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Digital Marketing: How SEO Empowers SaaS Startups
Growth Strategies

Master's Thesis

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1. Introduction

1.1 Relevance of the Research in Digital Marketing

The relevance of this research in digital marketing lies in the always-evolving landscape of online business strategies, particularly within the Software as a Service (SaaS) sector. In recent years, SaaS startups have grown not only in America within the Silicon Valley landscape, but in EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa) territory as well, offering innovative solutions to various industries. However, amidst intense competition, visibility and customer acquisition remain paramount for sustained growth and success (Dang, 2019). This study seeks to explore the pivotal role of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in empowering SaaS startups' growth strategies, thus, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective digital marketing practices in the contemporary business environment.

As shown in Figure 1, from 2018 to 2023, the SaaS industry in this region (EMEA) has seen annual growth rates averaging around 15% to 20% on average, and by 2023, the EMEA SaaS market had achieved significantly growth, contributing a part to the global SaaS market value, which reached approximately \$197 billion in 2023 (McKinsey, 2022).

The SaaS market in EMEA is expected to continue growth, projections indicate that the SaaS industry will grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 18.7%, potentially reaching \$908.21 billion globally by 2030. A significant portion of this growth is expected to come from the EMEA region due to increasing digital transformation initiatives, In addition, by 2025, it is anticipated that 85% of all

business applications in the EMEA region will be SaaS-based, reflecting the robust adoption and integration of SaaS solutions across various industries (Yon, 2024).

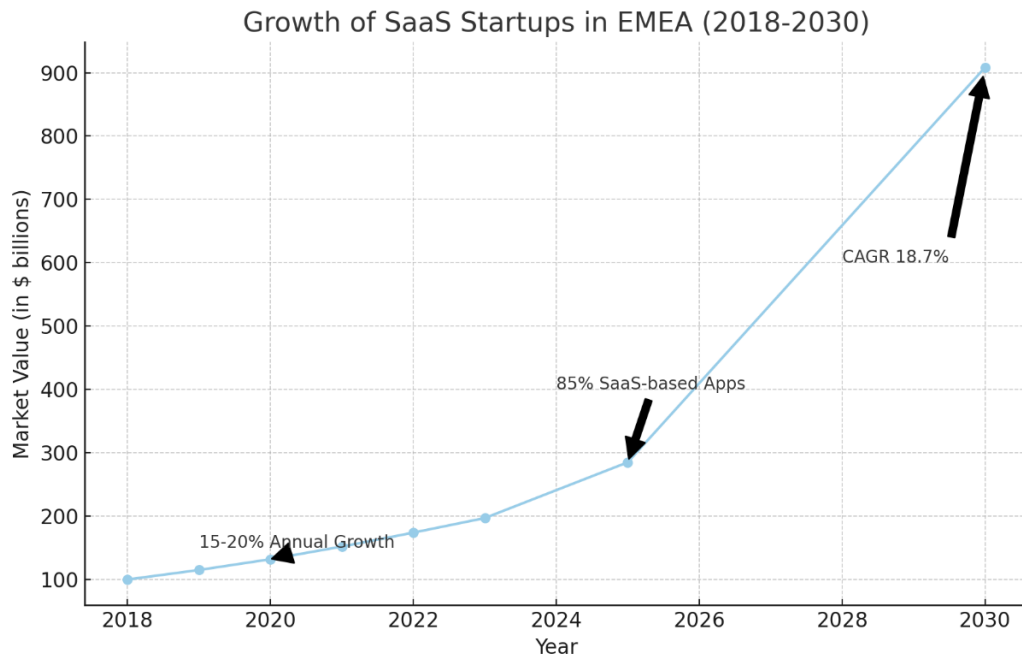


Figure 1 Growth of SaaS Startups in EMEA (2018-2030) (2024) by McKinsey and Growthlist

As digital marketing continues to shape the business landscape, the significance of SEO cannot be overstated. SEO serves as the cornerstone of online visibility, enabling businesses to enhance their presence in search engine results pages (SERPs) and attract organic traffic (Singh, 2024). For SaaS startups, which often operate in highly competitive niches, SEO effectively can be the difference between obscurity and prominence in the digital marketplace. By investigating the impact of SEO strategies on SaaS startups, this research aims to provide actionable insights of how this type of approach empowers their growth, aimed for marketers, and business leaders navigating the complexities of online marketing.

Furthermore, understanding the dynamics of SEO in the context of SaaS startups is crucial for optimizing resource allocation and maximizing Return of Investment (ROI). In an era where digital marketing budgets are carefully assigned for efficiency and effectiveness, it is imperative to identify strategies that offer sustainable growth and long-term viability (Rahman, 2018). By unraveling the link between SEO implementation and business outcomes in the SaaS sector we can identify, is it worth the hype that the industry puts in SEO implementations?

1.1.1 Research Gap: Understanding the Effects of SEO in SaaS B2B

In today's digital age, where software solutions are often delivered as services over the internet (known as SaaS), the way companies market themselves has changed dramatically. Imagine you're searching for a new software tool for your business online. You might start by typing a few keywords into Google, right? Well, that's where SEO comes into play. It's all about making sure companies show up at the top of those search results, and for SaaS companies, it's crucial.

While there's loads of info out there about SEO and how it works in general, when it comes to SaaS companies selling to other businesses (B2B), there's a gap in the research. Most studies focus on SEO in a broad sense or look at examples from other industries. They don't really dive deep into how SEO specifically affects SaaS businesses that sell to other businesses, for example, Chaffey & Ellos-Chadwick (2019) in their research, provide a comprehensive overview of digital marketing strategies, including SEO, social media, and content marketing, across various industries. It covers essential SEO practices such as keyword research, on-page and

off-page optimization, and link building, with numerous case studies from diverse sectors.

However, the research does not specifically address the unique aspects of SEO for SaaS B2B companies. These businesses face distinct challenges like much longer sales cycles and complex customer needs, mostly focus on technologies, requiring tailored SEO strategies for lead generation.

That's where this thesis comes in. We're diving into the world of SEO for SaaS B2B companies. We are going to dig into how SEO strategies have changed over time, how they've adapted to the ever-changing online landscape, and most importantly, how they've impacted the success of these companies and their profitability.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General Objective

- Analyze how the effective implementation of SEO strategies impacts the growth and success of SaaS startups in the field of digital marketing and if it is profitable.

1.2.1 Specific Objectives

- Identify the major elements influencing organic traffic while evaluating the impact of SEO on the visibility of SaaS businesses in search engine results.

- Analyze how SEO strategies can enhance customer conversion and retention in SaaS startups.
- Investigate the impact of SEO strategies on user acquisition and customer base expansion in SaaS startup companies, with a focus on the effectiveness of lead generation and conversion tactics.
- Develop a research methodology that combines qualitative approaches to investigate the impact of SEO strategies on SaaS businesses.
- Conduct interviews and one case study to gather real-insight about SEO's effects on organic traffic, customer conversion, and retention.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into chapters, each focusing on distinct aspects of the research on the impact of SEO on SaaS startups. In Chapter 1 the main discussion is the relevance of the research in digital marketing, particularly within the SaaS sector, highlighting the growth and challenges faced by SaaS startups in America and EMEA regions. It emphasizes the pivotal role of SEO in the EMEA territory and in the growth strategies of these startups and the importance of understanding SEO's impact on visibility and customer acquisition. It also identifies a research gap concerning the effects of SEO in SaaS B2B companies and outlines the general and specific objectives of the study.

In Chapter 2, we outline the research methodology employed in the study. This chapter explains the document analysis procedure, which involves a systematic review of existing literature to identify research gaps and establish a theoretical framework. It also covers the interview methodology, detailing the selection of interview participants, the design of interview questions, and the process of conducting interviews. By providing a comprehensive understanding of the methods used to gather and analyze data, this chapter ensures the validity and reliability of the research findings.

Following the steps of how we'll lay out our research methodology, in chapter 3 we review the theoretical framework of the study, defining key concepts and providing a historical overview of SEO practices. It discusses different types of SEO, including on-page, off-page, and technical SEO, and examines various SEO strategies such as keyword research, content optimization, link building, and mobile optimization. This chapter lays the foundation for understanding how SEO can impact the growth and success of SaaS startups by enhancing their online visibility and customer acquisition efforts.

Furthermore, we need a comprehensive review of the theoretical and our qualitative results and findings, therefore, in chapter 4, we present the research findings derived from the document analysis and interviews. This chapter analyzes the major elements influencing organic traffic and evaluates the impact of SEO on the visibility of SaaS businesses in search engine results. It discusses the effectiveness of different SEO strategies in improving customer conversion and retention. The findings are supported by qualitative data gathered from industry experts and practitioners, providing valuable insights into the practical application of SEO in the SaaS sector. By

highlighting key trends and patterns, this chapter offers evidence-based recommendations for SaaS startups looking to optimize their SEO efforts.

Lastly, as a review of the research and following the objectives we set at the beginning of the research, in chapter 5, we dive in and provide a comprehensive conclusion and offer practical recommendations based on the research findings. This chapter summarizes the key insights and contributions of the study, highlighting the importance of tailored SEO strategies for SaaS startups. It also outlines potential areas for future research, emphasizing the need for ongoing investigation into the dynamic field of SEO and its impact on SaaS businesses.

2. Methodology and Data

The methodology and data section outlines the approaches used to explore the role of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in the growth strategies of SaaS startups. This includes document analysis, systematic review, and interviews. Document analysis involves reviewing relevant literature to identify patterns and gaps related to SEO's impact on SaaS startups. Systematic reviews enhance the transparency and quality of evidence synthesis. Interviews with key stakeholders, selected through purposive sampling, provide in-depth insights from digital marketing strategists and SEO experts. This combination of methods ensures a comprehensive and rigorous investigation into how SEO empowers SaaS startups' growth strategies.

2.1 Document Analysis Procedure

Document analysis is the methodical process of looking over or evaluating written and electronic documents (computer-based and Internet-transmitted). Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis also requires data inspection and interpretation to derive meaning, improve understanding, and provide empirical information. Document text, words, and photographs were captured without the researcher's help. For the purposes of this discussion, other mute or traces of evidence—such as cultural artifacts—are disregarded (Bowen, 2009).

An interesting point of view is mention by Silverman (2011) regarding documents, referring to them as social facts, generated, distributed, and utilized through socially organized methods. Some examples of documents used in an analysis can include minutes of meetings, manuals, radio, T.V , data collected via surveys, etc, documents that can be easily found online, in libraries, or even in newspapers (Silverman, Range of Methods, 2011).

Typically, researchers examine existing literature as part of their investigations and incorporate that information into their reports. When a list of scrutinized documents is provided, prior studies are frequently left out. Without a doubt, previous studies serve as a data source, requiring the researcher to rely on data descriptions and interpretation rather than raw data as a foundation for analysis.

Finding, selecting, evaluating, and combining data from documents is part of the analytical process. Document analysis generates data excerpts, quotations, or

entire passages, which are then organized into significant themes, categories, and case examples using content analysis (Labuschagne, 2003).

2.1.1 Systematic Review

A systematic review is a thorough and structured approach to evidence synthesis that entails a meticulous and unbiased examination of all relevant studies on a specific topic. Its goal is to provide a comprehensive overview of existing evidence while minimizing bias and subjectivity through a predetermined and transparent methodology (Moher, Liberati, & Tetzlaff, 2015).

The significance of transparent reporting in systematic reviews lies in its ability to ensure that the quality, reproducibility, and overall validity of findings are meticulously evaluated. Guidelines such as those provided by Gough, Oliver, and Thomas (2017) in their comprehensive overview of systematic reviews offer standardized protocols to maintain clarity and completeness in reporting. Their framework includes detailed checklists and flow diagrams that help researchers systematically document and communicate key protocol details, ensuring the robustness and transparency of the review process (Gough, Oliver, & Thomas, 2017).

Moreover, it's imperative to emphasize the importance of a detailed and systematic approach to document search strategies, inclusion criteria, and data extraction methods. Such thorough documentation not only enhances the quality of individual reviews but also contributes to the broader goal of building a reliable

evidence base for future research and policy-making. To sum up, adhering to these guidelines is essential for improving reporting standards in meta-analyses and systematic reviews, encouraging openness, and making it easier to critically evaluate research methods (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008).

As you can see in Table 1 below, it outlines a systematic checklist for key components of a systematic review protocol, providing a structured approach to administrative information, author details, support sources, the introduction, and methodology. Administrative information ensures proper identification and registration, while the author section emphasizes contributions and amendments. The support segment details financial sources and the role of funders. In the introduction, the rationale and explicit research questions are presented. The methodology section delves into eligibility criteria, information sources, search strategy, and data management. Study records encompass the selection process, data extraction, variables, and outcomes. The data synthesis section covers quantitative synthesis criteria, summary measures, and meta-bias assessment. This comprehensive checklist ensures a meticulous and transparent approach to each stage of the systematic review process, contributing to the credibility and reliability of the research.

Section/topic	Item #	Checklist item
ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION		
Title	1a	Identify the report as a protocol of a systematic review
Identification	1b	If the protocol is for an update of a previous systematic review, identify as such
Registration	2	If registered, provide the name of the registry (e.g., PROSPERO) and registration number
Authors		
Contact	3a	Provide name, institutional affiliation, and e-mail address of all protocol authors; provide the physical mailing address of the corresponding author
Contributions	3b	Describe contributions of protocol authors and identify the guarantor of the review
Amendments	4	If the protocol represents an amendment of a previously completed or published protocol, identify as such and list changes; otherwise, state a plan for documenting important protocol amendments
Support		
Sources	5a	Indicate sources of financial or other support for the review
Sponsor	5b	Provide the name of the review funder and/or sponsor
Role of sponsor/funder	5c	Describe the roles of funder(s), sponsor(s), and/or institution(s), if any, in developing the protocol
INTRODUCTION		
Rationale	6	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known
Objectives	7	Provide an explicit statement of the question(s) the review will address with reference to participants, interventions, comparators, and outcomes (PICO)
METHODS		
Eligibility criteria	8	Specify the study characteristics (e.g., PICO, study design, setting, time frame) and report characteristics (e.g., years considered, language, publication status) to be used as criteria for eligibility for the review
Information sources	9	Describe all intended information sources (e.g., electronic databases, contact with study authors, trial registers, or other grey literature sources) with planned dates of coverage
Search strategy	10	Present a draft of the search strategy to be used for at least one electronic database, including planned limits, such that it could be repeated
Study records		
Data management	11a	Describe the mechanism(s) that will be used to manage records and data throughout the review
Selection process	11b	State the process that will be used for selecting studies (e.g., two independent reviewers) through each phase of the review (i.e., screening, eligibility, and inclusion in meta-analysis)

Data collection process	11c	Describe the planned method of extracting data from reports (e.g., piloting forms, done independently, in duplicate), any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators
Data items	12	List and define all variables for which data will be sought (e.g., PICO items, funding sources), any pre-planned data assumptions and simplifications
Outcomes and prioritization	13	List and define all outcomes for which data will be sought, including prioritization of main and additional outcomes, with rationale
Risk of bias in individual studies	14	Describe anticipated methods for assessing the risk of bias of individual studies, including whether this will be done at the outcome or study level, or both; state how this information will be used in data synthesis
Data Synthesis		
Describe criteria under which study data will be quantitatively synthesized	15a	Describe criteria under which study data will be quantitatively synthesized
If data are appropriate for quantitative synthesis, describe planned summary measures, methods of handling data, and methods of combining data from studies, including any planned exploration of consistency (e.g., I 2 , Kendall's tau)	15b	If data are appropriate for quantitative synthesis, describe planned summary measures, methods of handling data, and methods of combining data from studies, including any planned exploration of consistency (e.g., I 2, Kendall's tau)
Describe any proposed additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression)	15c	Describe any proposed additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression)
If quantitative synthesis is not appropriate, describe the type of summary planned	15d	Describe any proposed additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression)
Meta-bias(es)	16	Specify any planned assessment of meta-bias(es) (e.g., publication bias across studies, selective reporting within studies)
Confidence in cumulative evidence	17	Describe how the strength of the body of evidence will be assessed (e.g., GRADE)

Table 1 PRISMA-P 2015 checklist: recommended items to include in a systematic review protocol (Moher, Liberati, & Tetzlaff, 2015)

As shown in Figure 2 the PRISMA diagram begins with the identification phase where 154 studies were initially found through a literature search, in platforms like academic review, ISBN data base, and the university data base.

From these, 92 studies were excluded based on initial criteria, with 50 specifically deemed not relevant to the research objectives. This left 60 studies that were thoroughly evaluated for eligibility. During the evaluation phase, an additional 12 studies were excluded due to not meeting the inclusion criteria or lacking sufficient data regarding the industry we're studying, resulting in 48 studies that were finally included in the systematic analysis. This diagram not only helps in visualizing the study selection process but also ensures the reproducibility and transparency of the research methodology, providing a clear rationale for the inclusion and exclusion of studies throughout the review.

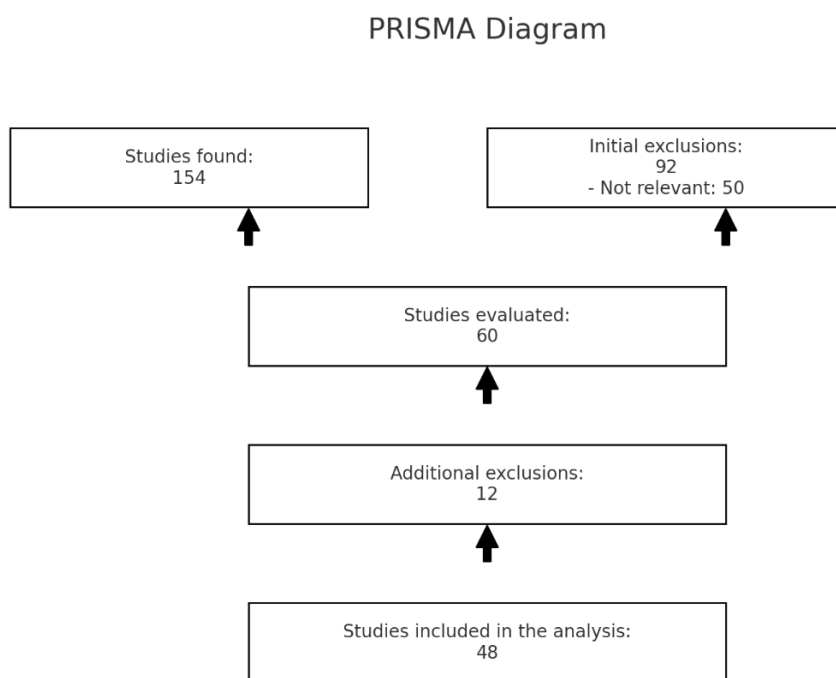


Figure 2 Prisma Diagram (2024)

by Author

2.2 Interview

The emphasis lies on the crucial role of selecting an appropriate interview process to gather comprehensive and meaningful data in qualitative research. First, we need a deep understanding of different interview types, primarily structured, semi-structured, and unstructured, as pivotal components in the research methodology (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

When conducting a structured interview, all questions relevant to the research goals are carefully prepared in advance and asked during the meeting. However, there are a few drawbacks to this approach. Interviewees are expected to respond to a predetermined set of questions during structured interviews, which are by nature formal. The conversational flow is hampered by this formality, which makes it difficult for participants to freely express their actual thoughts and feelings. In addition, the interviewer is limited in their ability to formulate original follow-up questions by the structured format, which centers the entire interview around a pre-planned list of questions designed to elicit information. Thus, it is impossible to describe structured interviews as fully open-ended; instead, they are more like oral questionnaires in which the interviewer is required to answer every question in accordance with predefined research goals. Despite being simple to use and evaluate, the structured interview format may not allow for a completely expressive and natural interaction, which could limit the amount of detailed data gathered for study goals (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

Semi-structured interviews diverge from written questionnaires, resembling natural conversations more closely (Duranti, 2011). Ending questions to delve into specific topics in greater detail is a defining characteristic of this interview type. Open-ended questions empower interviewers to gather comprehensive data, including personal feelings and emotions, fostering a less inhibited exchange of ideas. The need for substantial planning in qualitative interviews, particularly in the case of semi-structured interviews, which demand preplanning and thorough preparation, General questions serve as an introductory kind of step, breaking the first barrier before more in-depth inquiries and topics are introduced in the interview process (Mason, 2022). Basically, flexibility is an elemental part of this type of interview; more questions often arise on the go during the research.

In contrast to semi-structured and structured interviews, unstructured interviews are less planned and more akin to spontaneous discussions, which may make it more difficult to guarantee the collection of pertinent research data. The need for additional interviews may arise, and steering the conversation towards the desired information becomes a considerable challenge (Galletta & Cross, 2013).

2.2.1 Selection of Interview Participants

One of the most important factors that directly affects the depth and richness of the data gathered in qualitative research is participant selection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Researchers frequently choose participants who have pertinent knowledge and experiences related to the research topic through Purposeful or Purposive Sampling, Snowball Sampling, Theoretical Sampling, Convenience Sampling, Quota Sampling, Critical Case Sampling, Sequential Sampling, a non-random sampling technique. Here

are some common strategies for selecting participants in qualitative research (Patton M. , 2015):

Purposive Sampling: This involves selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research question or objectives. Including people who can offer in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied is the aim. The following are typical subtypes of purposive sampling: homogeneous, criterion, and maximum variation samples.

Snowball Sampling: In cases where it is challenging to identify participants directly, researchers may start with a few key informants who then refer to other potential participants. This method is particularly useful when studying hidden or hard-to-reach populations.

Theoretical Sampling: Associated with grounded theory research, this approach involves selecting participants based on emerging themes and concepts from ongoing data analysis. The goal is to refine and develop theoretical concepts through iterative data collection and analysis.

Convenience Sampling: Less rigorous than other sampling methods, convenience sampling involves selecting participants based on their accessibility and availability. Often used when practical considerations, such as time and resources, limit the researcher's ability to use more complex sampling strategies.

Quota Sampling: This involves setting specific quotas for certain participant characteristics (age, gender, occupation) to ensure representation of diverse perspectives within the sample.

Critical Case Sampling: Researchers may deliberately select cases that are considered critical or extreme to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon. This method is useful for exploring outliers or unique cases.

Sequential Sampling: In longitudinal or multi-phase studies, researchers may use sequential sampling to select participants for subsequent phases based on the findings of earlier phases.

In the selection of interview participants, our focus gravitates towards individuals in charge of digital marketing strategies within SaaS startups. These key decision-makers hold a unique vantage point, actively shaping and executing initiatives pivotal to their companies' growth in the competitive digital sphere. By engaging with them, we aim to have firsthand insights into their experiences and an overview of the results of their strategies, particularly in the realm of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). In addition of these interviews, we would ask a model of questions to a SEO expert, working closely as an independent in his Digital Marketing agency, helping his clients to seek their objectives through SEO.

We conducted interviews with two individuals: Adrian De Pedro and Alfonso Calero. Adrian De Pedro has extensive experience in online positioning and SEO strategy execution, having worked in the field for over 15 years. He has successfully led numerous SEO projects, focusing on increasing organic traffic and improving search engine rankings for various clients. Similarly, Alfonso Calero brings over 15 years of expertise in SEO advisory and implementation. He runs his own consultancy where he helps clients develop and execute effective SEO strategies, enhancing their online visibility and driving business growth.

Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes and took place in their offices in Valencia, near Alameda Coworking. Although the participants preferred not to be recorded, they granted us permission to use their names and insights freely. The data collected from these interviews were meticulously analyzed by transcribing notes taken during the discussions. These notes were then categorized into key themes relevant to our research objectives, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the strategies and outcomes shared by the interviewees.

The last interview with Rebeca Zaragozá as the Head of Marketing at Uktena, a Spanish SaaS startup focused on providing innovative solutions for businesses. The interview with Rebeca was conducted at Lanzadera, where Uktena is based, and lasted about 30 minutes.

Through a qualitative lens, we sought to unravel the refinement interplay between digital marketing tactics and the overarching goals of SaaS startups. Specifically, our interviews are designed to delve into the intricate details of how these strategies bolster customer conversion and retention, with a keen eye on the effectiveness of lead generation and conversion tactics. Moreover, by tapping into the experiences of these industry insiders, we aim to unravel the impact of such strategies on user acquisition and the expansion of customer bases. Ultimately, our endeavor is to illuminate, in a qualitative manner, the critical role of digital marketing in driving sustainable growth and long-term success within the dynamic outlook of SaaS entrepreneurship.

2.2.2 Interview Question Design

A crucial component of qualitative research is creating interview questions that are successful in influencing the volume and caliber of the data gathered. Using open-ended questions to entice participants to contribute in-depth, narrative answers that enhance the dataset is a fundamental principle. In order to maintain neutrality and obtain real participant insights, it is imperative to steer clear of leading questions that could sway responses. By starting with icebreaker questions, the researcher and participant can create a relaxed atmosphere and build rapport. Probes, also known as follow-up inquiries, are useful instruments for getting further information or clarification from respondents. Being sensitive is crucial, particularly when discussing sensitive subjects. This calls for cautious wording and giving participants the choice to omit difficult issues. Asking questions in a logical order, from general to specific, makes it easier for participants to explore difficult subjects (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009).

Before developing the interview questions, a comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted to identify relevant questionnaires used in similar research contexts. One notable reference is the study by Chaffey (2019), which provides a comprehensive overview of digital marketing strategies, including SEO, across various industries. This study includes a set of interview questions aimed at understanding the effectiveness of SEO practices. For example, one question from Chaffey's questionnaire that is relevant to our research is:

1. "How do you measure the success of your SEO strategies in terms of key performance indicators (KPIs)?" (Chaffey, 2019, p. 112)

While this question is valuable, it alone does not cover the specific needs and unique challenges of SEO in SaaS startups. Thus, additional custom questions were developed to fully address our research objectives. The following questions are designed for SEO experts to gain insights into the specific strategies and their effectiveness within the SaaS industry. These questions aim to understand the practical implementation, results, and challenges of SEO tactics for customer retention, acquisition, and overall business growth.

Building on Chaffey's question about measuring success through KPIs, the following customized interview questions were also designed specifically for SaaS startups:

2. In your experience within the SaaS industry, what time frame typically elapses between the implementation of SEO-focused customer retention and acquisition tactics and the observable impact on customer behavior or conversion rates? Are there any notable trends or patterns you've observed regarding the timeline for seeing results?

3. Considering the investment of time and resources required to implement SEO strategies aimed at customer retention and acquisition in SaaS startups, do you believe the long-term benefits justify the upfront effort? Can you provide any specific examples or case studies where the ROI of these efforts has been particularly significant for your SaaS company?

4. How do you leverage data analytics and user behavior insights to inform your SEO-driven customer retention and acquisition strategies in your SaaS startup? Are there any specific tools or methodologies you find most effective in analyzing customer engagement and identifying areas for optimization?

5. In your opinion, what role does personalized marketing and targeted messaging play in enhancing the effectiveness of SEO-driven customer retention and acquisition efforts? Can you share any successful campaigns or initiatives where personalized SEO strategies have resulted in intangible improvements in customer engagement or loyalty?

6. How do you approach competitor analysis within your SEO strategy in the SaaS industry, and how does understanding your competitors' tactics inform your own approach to search engine optimization?

To explore the major elements influencing organic traffic and the impact of SEO on visibility, customer conversion, and user acquisition, we have designed based on the theory and SEO strategies mentioned later in our research, the following questions for marketing directors or specialists who have worked or are currently working in SaaS startups. These questions also address the challenges and investment considerations in SEO for SaaS startups.

1. How do you prioritize SEO strategies within your overall marketing budget, given the high initial investment required? What factors influence your decision to allocate resources to SEO over other marketing channels?
2. Can you describe a situation where the implementation of SEO strategies significantly improved organic traffic and visibility for your SaaS business? What were the key elements that influenced this success?
3. In your experience, how does investing in SEO strategies impact customer conversion and retention in SaaS startups? Are there specific metrics or KPIs that you use to measure this impact effectively?

These questions aim to delve deeper into the strategic decision-making process of marketing directors regarding SEO investments, focusing on tangible benefits and the challenges faced.

2.2 Case Study Analysis

2.2.1 Selection of Case Studies: Definition

In selecting case studies, researchers often employ a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that chosen cases provide comprehensive and diverse insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This involves identifying cases that represent a range of variables, including geographical location, organizational size, industry sector, and historical context (Yin, 2018,). By deliberately selecting cases that exhibit variability along these dimensions, researchers can maximize the richness and depth of their analysis, facilitating a more robust understanding of the research topic. Additionally, researchers may employ theoretical sampling techniques, wherein cases are selected based on emerging theories or conceptual frameworks, allowing for theoretical development and refinement throughout the study (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

Furthermore, researchers must consider the feasibility and accessibility of potential case studies, considering factors such as data availability, participant cooperation, and logistical constraints. Clear criteria for case selection should be established a priori to guide the process and ensure transparency and rigor in decision-making. Through thoughtful and systematic case selection, researchers can enhance the relevance, generalizability, and validity of their findings, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their field.

2.2.1.1 Data Collection from Case Studies: Definition

Data collection from published case studies involves a systematic and rigorous approach to gather relevant information from existing literature and documented accounts of real-world phenomena (Yin, 2018). Researchers typically begin by conducting a comprehensive search of academic databases, scholarly journals, books, reports, and other reputable sources to identify relevant case studies that align with the research objectives (Merriam, 2009). Keyword searches, citation tracking, and reference list scanning are commonly employed techniques to locate pertinent literature (Miles, 2019). Additionally, researchers may consult experts in the field and review grey literature, such as industry reports and conference proceedings, to ensure thorough coverage of the topic.

Once relevant case studies have been identified, researchers carefully review and analyze each document to extract key data points, such as case background, research questions, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, findings, and implications. Data extraction forms or coding templates may be developed to systematically record and organize information from each case study. Researchers pay close attention to methodological rigor, validity, and reliability of findings to assess the quality and trustworthiness of the evidence (Patton, 2015).

Moreover, researchers critically evaluate the transferability and applicability of findings from published case studies to the current research context, considering factors such as temporal relevance, geographical location, organizational context, and industry sector. Comparative analysis and pattern recognition techniques may be

employed to identify common themes, trends, and divergent patterns across multiple case studies, facilitating theory-building and knowledge synthesis (Merriam, 2009).

2.2.2 Case Study #1

Hurdlr is a SaaS startup specializing in financial tracking for freelancers and small business owners. Its core product helps users track income, expenses, and mileage, making tax preparation and financial management more efficient. Despite offering a valuable service, Hurdlr faced challenges in increasing its online visibility and attracting a broader audience. To address these challenges, Hurdlr implemented a comprehensive SEO strategy focused on improving search engine rankings, increasing organic traffic, and ultimately enhancing customer acquisition and retention (Crunch Base, 2020).

The first step in Hurdlr's SEO strategy involved thorough keyword research to identify a mix of 21 strategic keywords that were relevant to their target audience but where they were not yet ranking effectively. This included both high-volume and long-tail keywords that potential users were likely to search for. Keywords such as "Uber tax calculator" and "freelancer income tax calculator" were prioritized due to their high relevance and search intent (Siu, 2019).

Hurdlr focused on creating high-quality, informative content that addressed the specific pain points and needs of their target audience. This included writing and updating blog posts and product pages that were optimized for the selected keywords. For instance, the blog post on the "Uber tax calculator" was enhanced with comprehensive content that explained the benefits of using Hurdlr's tool, detailed instructions on how to use it, and included internal links to related articles. This not only improved the page's search engine ranking but also provided valuable information to users, thereby increasing engagement and conversion rates (Smith, 2020).

Goals

Hurdlr's main objectives were:

- **Increasing conversions** through their content marketing efforts.
- **Improving rankings** for some of their highest value keywords.
- **Increasing the proportion of site visitors** who were closer to the purchase stage.

Initial Assessment

In 2018, Hurdlr, already serving thousands of users across various professions such as rideshare drivers, couriers, REALTORS®, real estate agents, and direct sales distributors, identified several areas for potential improvement in their content marketing and SEO efforts. Although their in-house team was talented, they saw an opportunity to enhance their strategies to achieve better results. They aimed to:

- Increase conversions through more effective content marketing.
- Improve rankings for high-value keywords crucial to their business.
- Attract more site visitors who were closer to making a purchase.

Keyword Research

The first step in Hurdlr's SEO strategy involved thorough keyword research to identify a mix of 21 strategic keywords relevant to their target audience but where they were not yet ranking effectively. This included both high-volume and long-tail keywords that potential users were likely to search for, such as "Uber tax calculator" and "freelancer income tax calculator."

Using tools like Ahrefs and SEMrush, an extensive keyword analysis was conducted to uncover opportunities for content creation and optimization. This research revealed gaps in Hurdlr's current keyword strategy, highlighting areas where new content could drive significant traffic and engagement (Siu, 2019).

Content Optimization

Hurdlr focused on creating high-quality, informative content that addressed the specific pain points and needs of their target audience. This included writing and updating blog posts and product pages optimized for the selected keywords. For instance, the blog post on the "Uber tax calculator" was enhanced with comprehensive content, including detailed instructions on using the tool and internal links to related articles. This not only improved the page's search engine ranking but also provided valuable information to users, increasing engagement and conversion rates.

Each piece of content was crafted to align with the user intent behind the targeted keywords. The content was made informative and actionable, with clear calls-to-action (CTAs) to guide users towards conversion. Additionally, the content was designed to be easily digestible, with bullet points, subheadings, and multimedia elements to enhance readability and engagement.

Customer Acquisition via Content Marketing

Hurdlr significantly boosted customer acquisition through a content marketing strategy that included a high-quality blog post focused on Uber drivers. This blog post, featuring the top 16 deductions for Uber drivers, was designed with mobile-friendly

clickable tiles to enhance user experience. By promoting this content on social media platforms, Hurdlr attracted around 3000 new users within the first week.

The production of this introductory content cost approximately \$5000, and a significant amount of time was invested to ensure its high quality and value. The strategic focus on creating valuable, targeted content paid off, as evidenced by the substantial user acquisition results.

Technical SEO Improvements

Significant improvements were made to the technical aspects of Hurdlr's website. This included optimizing meta tags, improving site speed, ensuring mobile responsiveness, and enhancing the overall site architecture to make it more search-engine friendly. These technical updates helped search engines better crawl and index Hurdlr's content, leading to improved rankings on search engine results pages (SERPs).

To enhance site speed, images were optimized, CSS and JavaScript files were minified, and browser caching was leveraged. Mobile responsiveness was ensured by adopting a responsive design framework that allowed the site to adapt seamlessly to different screen sizes and devices. Additionally, structured data markup was implemented to help search engines understand the content better, which contributed to higher rankings and improved visibility in search results (Smith, 2020).

Monitoring and Analytics

Throughout the implementation of their SEO strategy, Hurdlr used tools like Google Analytics to monitor the performance of their website and the effectiveness of their SEO efforts. By tracking key metrics such as organic traffic, bounce rates, and conversion rates, Hurdlr was able to continuously refine their strategy and make data-driven decisions to further enhance their SEO performance.

Detailed tracking dashboards were set up to monitor the performance of individual content pieces and overall site health. This allowed Hurdlr to identify areas that required further optimization and to track the impact of their efforts in real-time. Regular performance reports were shared with Hurdlr's team, providing transparency and enabling collaborative decision-making.

Implementing the Predictable Growth Methodology

The SaaS Predictable Growth methodology applied to Hurdlr involves a systematic process designed to coordinate different marketing tactics and channels strategically. This methodology includes eight steps:

- **Evaluating MRR Accelerators:** Identifying different types of fit beyond product-market fit, including customer-content fit, customer-channel fit, and message-market fit.
- **Understanding Customer Intent and Pain Points:** Conducting workshops with Hurdlr's marketing, product, and customer success teams to understand their customers' primary pain points.

- **Pinpointing Conversion Barriers:** Using data analytics to identify why visitors were not converting.
- **Educating and Motivating Prospects:** Creating content that addresses pain points and motivates prospects to take action.
- **Driving Right Fit Traffic:** Using both paid and organic channels to attract high-intent visitors.
- **Creating a Proof of Concept:** Developing pilot projects to test the effectiveness of new strategies.
- **Measuring Results and Generating Insights:** Continuously tracking performance and generating actionable insights.
- **Creating an MRR Acceleration Roadmap:** Developing a roadmap to assign tasks and responsibilities for achieving growth targets.

Content Creation and Optimization

The approach to content creation for Hurdlr involved both creating new content and optimizing existing content. Five strategic blog posts were written and updated, targeting mid and lower-funnel keywords, including:

- Federal mileage rate
- Average mileage deduction for realtors

- Employee vs self-employed mileage deductions
- Uber driver income earnings calculator
- Freelancer income tax calculator

Each post was meticulously crafted to address the specific needs of the target audience, incorporating comprehensive information and actionable insights. For example, the "Uber tax calculator" blog post was expanded to include detailed sections on how to use the calculator, tax tips for rideshare drivers, and a CTA to try Hurdlr (Siu, 2019).

Creating Product Pages

In addition to the blog posts, Hurdlr's website homepage and product pages were updated. The original product page was broken out into three separate pages targeting specific keywords for:

- Mileage tracking
- Expense tracking
- Self-employed taxes

Each product page followed a SaaS website framework, emphasizing benefits and trust-building proof points. Sections like testimonials and other trust-building elements were included to enhance credibility and drive conversions.

By focusing on these specific product pages, each page was highly relevant to its targeted keywords, improving the likelihood of ranking highly in search engine

results. This approach allowed for a more targeted and effective SEO strategy, driving higher quality traffic to the website. As shown in Figure 3 detailed breakdown of content performance highlights the importance of targeted, high-quality content in an SEO strategy. The success of the "Uber Tax Calculator" post shows how addressing specific user needs with comprehensive and engaging content can drive significant engagement and conversions.

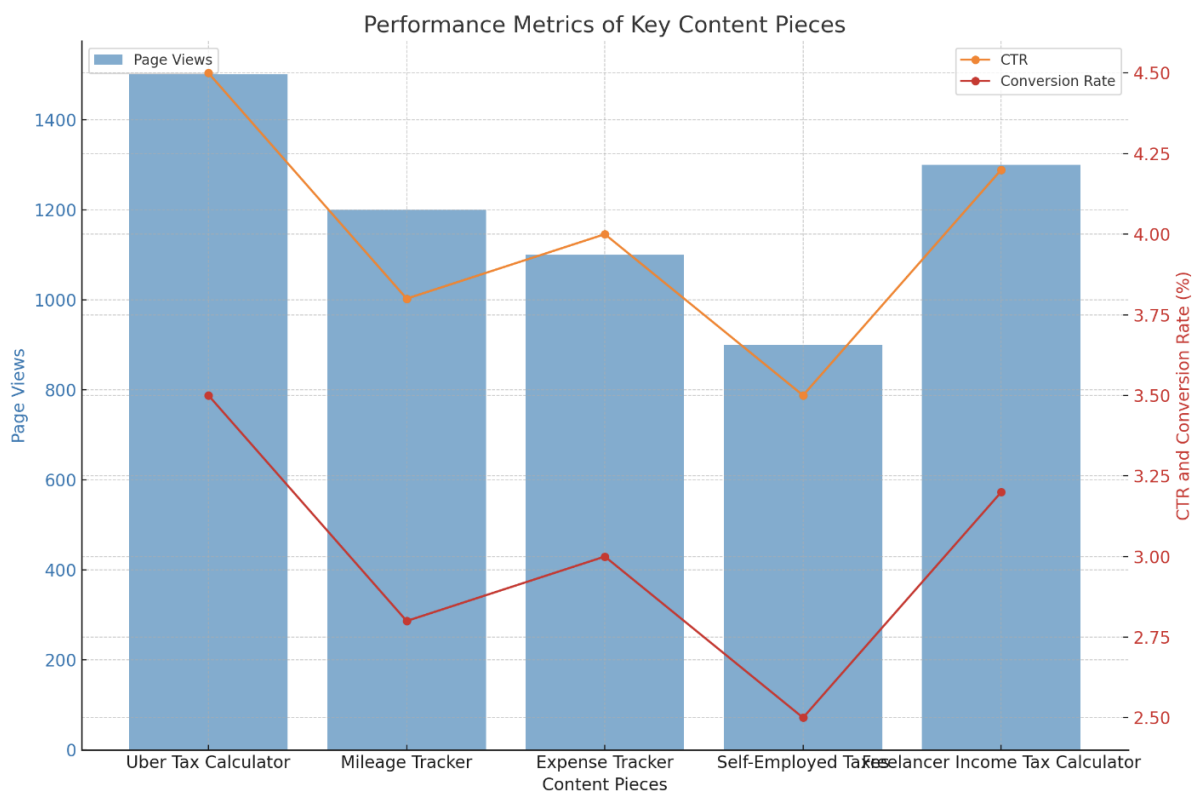


Figure 3 Performance Metrics of Key Content Pieces

(2023) By SemRush

Technical SEO Updates

Technical updates included improved internal linking and canonical tags to prevent keyword cannibalization. Links to the new product pages were added in the header and footer menus, and more internal links were added within blog articles. Canonical tags were used to point search engines to the primary content pages, preventing duplicate content issues and enhancing overall site SEO health.

For example, Hurdlr had multiple pages discussing mileage tracking, which could lead to internal competition for the same keywords. By using canonical tags, search engines were directed to consider the primary product page as the main source, consolidating SEO efforts and improving the page's authority.

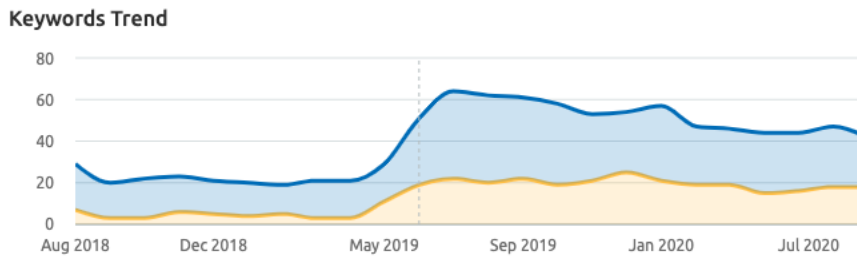
Comprehensive Strategy Implementation

The comprehensive strategy implemented for Hurdlr encompassed both content and technical aspects of SEO. By aligning efforts across these areas, a cohesive strategy was created that reinforced Hurdlr's online presence and improved their search engine rankings.

Outreach efforts were also engaged towards the end of the engagement, focusing on building high-quality backlinks to support the content and technical improvements made on the site. These backlinks provided additional authority and helped further boost the rankings of key pages.

In an interview with Growth Everywhere, Raj Bhaskar, co-founder and CEO of Hurdlr, highlighted several key aspects of their strategy. He emphasized the importance of content marketing and high-quality blog posts in driving user acquisition. Bhaskar explained how understanding and addressing specific customer pain points through SEO content helped them achieve significant growth. Additionally, he discussed the use of data analytics and user insights to continuously refine and optimize their SEO strategies. This interview corroborates the effectiveness of Hurdlr's comprehensive approach to SEO and provides a deeper understanding of the strategic decisions behind their success (Growth Everywhere, n.d)

The implementation of Hurdlr's SEO strategy led to significant improvements in their online presence and business performance. Over the course of the SEO campaign, as seen on Figure 4 , Hurdlr experienced a 70% increase in Google rankings for their targeted keywords. This increase in visibility translated to a substantial rise in organic traffic, with more users finding Hurdlr through search engines. The improved content and user experience also contributed to higher engagement rates and better conversion rates, demonstrating the effectiveness of their SEO efforts in attracting and retaining customers (Smith, 2020).



*Figure 4 SaaS SEO Case Study: Increasing Hurdlr’s Google Rankings
(2020) By Author*

In conclusions, the implementation of Hurdlr’s SEO strategy led to significant improvements in their online presence and business performance. Over the course of the SEO campaign, Hurdlr experienced a 70% increase in Google rankings for their targeted keywords. This visibility increase translated to a substantial rise in organic traffic, with more users finding Hurdlr through search engines. The improved content and user experience also contributed to higher engagement rates and better conversion rates, demonstrating the effectiveness of their SEO efforts in attracting and retaining customers.

In terms of specific metrics:

- **First Page Rankings:** Hurdlr’s first page Google rankings increased by 2-3 times.
- **Top Position Rankings:** Rankings for positions 1-3 increased by 4 times.
- **Keyword Position:** Average position for targeted keywords improved by 70%, with 9 of the targeted keywords achieving page 1 or 2 rankings.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Understanding Search Engine Optimization (SEO) And Software As A Service (SaaS)

Implementing SEO in SaaS startups not only enhances visibility in search results but also plays a crucial role in optimizing resource allocation and maximizing ROI (Return on Investment). SaaS startups must adopt an approach that includes sector-specific keyword research, optimized content creation, and building high-quality links from relevant sites, as part of On Page SEO strategy. This enables startups to stand out in a highly competitive digital market, attract qualified organic traffic, leads, and convert visitors into loyal customers and maintain their retention.

The significance of SEO has grown exponentially with the increasing reliance on search engines for information discovery. For SaaS startups, effective SEO strategies can be a game-changer, providing a competitive edge in a crowded digital marketplace. Understanding the fundamentals and evolution of SEO, as well as the different types and strategies, is essential for leveraging its full potential to drive growth and success.

This section will explore the definition of SEO, trace its historical development, and examine the evolution of SEO practices. It will also delve into the various types of SEO, including on-page, off-page, and technical SEO, and discuss key strategies such as keyword research, content optimization, link building, and mobile optimization. Additionally, future trends in SEO, such as voice search and artificial intelligence, will

be considered, along with insights from case studies in other industries that can inform best practices for SaaS startups.

3.1.1 Definition of SEO

Search Engine Optimization is a pivotal digital marketing strategy aimed at enhancing a website's visibility and ranking on SERPs where it encompasses a set of techniques and practices designed to optimize various aspects of a website, thereby improving its organic (unpaid) search engine traffic. SEO involves optimizing content, meta tags, site architecture, and backlinks to align with search engine algorithms, ultimately aiming to increase the website's relevance and authority for specific search queries (Clarke, 2019).

3.1.1.1 Historical Overview of SEO

The history of SEO is marked by a series of milestones and paradigm shifts that have shaped its trajectory into the sophisticated discipline it is today. In its nascent stages, SEO practices were relatively simplistic, focusing primarily on keyword density and meta tag optimization to manipulate search engine rankings. This early era, often referred to as the "wild west" of SEO, saw practitioners using rudimentary techniques such as stuffing keywords into content and meta tags, sometimes to the detriment of readability and user experience. These methods aimed to exploit the basic algorithms of early search engines, which relied heavily on textual content to determine relevance (Clarke, 2019).

However, as search engines evolved, so did the tactics employed by SEO practitioners. The late 1990s saw the rise of more sophisticated algorithms, such as Google's PageRank, which introduced the concept of link authority. This marked the beginning of a shift towards valuing the quality and quantity of backlinks, rather than just on-page factors. Consequently, SEO strategies began to incorporate link-building activities, aiming to increase a website's authority and trustworthiness in the eyes of search engines (Langville & Meyer, 2012).

The early 2000s witnessed the emergence of new types of search, such as image and video search, which expanded the scope of SEO beyond text-based content. SEO practitioners had to adapt by optimizing various forms of media, ensuring that images and videos were properly tagged and could be indexed by search engines. This period also saw the advent of local SEO, driven by search engines' increasing use of geographic data to provide more relevant local results (Baye, Santos, & Wildenbeest, 2016).

As search technology continued to advance, search engines began to prioritize user experience and content quality over manipulative techniques. The mid-2000s saw major algorithm updates, like Google's Panda and Penguin, which cracked down on low-quality content and black hat SEO practices such as link farming and keyword stuffing. These updates marked a significant shift towards ethical SEO practices, emphasizing the importance of high-quality, relevant content and natural link-building (Hollingsworth, 2013).

In recent years, the focus of SEO has further shifted towards understanding user intent and improving the overall user experience. The rise of mobile search, voice search, and AI-driven algorithms like Google's RankBrain have pushed SEO practitioners to adopt more holistic strategies, these, may include optimizing for mobile-friendliness, enhancing page load speeds, and creating content that aligns with the nuanced queries posed by voice search users. Additionally, the use of AI tools has become crucial in analyzing data, predicting trends, and optimizing content. The integration of machine learning algorithms helps in understanding and processing natural language queries more effectively. (SemRush, 2024).

Furthermore, the importance of topical authority and E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness) has grown, encouraging the creation of comprehensive and high-quality content. SEO has thus transformed from a set of basic tactics into a complex, multifaceted discipline that requires a deep understanding of search engine algorithms, user behavior, and content strategy (Kaufer, 2017).

3.1.1.2 Evolution of SEO practices

The evolution of SEO practices has been characterized by a shift towards user-centricity and holistic optimization strategies. With search engines placing greater emphasis on user experience and relevance, SEO practitioners have had to adapt their approach accordingly. Content quality and relevance have emerged as key ranking factors, prompting businesses to invest in high-quality, informative content that addresses user needs. Furthermore, the proliferation of mobile devices and the advent

of voice search have necessitated the optimization of websites for mobile-friendliness and conversational queries. Mobile-first indexing, introduced by Google in 2018, underscored the importance of mobile optimization in achieving search visibility (Search Engine Journal, 2024).

In recent years, the rise of machine learning algorithms and natural language processing has further transformed the SEO landscape. Google's RankBrain algorithm, for instance, uses machine learning to interpret search queries and deliver more relevant results. As a result, SEO has become increasingly nuanced, requiring a deep understanding of user intent and semantic relevance (Bansal, 2024).

3.1.1.3 Future Trends in SEO

As SEO continues to evolve, several future trends are expected to shape the industry significantly. One of the most notable trends is the increasing importance of voice search. With the growing adoption of smart speakers and virtual assistants, optimizing content for voice search has become crucial. Voice search queries tend to be longer and more conversational, requiring SEO strategies to adapt by incorporating natural language and question-based keywords (Murphy, 2021).

Another emerging trend is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in SEO. AI-powered tools and algorithms, such as Google's RankBrain and BERT, are becoming more adept at understanding user intent and context. These advancements mean that SEO strategies must focus on creating high-quality, contextually relevant

content that aligns with AI's capabilities to interpret search queries accurately (Ming-Hui & Roland, 2021).

Additionally, the importance of user experience (UX) in SEO is set to increase. Google's Core Web Vitals, which measure aspects of web usability such as load time, interactivity, and visual stability, are becoming critical ranking factors. Ensuring that websites provide a seamless and enjoyable user experience will be paramount for achieving and maintaining high search rankings (Petrov, 2022).

Finally, the trend towards mobile-first indexing and mobile optimization will continue to dominate. With the majority of internet users accessing websites via mobile devices, ensuring that websites are mobile-friendly is no longer optional. This includes optimizing site speed, responsive design, and easy navigation for mobile users (Brown, 2020).

By staying ahead of these trends and continually adapting their strategies, SaaS startups can leverage SEO to enhance their online visibility, attract more organic traffic, and ultimately drive growth and success in the competitive digital landscape.

3.1.2 Types of SEO

Understanding the different types of SEO is crucial for developing a comprehensive strategy that addresses all aspects of search engine optimization. SEO can be broadly categorized into on-page, off-page, and technical SEO, each focusing on different elements that contribute to a website's overall search engine performance.

On-page SEO involves optimizing the content and structure of individual web pages to make them more relevant and valuable to users and search engines. Off-page SEO focuses on building the website's reputation and authority through external links and social signals.

Technical SEO addresses the backend aspects of a website, such as site speed, mobile-friendliness, and crawlability, to ensure that search engines can efficiently index and rank the site. By integrating these types of SEO, SaaS startups can enhance their online visibility, attract more organic traffic, and improve user engagement and conversion rates (Ledford, 2015).

On-Page SEO

On-page SEO refers to optimization tactics implemented directly on the website to improve its search engine visibility. This includes optimizing meta tags, headings, and content for relevant keywords, as well as ensuring proper URL structure and internal linking. The importance of enhancing user experience factors such as page load speed, mobile responsiveness, and readability. By focusing on page optimization, SaaS startups can make their websites more accessible to search engine crawlers and provide a seamless user experience for visitors (Enge, Spencer, & Stricchiola, 2023).

Additionally, on-page SEO involves creating high-quality content that directly addresses the needs and queries of the target audience. Jerkovic (2010) highlights that content relevance and quality are pivotal in engaging users and improving search rankings. Incorporating multimedia elements like images, videos, and infographics can also enhance user engagement and dwell time on the site, further boosting SEO

performance. Moreover, regularly updating content to reflect the latest information and trends can help maintain its relevance and attractiveness to both users and search engines.

Off-Page SEO

Off-page SEO encompasses activities conducted outside of the website to improve its search engine rankings and authority. This includes building backlinks from reputable websites, engaging in social media marketing, and participating in online communities and forums. (Enge, Spencer, & Stricchiola, 2023) state that off-page SEO signals, such as the quantity and quality of backlinks, play a crucial role in determining a website's authority and relevance in search engine results.

In contrast, (Lee, 2020) argues that the context and relevance of backlinks have become more critical due to algorithm updates like Google Penguin. Rather than focusing solely on the number of backlinks, the emphasis should be on earning links from high-authority sites within the same industry. Building relationships with influencers, guest blogging, and participating in industry forums can naturally attract valuable backlinks. Additionally, social signals from platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn can enhance a website's off-page SEO by increasing its visibility and credibility.

Technical SEO

Technical SEO involves optimizing the technical aspects of a website to improve its search engine visibility and crawling efficiency. This includes optimizing website structure, implementing schema markup, improving site speed and performance, and ensuring proper indexing of web pages. Enge (2023) highlight that

technical SEO also involves addressing issues such as duplicate content, broken links, and crawl errors to ensure search engines can access and understand the website's content effectively.

Matthew (2023) adds that technical SEO should also consider emerging technologies and trends, such as mobile-first indexing and voice search optimization. As mobile internet usage continues to rise, ensuring that websites are mobile-friendly is paramount for maintaining search engine rankings. Implementing advanced analytics and AI tools can provide deeper insights into site performance and user behavior, helping identify and address technical issues more efficiently. Structured data and schema markup can also enhance the way search engines interpret and display website information, improving click-through rates and user engagement.

By integrating these types of SEO, SaaS startups can enhance their online visibility, attract more organic traffic, and improve user engagement and conversion rates. The differing perspectives from various experts highlight the multifaceted nature of SEO and the need for a balanced approach that considers on-page, off-page, and technical aspects to achieve comprehensive optimization.

3.1.3 SEO Strategies

Keyword Research and Analysis

Keyword research is the foundation of any successful SEO strategy, allowing SaaS startups to identify the terms and phrases their target audience is searching for online. By conducting thorough keyword research, startups can uncover high-volume, low-competition keywords that present opportunities for ranking and driving organic traffic to their website. Keyword analysis involves evaluating keyword relevance, search volume, and competition to prioritize the most valuable keywords for optimization (Clarke, 2019). Furthermore, using tools such as Google's Keyword Planner, Ahrefs, and SEMrush can provide valuable insights into keyword trends and competitor strategies, enabling more precise targeting.

Additionally, incorporating long-tail keywords, which are more specific and less competitive, can attract a targeted audience that is more likely to convert Turner (2020). emphasizes the importance of understanding user intent behind search queries to select keywords that align with the potential customer's needs. This approach not only enhances visibility but also improves the relevance and quality of traffic to the website. Integrating keyword research into the overall content strategy ensures that all content produced is aligned with the terms that potential customers are actively searching for, thus maximizing SEO efforts.

Now, as an example in Figure 5, you can see an example of keyword analysis performed using Ahrefs, a popular SEO tool. This chart illustrates the search volume and keyword difficulty for five different keywords, labeled as Keyword A, Keyword B, Keyword C, Keyword D, and Keyword E.

Search Volume: Represented by the blue bars, this metric indicates the average number of monthly searches for each keyword. Higher search volume suggests a higher interest in the keyword among users.

Keyword A: Approximately 10,000 searches.

Keyword B: Around 8,000 searches.

Keyword C: About 5,000 searches.

Keyword D: Roughly 7,000 searches.

Keyword E: Around 9,000 searches.

Keyword Difficulty: Represented by the red line with data points, this metric indicates how challenging it is to rank for each keyword on search engine results pages. It is scored on a scale from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating greater difficulty.

Keyword A: Difficulty of 70.

Keyword B: Difficulty of 55.

Keyword C: Difficulty of 45.

Keyword D: Difficulty of 60.

Keyword E: Difficulty of 50.

Key Insights

High Search Volume with High Difficulty:

Keyword A has the highest search volume at 10,000 but also the highest difficulty at 70. This suggests that while there is a significant interest in this keyword, it would be challenging to achieve a high ranking due to strong competition.

Moderate Search Volume with Moderate Difficulty:

Keywords B and D have moderate search volumes of 8,000 and 7,000, respectively, with keyword difficulties of 55 and 60. These keywords represent a balance between search volume and difficulty, making them potential targets depending on the competitive landscape.

Lower Search Volume with Lower Difficulty:

Keyword C has the lowest search volume at 5,000 and the lowest difficulty at 45. This indicates an easier keyword to rank for, but with less search traffic potential. It might be a good target for niche marketing strategies.

High Search Volume with Lower Difficulty:

Keyword E has a high search volume of 9,000 but a relatively lower difficulty of 50. This keyword represents a prime opportunity, combining high user interest with a manageable level of competition.

Ahrefs is a popular tool for keyword research, offering metrics such as search volume and keyword difficulty. The keyword difficulty (KD) score indicates how hard it would be to rank in the top 10 organic search results for a given keyword. A higher KD score means more competition and requires stronger SEO efforts.

- **Search Volume:** The average number of monthly searches for a keyword.
- **Keyword Difficulty:** A score from 0 to 100 that estimates the competition level for ranking in the top 10 search results.

In the example above, "Keyword A" has a high search volume but also a high keyword difficulty, indicating strong competition. Conversely, "Keyword C" has lower search volume and difficulty, making it potentially easier to rank for.

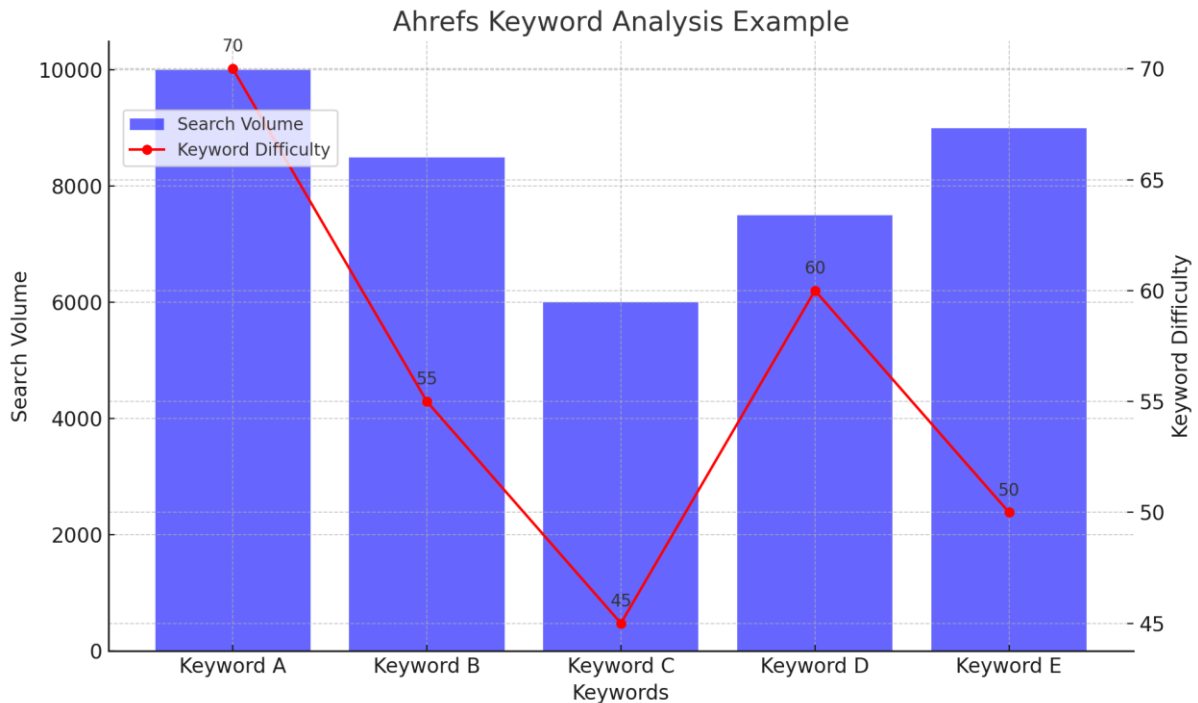


Figure 5 Ahrefs Keyword Analysis Example (2024)

Created by Author

Content Optimization

Content optimization involves creating high-quality, relevant content that addresses the needs and interests of the target audience while incorporating targeted keywords naturally. This includes optimizing meta tags, headings, and content structure to improve search engine visibility and user engagement. Content optimization also encompasses optimizing multimedia elements such as images and videos for search engines, as well as ensuring content is shareable and link-worthy (Clarke, 2019). According to Sullivan (2016), a well-optimized content strategy should

focus on providing value to the user, which in turn will lead to better engagement metrics such as lower bounce rates and higher time-on-page.

Moreover, the importance of E-A-T (Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) as highlighted by Google's guidelines, cannot be overstated. Content should be authored by credible sources, thoroughly researched, and regularly updated to maintain its relevance and authority (Turner, 2020). Additionally, incorporating multimedia elements such as videos, infographics, and interactive tools can enhance user engagement and improve the chances of content being shared, thereby boosting its SEO potential.

Content Optimization Process

Content optimization involves creating high-quality, relevant content that addresses the needs and interests of the target audience while incorporating targeted keywords naturally. Here are some key strategies to enhance content optimization (Cardozo, 2022):

- Start titles with keywords

Place the primary keyword at the beginning of the title for better impact.

- Optimized URLs

Keep URLs short and include the primary keyword.

- Proper use of headings

Use H1 tags for titles, H2 for main sections, and H3 for subsections. Ensure that primary and secondary keywords are included naturally.

- Incorporate multimedia

Use images, videos, and infographics to make content engaging and reduce bounce rates.

- Internal and external linking

Link to other pages on your site and authoritative external sites to improve SEO and provide value to readers.

- Utilize synonyms and related keywords

Avoid keyword stuffing by using synonyms and related terms.

- Optimize images

Use descriptive filenames and ALT text for images and compress them for faster loading times.

- Rich snippets

Implement structured data to enhance search results with rich snippets, improving CTR.

- Engagement and social sharing

Include CTAs and social sharing buttons to increase engagement and sharing.

Link Building Techniques

Link building is a crucial component of off-page SEO, involving the acquisition of backlinks from authoritative and relevant websites. Effective link building strategies include guest blogging, influencer outreach, and content promotion to attract natural backlinks. By building a diverse and high-quality backlink profile, SaaS startups can improve their website's authority and relevance in search engine results, driving more organic traffic and improving their search engine rankings (Anderson, 2018). Brown (2020) suggests that link building should focus on creating relationships within the industry, which can lead to more organic and high-quality backlinks over time.

Additionally, the relevance and context of backlinks have gained more importance due to algorithm updates such as Google Penguin. Links from reputable sites in the same industry or niche carry more weight and can significantly boost a site's authority (Taylor, 2019). Utilizing advanced link-building tactics such as broken link building, where you find and replace broken links on other websites with your own content, can also be an effective strategy.

Additional Strategies for Link Building:

- Guest Posting:

Writing articles for other websites in your industry can help gain high-quality backlinks. Ensure the content is valuable and relevant to the audience of the host site.

- Email Outreach:

Reach out to website owners and bloggers in your niche to request backlinks. Personalize your emails and offer value, such as a guest post or a collaboration opportunity.

- Broken Link Building:

Find broken links on other websites and suggest your content as a replacement. This helps the website owner fix their broken links and provides you with a valuable backlink.

- Content Promotion:

Promote your content on social media, forums, and communities to increase its visibility and chances of being linked by other websites.

- Resource Pages:

Identify resource pages in your niche and request the inclusion of your website. Resource pages often link to useful and relevant content within a specific industry.

- Influencer Outreach:

Collaborate with influencers in your industry to create content that includes backlinks to your website. Influencers have the power to amplify your content reach and attract backlinks (Cardozo, 2024).

Mobile Optimization

With the increasing prevalence of mobile devices, mobile optimization has become essential for SEO success. Mobile optimization involves ensuring that websites are responsive and accessible across various devices and screen sizes. This includes optimizing page load speed, improving mobile usability, and implementing mobile-friendly design elements. By prioritizing mobile optimization, SaaS startups can provide a seamless user experience for mobile users and improve their search engine rankings, particularly in mobile search results (Clarke, 2019). Google's mobile-first indexing underscores the importance of having a mobile-optimized site, as the mobile version of the site is now considered the primary version for indexing and ranking (Miller, 2017).

Moreover, Myers (2021) highlights the importance of Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) in enhancing mobile performance. AMPs can significantly reduce load times, thus improving user experience and reducing bounce rates. Additionally, ensuring that mobile pages are free from intrusive interstitials and other elements that hinder usability is crucial for maintaining high mobile SEO standards.

As shown on Table 2 Key Components of Mobile Optimization (2024)

By Author, the key components of technical SEO focus on optimizing various aspects of a website to improve its performance, usability, and search engine visibility. Responsive design ensures websites adapt to various screen sizes using media queries and flexible images. AMP (Accelerated Mobile Pages) creates fast-loading, lightweight pages like Google AMP. Mobile usability focuses on touch-friendly

navigation with large buttons and easy navigation. Page load speed is enhanced by compressing images and minifying CSS/JS, using techniques like image compression and lazy loading. Structured data, such as schema markup, helps search engines understand website content better. Minimizing interstitials involves avoiding intrusive pop-ups, ensuring no full-screen pop-ups. These strategies collectively enhance user experience and search engine rankings.

Component	Description	Examples
Responsive Design	Adapts to various screen sizes	Media queries, flexible images
AMP (Accelerated Mobile Pages)	Fast-loading lightweight pages	Google AMP pages
Mobile Usability	Touch-friendly navigation	Large buttons, easy navigation
Page Load Speed	Compressed images, minified CSS/JS	Image compression, lazy loading
Structured Data	Enhanced search engine understanding	Schema markup
Minimizing Interstitials	Avoid intrusive pop-ups	No full-screen pop-ups

Table 2 Key Components of Mobile Optimization (2024)

By Author

4. Interview Results

4.1 Major Elements Influencing Organic Traffic from a Head of Marketing

We interviewed Rebeca Zaragoza, the Head of Marketing at Uktena, a Spanish SaaS startup, to gain insights into how they prioritize and implement SEO strategies within their marketing efforts.

Rebeca emphasized the importance of prioritizing SEO within the overall marketing budget despite the high initial investment required. According to Zaragoza, SEO offers long-term benefits that make it a critical focus, especially for companies with limited budgets. The initial costs of SEO might be substantial, but once the foundational strategies are in place, they drive continuous organic traffic without the need for ongoing ad spend. The decision to allocate resources to SEO is influenced by factors such as ROI potential, current traffic trends, and the target audience's search behavior, doing emphasis that SEO campaigns are a long term investment, since the results are usually portait in a time-range of six months.

Unlike paid ads, which cease to drive traffic once the budget is exhausted, well-ranking organic content can provide sustained value for years.

One notable example shared by Zaragoza involved a significant improvement in organic traffic and visibility following the revamping of Uktena's blog strategy, this, by focusing on creating keyword-rich, high-quality articles that addressed the common pain points of their target audience, Uktena experienced a substantial boost in organic traffic.

Optimizing on-page elements such as meta tags, headers, and internal links further enhanced this growth, since a start up has limited budget like any other SME, depending on their monthly budget, they either hired freelancers or utilized AI-SEO tools like Jasper for content optimization. Although specific figures were not disclosed due to confidentiality reasons, Zaragoza noted that this strategy led to more qualified leads, increased demos for their account managers, and a higher conversion rate. The improvements in blog content and mobile optimization were key factors in this success, particularly important for their B2B business model.

Investing in SEO strategies has had a significant impact on both customer conversion and retention for Uktena. By attracting highly relevant traffic, the company has observed better conversion rates, as these visitors are already searching for the solutions Uktena provides. While customer retention is primarily driven by the quality of services provided, it is significantly boosted by the free tools offered on their blog, such as information regarding free calculators on relevant topics, news, and newsletters. This quality content not only aids in conversions but also builds trust and keeps users engaged.

However, Uktena focuses more on customer conversion. To measure the impact of SEO, Uktena uses metrics such as organic traffic growth, conversion rates from organic visitors, and engagement metrics like time on page and bounce rate, using Google Search Console as their primary tool for tracking these metrics, enabling them to understand their visibility in search results and monitor their website's performance effectively.

4.1 Insights from SEO experts

We interviewed two SEO experts who worked as freelancers assisting a variety of clients, primarily SaaS and e-commerce clients, with their digital marketing services. Adrian de Pedro and Alfonso Calero provided valuable insights into their approaches and experiences.

Timeframe for Observing Impact of SEO Tactics

De Pedro indicated that SEO tactics typically start showing changes in organic traffic within 3 to 6 months. He emphasized that noticeable changes in conversion rates and customer behavior could take between 6 to 12 months, depending on market competition and the effectiveness of the tactics implemented. Calero also noted that results in organic traffic could be seen within 3 to 6 months. However, he mentioned that conversion rate changes might take 6 to 9 months, highlighting the influence of seasonal patterns on these results. Calero provided an example of a client he has been working with since 2012. In figure Figure 6 there is a significant increase in organic traffic by approximately 200% from 2018 to 2022, driven by SEO strategies such as blog posts and keyword analysis. This growth highlights the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing visibility and attracting visitors over the years. Paid traffic remained minimal, underscoring the success of organic efforts.



Figure 6 Calero's client's growth

Both responses align with the literature on SEO implementation in their experience in SaaS businesses. According to Clarke (2019), SEO is a long-term strategy, often requiring several months to yield significant results in traffic and conversions. This is supported in section 3.2, which discusses the long-term nature of SEO efforts. The consensus is that while immediate changes can be observed in traffic, the full impact on conversions and customer behavior typically materializes over a longer period, corroborating the views of both De Pedro and Calero.

Justification of Long-term SEO Investment

De Pedro strongly believes that the long-term benefits of SEO justify the initial investment. He cited an example where the SEO efforts led to a 230% increase in organic traffic and a 50% increase in sales within a year, demonstrating significant ROI. De Pedro also mentioned a specific struggle where a CEO, whose leadership position lasted 4 years, refused to invest in SEO in the third year, despite 80% of the company's clients coming through SEO channels. He highlighted that many companies and their leaders only focus on the short term, making it challenging to justify SEO investment despite its evident long-term benefits. Similarly, Calero supports the long-term investment in SEO, providing an example from a major travel

company where SEO was crucial, accounting for 80% of the customer base. Despite initial reluctance from leadership, the long-term benefits proved substantial. This perspective is supported by Rahman (2018), who emphasizes the importance of SEO in providing sustainable growth and high ROI over time. Section 3.4 elaborates on the cost-benefit analysis of long-term SEO investments. The cases shared by De Pedro and Calero reinforce the theoretical perspective that strategic SEO investment is essential for long-term success in competitive markets.

Use of Data Analytics in SEO Strategies

De Pedro utilizes tools such as Google Analytics, Google Search Console, and SEMrush to analyze user behavior and optimize SEO strategies. He also employs Hotjar for detailed session analysis, which helps in making data-driven decisions, he also mentioned that previously used Google Optimize for A/B testing but now relies on HubSpot's marketing module for these tests. A/B testing, or split testing, involves comparing two versions of a webpage or app against each other to determine which one performs better. For example, one version might have a different headline, image, or call-to-action button. By randomly showing one version to half of the visitors and the other version to the other half, the performance of each can be measured based on predefined metrics like conversion rates or click-through rates. This method allows for data-driven decisions on which elements of a page contribute most to its success.

De Pedro collects data from various tools like Google Analytics, Google Search Console, Google Ads (for campaign data), and SEMrush, and he places significant emphasis on Hotjar, which records user sessions for detailed behavior analysis. He uses this information in two dimensions: generally, and by cohorts, to understand

specific moments and actions for improvement. Calero primarily uses Google Analytics and SEMrush for user behavior analysis, focusing on optimizing high-bounce pages and relying on support team insights to personalize content. These responses align with Chaffey (2019), who highlights the importance of data analytics in refining SEO strategies. This is reflected in section 3.6 of the research, which details the role of data analytics in SEO. Tools like Google Analytics and SEMrush are crucial for tracking performance and making informed adjustments to improve user engagement and conversion rates.

Role of Personalized Marketing in SEO

De Pedro emphasized the importance of personalized marketing, citing an example where personalized landing pages based on user behavior led to a 30% increase in CTR. Calero also values personalized marketing, using remarketing lists and personalized content to enhance campaign effectiveness. He specifically mentioned using TrackIN for personalized remarketing, which helps in creating targeted ads based on user behavior and preferences, enhancing the effectiveness of their campaigns. Both responses are consistent with Enge (2023), who discusses the significant impact of personalized content on user engagement and SEO performance. Section 3.8 of the TFM discusses the integration of personalized marketing strategies in SEO. Personalization strategies, such as targeted messaging and tailored content, are crucial for improving customer retention and conversion rates.

Competitor Analysis in SEO Strategy

De Pedro uses SEMrush and Sistrix for competitor analysis, focusing on keyword strategies and identifying new market entrants to stay ahead. He believes that understanding the competition's system is crucial for discovering hidden pages

only available to search engines, which can help optimize and improve strategies or propose new, more effective ones. Calero also leverages SEMrush for competitive analysis, looking at both organic and paid keywords. He emphasizes the need for segmentation by country in international projects, noting that when leading a sector, the focus should shift to detecting new entrants rather than existing competitors trying to copy strategies. This approach aligns with section 3.9 of the research, which, elaborates on the importance of competitor analysis in SEO strategy development. Competitor analysis tools like SEMrush are vital for identifying opportunities and threats in the SEO landscape.

Both De Pedro and Calero brought extensive experience and strategic insights to their SEO practices. While their timelines for seeing results and specific methodologies might vary, their approaches to leveraging data analytics, personalized marketing, and competitor analysis highlight the critical elements of successful SEO strategies for SaaS startups.

5. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the effective implementation of SEO strategies significantly impacts the growth and success of SaaS startups by improving visibility, increasing organic traffic, and enhancing profitability. An integral SEO strategy, when executed well, can provide long-term benefits that justify the initial investment of time and resources, the Hurdlr case study vividly illustrates these impacts, showing notable improvements in online presence and customer engagement following the adoption of targeted SEO tactics, as well as insights from expert interviews.

The primary objective was to identify the key elements influencing organic traffic and assess the impact of SEO on the visibility of SaaS companies in search results. Effective keyword research and analysis, such as using tools like Ahrefs, help identify high-value keywords that attract target audiences, long-tail keywords and understanding the user intent behind search queries significantly enhance visibility and organic traffic.

Content optimization, which includes creating high-quality, relevant content that naturally incorporates keywords, improves search engine rankings and user engagement, technical SEO is mention for aspects like site speed, mobile-friendliness, and structured data are crucial for ensuring that search engines can efficiently index and rank the site. Link building, through methods like guest blogging, influencer outreach, and content promotion, enhances the site's authority and relevance in search results.

The study also analyzed how SEO strategies can improve customer conversion and retention in SaaS startups, creating valuable content that addresses specific pain points effectively attracts users, leading to higher conversion rates. Ensuring content is authored by credible sources and regularly updated maintains its relevance and authority.

Personalized marketing and messaging, backed by data analytics, significantly enhance customer engagement and loyalty, successful campaigns have shown tangible improvements in customer retention and conversion rates, in addition enhancing user experience through mobile optimization and faster load times contributes significantly to customer retention.

In investigating the impact of SEO strategies on user acquisition and expanding the customer base, the research highlighted the effectiveness of lead generation and conversion tactics. Thorough keyword research, content marketing, and competitor analysis drive significant increases in organic traffic and lead quality, effective SEO strategies can double organic traffic and lead conversions. Understanding competitor tactics using tools like Ahrefs and SEMrush helps create more effective SEO strategies by identifying gaps and opportunities.

The methodology combined qualitative approaches to investigate the impact of SEO strategies on SaaS companies, including document analysis, systematic reviews, and semi-structured interviews to gain comprehensive qualitative insights, this approach provided an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness and challenges of SEO

strategies. Interviews and a case study were conducted to gather real-world insights on the effects of SEO on organic traffic, customer conversion, and retention. Interviews with marketing directors and SEO experts revealed that implementing SEO strategies often leads to significant improvements in organic traffic and search engine rankings. Directors emphasized the importance of continuous content updates and technical SEO improvements.

In the Hurdlr case study, the company identified strategic keywords relevant to their target audience, including high-volume and long-tail keywords like "Uber tax calculator" and "freelancer income tax calculator." They created high-quality, informative content tailored to user needs, such as their blog post on the "Uber tax calculator," which was enhanced with comprehensive content, detailed instructions, and internal links, improving search engine rankings and user engagement.

Technical SEO improvements included optimizing meta tags, improving site speed, ensuring mobile compatibility, and enhancing site architecture, which helped search engines better crawl and index their content, leading to higher SERP rankings. As a result, Hurdlr experienced a 70% increase in Google rankings for their target keywords, leading to substantial organic traffic growth, higher engagement rates, and improved conversion rates, acquiring 3000 new users from an optimized blog post.

In conclusion, the research confirms that effective SEO strategies are essential for the growth and success of SaaS startups, providing substantial long-term benefits in terms of visibility, user acquisition, and profitability, an integral SEO approach that combines technical, on-page, and off-page optimization is crucial for maximizing the potential of digital marketing efforts. The case study and interviews underline the

importance of continuous SEO optimization and adaptation to maintain a competitive edge and achieve long-term growth.

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7. Annex

Annex 1: Relationship with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda

Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenibles	Alto	Medio	Bajo	No Procede
ODS 1. Fin de la pobreza.				X
ODS 2. Hambre cero.				X
ODS 3. Salud y bienestar.				X
ODS 4. Educación de calidad.	X			
ODS 5. Igualdad de género.				X
ODS 6. Agua limpia y saneamiento.				X
ODS 7. Energía asequible y no contaminante.				X
ODS 8. Trabajo decente y crecimiento económico.	X			
ODS 9. Industria, innovación e infraestructuras.				X
ODS 10. Reducción de las desigualdades.				X
ODS 11. Ciudades y comunidades sostenibles.				X
ODS 12. Producción y consumo responsables.				X
ODS 13. Acción por el clima.				X
ODS 14. Vida submarina.				X
ODS 15. Vida de ecosistemas terrestres.				X
ODS 16. Paz, justicia e instituciones sólidas.				X
ODS 17. Alianzas para lograr objetivos.				X

Table 3 Relationship with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.