ticking off each one when you've achieved it on your pillar page.

☐ Ensure your core topic is actually referenced in your page title

It sounds so obvious, but this is the best way for Google to find you and associate you with other similar content you've created. Remember, if your pillar page performs well, it boosts everything else linked to it, so make it really easy to find you.

☐ Likewise, make sure you core topic is referenced in the URL for the page

Lots of CMSs do this automatically for you when you create a new page, but it's still worth checking that your key core topic words appear in your URL – again this helps improve your site's search visibility.

☐ Check there's a top navigation to the rest

If this is the first page a new visitor lands on – because they've clicked through from one of your related posts, social media or advertising – you need to give them the opportunity to explore the rest of your site, so don't hide away.

☐ Don't stop at the page title, include th core topic in your H1 tag

It bears repeating: you need to ram it home that this pillar page is about your core topic! Yes, it feels overly repetitive and contrived, but by repeating those key terms you'll be easier to find and easier not to confuse with something else.

Early on, define your core topic – assume nothing

Your reader has come to your pillar page for one of two reasons: they know a bit about the topic but need more, or they know absolutely nothing. The former will want confirmation of what they know for a confidence boost, the latter will benefit from layman's

Include conversion-focused landing page elements at the top (a form)

As explored in Chapter 5, the pillar page format isn't for everyone and the ways people plan to use your information may vary greatly: use this as an opportunity to gain some contacts and offer a PDF of the page in exchange for some basic details.

Create an anchor-linked table of contents which skips to chapters when clicked on

This is the essential feature of a pillar page – there is so much content in one place here that you need to make it as easy as possible to navigate the different sections/ include an anchor to make skipping around really easy.

Reference the core topic in the alt text of images throughout

Not only can your pillar page be found through Google text searches and linked external content, but if you include your core topic words in the alt text of the images you use, Google Images will also redirect to your pillar page, creating another way for you to be found.

Include clear H2 tags for section headers

This is a mighty, mighty body of content. Your reader will likely not be interested in the whole thing – you need to give them clear headers to signpost them to the parts they're interest in and ensure the correct H2 headers map to the correct anchor links in the table of contents. Remember: Google likes organisation!

Reference related core-topic terms throughout the page's content and define them

Not only do you need to be using your core topic wording at every turn, but related sub topics in the cluster – those you will link to outside of the pillar – need plenty of mentions. This isn't only so that you've got opportunities to hyperlink, but so you are constantly teaching the reader new terminology. terms explanation.

Link to relevant internal resources (blog posts, ebooks, case studies and others)

We've laboured this point enough in this pillar page, but just in case you missed it – link, link, link! The most valuable content to link to your pillar pageb (and vice versa) is your own. Whether it's older content or newly created for this purpose, the best way to promote your expert view is to hyperlink.

Link to relevant external resources (viable, trustworthy websites that aren't yours)

Your own content is the best, but showing you're confident and credible enough to shout about other great marketers is a wise move – alternative, if you're creating a Resource Pillar Page, you'll be predominantly relying on superb external links.

At the end, include a 'Back to top' button to save your reader from scrolling

This is another tactic to encourage further exploration of your website – don't just leave them hanging at the bottom of your page; guide the reader back to the top so they can a) explore another chapter they previously skipped or b) use your site navigation to discover more about you and your products/ services.

And there you have it…

Well, not really because – as your new expert knowledge has taught you – a pillar page is never really done! But for now, we wish you luck with your own go forth and organise!

Request content consultation

Simply fill in the short form, then someone from our team of experts will contact you shortly.

Thank you for downloading this ESM Inbound guide, and good luck on your journey to business growth with pillar pages!