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Blogging for Higher Education: Providing Value-added Content for Search Engine Results

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Executive Summary

T-Bird Nation, the official blog for Southern Utah University, was created for this professional project. More than two-thirds of U.S. colleges and universities report having an official blog (Barnes, & Lescault, 2013a). The blog served as a host for value-added content for both prospective and current students. Using a keyword search strategy for the phrase “colleges in Utah” and SEO tactics, the advisee published 19 blog posts during Q1 2016, a 13-week period. The aim was to increase organic traffic to the suu.edu website. During the time period, 73 organic views, coming from search engines, were received between the 19 blog posts.

Blogging for Higher Education: Providing Value-added Content for Search Engine Results

With the rise of the digital age, content marketing has become a preferred method for many companies because of its different approach compared to traditional marketing (Scott, 2015). Content marketing is about providing customers and prospective customers with useful and relevant information (Getting started, n.d.). Content can come in many forms including e-books, webinars, blog posts and social media. The professional project performed took research about content marketing, social media and higher education, and blogging with search engine optimization (SEO) to create a blog for Southern Utah University (SUU).

The idea to create a blog for SUU came from researching social media strategy. The advisee found that many marketing experts suggested the use of a blog as a hub for all information shared on social sites like Facebook and Twitter (Kilroy, 2015; Scott, 2015; & Schaffer, 2013). The T-Bird Nation blog was created in the fall of 2015, but at the start of the project in January 2016, there was no strategy in place. The project was to create a strategy for the blog using SEO tactics to increase the rank of suu.edu in Google searches.

The project ran through the entire first quarter of 2016 and Friday, April 1, 2016 to end the workweek. The project covered all 19 blog posts made in the 13-week period, six of which were specifically created using a keyword search strategy. Data collected at the end of the quarter measured the number and type of views the blog posts received.

Literature Review

Content Marketing & Integrated Marketing Campaigns

In order to be effective, marketers have to change strategies to suit the needs of their consumers (Scott, 2015). The old methods of marketing are essentially interruptions - radio spots, television commercials, highway billboards, etc. These tactics are ineffective because

customers see advertisements as an inconvenience. As Scott (2015) outlines in his book, *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*, companies should work toward being helpful to new and recurring customers. The use of the Internet has led to companies taking advantage of this, especially through the use of blogs and social media.

One method of “new marketing” is content marketing, providing valuable information to consumers. Joe Pulizzi of Content Marketing Institute defines content marketing as, “the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action,” (2014, p. 5). Content marketing is about serving the needs of the consumer by providing useful and relevant information (Getting started, n.d.). Through this new marketing strategy, companies create content through various forms - blog articles, white papers, e-books, and webinars. Content marketing is about being proactive and thinking about what the consumer will be searching for online.

When developing any marketing strategy, marketers often consider the target audience of the messaging. One of the reasons why companies are using a content marketing strategy is because it is a way for them to build a trusting relationship with multiple entities - customers, stakeholders, and competitors (Dietrich, & Livingston, 2012). The key to creating a successful content marketing strategy is to create valuable content that customers are searching for and is not blatantly sales speak. This falls in line with the “new rules of marketing” outlined by Scott (2012) as Dietrich and Livingston write, “people don’t choose to watch commercials, but they will watch, and share, videos that are clever and interesting,” (2012, p.121). Content marketing is about serving customers with useful information but is only effective if the content created is both useful and interesting.

Creating a content marketing strategy is a labor-intensive process and may be rewarding when done properly. One of the key components on making content marketing successful is making it fully integrated (Dietrich, & Livingston, 2012). Creating content is just one step, and if it is not integrated into a larger campaign, people will be unable to find the content.

A groundswell approach to integrated marketing closely fits the efforts being made by Southern Utah University. A funnel channels customers and prospects through different stages - awareness, consideration, conversion, loyalty, and advocacy. The funnel starts large, casting a net to all prospective students, making them aware of the university (Dietrich, & Livingston, 2012). From there, the pool of prospective students becomes smaller until they become an enrolled student. The final step is for the student to become a brand ambassador through choosing to continue their education at SUU and sharing their experiences with friends and family. The funnel is depicted in figure 1, as originally produced by Adam Cohen (2009) and re-published by Dietrich and Livingston (2012).

Figure 1 – New Marketing Funnel by Adam Cohen



The groundswell approach starts with listening to people talking about the company or brand. Dietrich and Livingston (2012) note that people are talking about your brand and that

listening to that feedback is a necessity. A key component in the groundswell approach to integrated marketing is word-of-mouth because the reviews provided by other consumers are seen as genuine and more reliable than advertisements put out by the company (WOMMAPEDIA, n.d.; & Dietrich, & Livingston, 2012). In order to capture the word-of-mouth marketing properly, brands should be constantly engaging with all consumers and people talking about the company.

One of the ways to use a groundswell integrated marketing approach is through social media because it allows marketers to listen, engage, and promote (Dietrich, & Livingston, 2012). The best way to use social media is to participate in conversations relevant to prospective customers (Dietrich, & Livingston, 2012). This idea is supported by Gary Vaynerchuk in his book *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook* (2013). Vaynerchuk says, “tone-deaf posts, especially in the form of come-ons and promos, just take up space, and are justifiably ignored by most of the public,” (2013, p. 15). The key is to use social media properly and not as another outlet to constantly promote a product.

While it may seem obvious for brands to use social media in the same way their consumers are using it, there are still plenty of marketers that use it as another advertising space. Vaynerchuk (2013) offers six rules to create outstanding content for social - it’s native, it doesn’t interrupt, it doesn’t make demands - often, it leverages pop culture, it’s micro, and it’s consistent and self-aware. Creating native content means the post is optimized for a specific social media platform. Successful posts vary for each of the platforms - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, etc. - and it does not make sense to post the same picture with the same caption on every single site. Vaynerchuk says, “content is king, but context is God,” (2013, p. 17) meaning formatting the content to fit the platform is more important than the content itself. The rule “it

doesn't interrupt" mirrors what Scott (2015) argues about new marketing (Vaynerchuk, 2013). Vaynerchuk argues that instead of interrupting entertainment, marketers should work to become entertainment (2013).

Vaynerchuk's rule "it doesn't make demands - often" comes from the title of the book, *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook* (2013). Essentially, provide content - jab, jab, jab - before you ask consumers to do something like purchase a product - right hook (Vaynerchuk, 2013). The fourth rule "it leverages pop culture" is a way for brands to be relatable to its consumers by showing they keep up with the trends. This follows closely into the rule "it's micro" as Vaynerchuk's example is Oreo's Tweet during the 2013 Super Bowl, also known as "dunk in the dark." The Tweet paved the way for other brands to become humanized through micro bits of humor and pop culture. Vaynerchuk points out that the Tweet was not a sales pitch and did not include any call to actions, yet it was one of the most memorable moments of the 2013 Super Bowl (2013).

The final rule for content marketing from Vaynerchuk is "it's consistent and self-aware" (2013). While the content from a company will change on a daily basis, it is important to be consistent in the messaging to establish a brand voice. This can be tricky, especially when trying to humanize a company, but Vaynerchuk argues that if marketers know their message it will be easy to be consistent (2013). Vaynerchuk's rules can be applied to a broad content marketing strategy, though he focuses more on social media content.

Social Media and Higher Education

Social media was first introduced in the early-mid 2000s and has since changed the way society interacts (Dijck, 2013). The term "social media" has become almost synonymous with sites like Facebook, Twitter, and even Instagram, but other sites like Wikipedia, YouTube, and Flickr also fall under the term (Dijck, 2013). The similarity between each of these platforms is

that they “allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” which is the basis for the definition of social media (Dijck, p. 4). Once a social media platform gains traction with users, businesses are quick to follow, trying to find new and innovative ways to interact with their audiences (Moe, & Schweidel, 2014). Social media marketers need to stay current with the trends to reach target audiences, particularly in higher education where the audience is typically young, early adopters.

In 2012, Kelleher and Sweetser conducted in-depth interviews with 26 U.S. universities communicators. The communicators used a nonrandom sample as they were selected after the researchers identified a social media presence for the university. The focus of the interviews revolved around how the communicators used social media innovatively. The researchers found five attributes of social media based on the interviews: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. These attributes help explain why communicators use social media, mainly because of the ease of use and the ability to reach a large audience (Kelleher, & Sweetser, 2012).

The relative advantage attribute captures how universities are able to connect with stakeholders dispersed around the world, the immediacy of the platform, and the leverage of technology by reaching students where they are already operating. Compatibility as an attribute is about how well social media fits in with jobs already performed by higher education marketers in maintaining the brand of the university. The attribute complexity ranges from ease to difficulty of use for marketers to adopt social media into their marketing practices. Trialability is about “testing” or “playing with” new platforms as they emerge. The attribute observability is about how social media adoption comes about due to industry and competition adoption or jumping on the “bandwagon” (Kelleher, & Sweetser, 2012). These attributes are important in

higher education as more schools are deciding to invest more efforts into social media by creating full time positions.

After choosing to establish social media for a university, marketers need to decide what content they will promote on the platforms. Linvill, McGee, and Hicks (2012) conducted a content analysis of 113 university Twitter accounts, sampling 10 Tweets from each university. The researchers found that 83.5% of Tweets contained “useful information,” 55.7% of Tweets concerned the “generation of visitors,” and 52.2% of Tweets concerned the “conservation of visitors.” The researchers also coded the Tweets based on the target audience - general audience (89.1%), prospective students (4.8%), students (6.1%), faculty (1.6%), alumni (1.7%) and parents (4.8%). The researchers found that most university Twitter accounts were used to share news about the institution (Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012). Higher education marketers can use this information to either replicate or differentiate from the industry standards.

Nora Barnes and Ava Lescault conducted social media research and published two articles in 2013 specifically about the use of social media by U.S. higher education institutions. The research studies a proportional sample of public and private colleges and universities from all 50 states. The proportional sample was created based on the number of public and private colleges and universities in each state (Barnes, & Lescault, 2013a; & Barnes, & Lescault, 2013b).

The first article researched the return on investment (ROI) social media provides in higher education with an emphasis in how admissions offices are taking advantage of social media (Barnes & Lescault, 2013b). The researchers found that schools reported less spending on traditional media because of social media. One in three schools said social media is a better tool to reach their target audience compared to traditional media. Seventy-eight percent of schools

reported that social media has changed the way they recruit for students (Barnes, & Lescault, 2013b).

The second research study reviews how higher education institutions as a whole use social media in branding efforts (Barnes, & Lescault, 2013a). More than two-thirds of U.S. colleges and universities have an official school blog and 35% of college presidents host their own blog. The most interesting finding from the research is that only 38% of schools reported any type of social listening/monitoring - looking for Internet buzz, posts, or conversations about the school. This is in decline from the 73% reported in 2009 (Barnes, & Lescault, 2013a).

Knowing the industry benchmark for how higher education is using social media is important to marketers because it can help them assess their own social media use. Marketers should strive to reach the benchmarks, but to also stand out from other schools. After finding the research of how social media is used in higher education, the advisee thought it would be a good marketing tool to create a blog for Southern Utah University.

Corporate Blogging

Blog marketing is considered a tactic in content marketing, as it is place for consumers to find information. Corporate blogging is not a relatively new tactic as it has been around for over ten years (Wright, 2006; & Scoble, & Israel, 2006). Not only is blogging seen as a way to produce content, it is seen as the center of a larger social media strategy.

In *The Book of Social Media Strategies and Tactics Vol. 1* various authors write about how to create a solid social media strategy. The chapter on blogs suggests that a blog should be the hub for a company's social strategy (Altobelli, 2015; Bland, 2015). A blog can be an outlet for a brand to establish itself as an industry thought-leader (Bland, 2015). The content created on a blog should serve as the core of a larger marketing strategy (Bland, 2015). Blogs are a way for

companies to produce original content consumers are searching for. They also can serve as good content to share on social media.

In *Maximize Your Social*, Neal Schaffer agrees that a blog is necessary for social media strategy. Schaffer suggests that while social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter can drive traffic to a website, the content is not owned by the brand, but rather the platform (2013). A blog allows brands to create and house their own content that can be shared through social media.

David Meerman Scott tackles a common misconception of corporate blogging - people do not understand what blogging is or what it can do (2015). The term blog has a connotation of being a personal web-journal, leaving them dismissed by PR and marketing professionals as a valued tool (Scott, 2015). By addressing this issue, Scott builds an argument as to how powerful blogs can be for any industry (2015).

Industry leaders agree that blogs are an important part of a social media strategy (Bland, 2015; Schaffer, 2013; & Scott, 2015). Blogs are an ideal platform to start for content marketers because of the user-friendly interface, making them easy to read and navigate, and the ability to make updates often (Schaffer, 2013; & Scott 2015). When optimized properly, blogs can be a powerful tool in content marketing.

Search Engine Optimization

Search engines have become a large part of how people use the Internet. Search engines became popular in the mid 1990s, but since then one engine has emerged as the choice for users - Google (Boulton, 2014). Stanford students, Sergey Brin and Larry Page, created Google when they wanted to apply the credibility of academia to web searches (Boulton, 2014). Brin and Page set out to create a search engine that considered not only keywords, but how many times other sites linked to a page, similar to peer approval of academic papers (Boulton, 2014). Google's

algorithm, known as PageRank and RankBrain, has led to the investment of search engine optimization (SEO) by marketers.

SEO is about improving a site's interactions with its users and with search engines (Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, 2010). The biggest stress Google makes in its *Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide* is that content should always be created with the website visitors in mind, not search engines (2010).

The basics of SEO are to create unique and accurate page titles and utilize the meta tag which provides a description of the page. Site structure is important in SEO because the website should be easy to navigate. This should be prevalent in the domain and the URLs for each page. Google defines a domain as, "an address on the Internet that indicates the location of a computer or network. These are administered to avoid duplication" (Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, 2010, p. 6). More details about domain and the impact of SEO on Domain Authority are at the end of this section.

When creating content, Google suggests marketers go for quality over quantity. Some of the tips suggested include, writing easy-to-read text, staying organized around a topic, and formatting links and pictures correctly (Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, 2010). The final step in SEO is to promote the website and content through proper channels like online communities and social media (Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, 2010). A good rule of thumb for most marketers is to share blog posts on Google+, Google's social media network.

In order for blogging to be effective, articles must adhere to SEO rules (Lobell, n.d.). NewsCred, a business to help other business create content, offers nine ways to improve SEO ranking of content marketing (Lobell, n.d.).

The first tip is to create original, high quality content. This means marketers should focus on writing content for the reader, not just for SEO standards. When search engines crawl websites and articles to rank for search engine results page (SERP), they are looking for if the website is high-quality, if other high-quality websites are linking back to it, and how long visitors stay on the page among other constantly changing criteria in the algorithms. The second tip is to modify URLs so they contain the keywords of the post (Lobell, n.d.). This makes it easy to read and more likely for the visitor to trust the article.

The third tip from NewsCred is to utilize SEO keywords. To do this, marketers should use tools to find relevant keywords to their business. NewsCred cautions marketers to be careful when using keywords in the post because using too many will lead Google to believe the post is spam, but not enough will not give a clear view as to what the post is about. The fourth tip is to design for the user, meaning to have the website easy to read and navigate. The fifth tip is to delete duplicate pages so Google does not index the wrong page by mistake (Lobell, n.d.).

Trying out SEO tools is the sixth tip from NewsCred. Many of the tools help marketers create the best content that is correctly optimized. The seventh tip is to create valuable connections. While the company will create a majority of the content, NewsCred suggests finding industry influencers to write and share content. The eighth tip is to check the load-time of the website because when pages take longer to load, the bounce-rate is higher, meaning people leave the site without clicking on a single link. The final tip is to invest in SEO in both time and money (Lobell, n.d.). SEO is not an overnight process and sometimes a little bit of funding for native advertisements can help boost SEO efforts.

Content marketers should be aware that SEO practices are constantly changing as Google revising the algorithms for RankBrain, “the system that analyzes vague, ambiguous queries and

matches them with the most relevant results” (Gomez, 2016, para. 1). The latest suggestions from Content Marketing Institute is to create content for a specific audience, craft content that sounds natural, make more detailed long-form content, and incorporate references from case studies, white papers, and authoritative websites (Gomez, 2016).

To help understand SEO and how pages are ranked, marketers should have basic background in domain names and authority. The Domain Name System (DNS) was created in 1983 by Paul Mockapetris to assign and record Internet addresses (Boulton, 2014). Top-level domains are found at the end of web addresses such as .com, .org, and .edu. Second-level domains are assigned to a registrar like suu.edu. From there, the local network administrator can add sub-domains like tbirdnation.suu.edu (Boulton, 2014). The DNS serves as a system of organization for websites.

One way to gauge SEO success is through the ranking of Domain Authority. Domain Authority is a score developed by Moz that helps predict a website’s rank by search engines (What is Domain Authority, n.d.). Domain Authority is scored on a logarithmic scale of 100 points, making it easy to increase Domain Authority from 20 to 30 compared to increasing from 70 to 80. Marketers can use the MozBar, a browser application, to find the Domain Authority of any website (What is Domain Authority, n.d.). Domain Authority should be used as a strategy and measurement tool for marketers working with SEO.

There are two ways to use Domain Authority, to strategize a keyword search plan against competitors, and to measure long-term internal SEO efforts. Moz suggests using Domain Authority as a comparison against competitors than to gauge SEO efforts because the 40 signals used to calculate the score often lead to fluctuation (What is Domain Authority, n.d.). Comparing

Domain Authority of search competitors was one of the first steps of determining keywords in the method of the professional project.

Method

The professional project was to develop a blog content strategy for SUU based on top Google searches by prospective students. Working with the advisor, the advisee conducted the research, as outlined in later in this section, to create the strategy including Google keywords, buyer personas, and an admissions timeline.

The first step in developing a blogging strategy was to determine the value of starting a blog. Members of SUU's Marketing Communication Office conducted research on where to host the blog, finally settling on HubSpot because of the ability to create a sub-domain - tbirdnation.suu.edu on SUU's second-level domain – suu.edu. The big draw in using the suu.edu domain was being able to use the domain authority of the website, which will help with SEO tactics.

Determining Content

The purpose of the blog is to provide relevant and interesting content to students, in particular prospective students interested in attending any Utah college or university. By providing unbiased, high searched content, the T-Bird Nation blog serves as a helpful research tool, rather than another direct advertisement outlet. By offering genuine content, either in an easy-to-read list style or written in a student perspective, SUU is offering real advice, not just advice that serves the institution.

This method serves the very definition of PR as offered by the Public Relations Society of America - "...build(ing) mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" ("What is," 2011). High school students are receiving information they need about

college in general, and SUU is receiving exposure to prospective students. The T-Bird Nation blog provides useful information to prospective students, rather than students seeing a billboard on the highway, which forces them to actively search for SUU specifically.

A three-step process to generate blog content was used for the project:

1. Determine the questions prospective students are asking, depending on the life cycle of a decision (6 months, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years away from applying).

2. Using analytics, determine keywords preferably with a high search and a low return. Compare the domain authority of winning (first page) websites to the domain authority of organization website and decide which websites the organization is able to compete with.

3. Create blog content that will position the organization on the first page of Google for the targeted keyword search terms.

Determining questions asked by high school students was done by looking at a model of the life cycle of a decision. This means that as SUU is targeting prospective students, the admissions office is looking at their college decision process at a younger and younger age. For the sake of this project, students ranging from high school freshmen to high school seniors were considered.

The easiest way to determine questions was to think in the perspective of a high school student and their parents. This was challenging as it has been a couple years since the advisee was a high school student, but rewarding as some of the best posts were created while thinking as a student. For example, the post “Colleges in Utah: Things to Consider”, figure 1.4 in Appendix A, was created after the advisee looked back on her own process of choosing a college and what she wished she would have known then. To further extend the blog content, the advisee plans to

break down the “Colleges in Utah: Things to Consider” blog post into individual blog posts as seen in “Where are All the Colleges in Utah?” (Appendix A, Figure 1.6).

The second step was done by using keyword tools like Google Keyword Planner, MozBar, and Answer the Public. In order to work on being at the top of search queries, the keyword phrase, “colleges in Utah” was used. According to Google Keyword Planner, this phrase had a high search with low competition as seen in Table 1. A screenshot of the Keyword Planner can be found as figure 2.1 in Appendix B.

Table 1
Google Keyword Planner Results

<u>Keyword/Phrase</u>	<u>Average Monthly Search</u>	<u>Competition</u>
Colleges in Utah	2400	Low
Universities in Utah	1300	Low
Utah Colleges	1600	Low
Online Colleges in Utah	140	High
Utah Universities	720	Low

The MozBar allows marketers to take a deeper look into the competition the Google Keyword Planner reports. On the SERP, the MozBar shows the Domain Authority for each of the websites in the results. Settling on a keyword means that T-Bird Nation Blog would be able to compete against the Domain Authorities of other results. In January 2016, the reported Domain Authority for suu.edu was 65. In April 2016, the Domain Authority increased to 67. This means suu.edu and tbirdnation.suu.edu can compete against websites lower than 67 and slightly higher. Screenshots of the SERP for “colleges in Utah” showing the MozBar results can be found in Appendix B, figures 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

Once it was determined that “colleges in Utah” was a good keyword phrase to target for blog content, the advisee used Answer the Public (answerthepublic.com) to find relevant questions being asked. After looking at the results, figures 2.3 and 2.4 in Appendix B, a plan was created for Q1 2016 and Q2 2016.

The blog posts for “colleges in Utah” for Q1 2016 can be found in Appendix A and are as follows:

- Public Colleges in Utah
- Choosing the Right College in Utah For You
- Division 1 Colleges in Utah
- Colleges in Utah: Things to Consider
- Colleges in Utah
- Where are all the Colleges in Utah?

Going forward, the “colleges in Utah” blog posts for Q2 2016 will focus on questions pertaining to specific majors. Three example posts are as follows:

- Colleges in Utah for Nursing
- Colleges in Utah for Psychology
- Colleges in Utah for Business

While the keyword and SERP focus was targeted for “colleges in Utah,” not all blog posts were required to contain the keyword phrase. During Q1 2016, another blog series called “College Terms” was created to answer questions for high school students about things like Admissions Index, Financial Aid, or the ACT Exam. Some blog posts created during Q1 2016 focused on real-time trending topics like spring break and the NFL Combine. Other posts on the blog were re-posts of SUU news stories, or sponsored content from other sites.

Search Engine Optimization

Having all the strategy for SERP in place, means nothing if the content created is not properly optimized for search engines.

After determining the keyword phrase, “colleges in Utah,” the advisee created an editorial calendar to create specific blog post topics. This calendar can be found as Figure 3 in Appendix C. To create the calendar, the advisee started by creating the title for the posts and then explaining the content in the description. The post was then assigned a writer and a general posting date.

Once the blog articles were written, and edited, the advisee posted them to the blog. In order to fully optimize each post (Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, 2010) the following list of items was completed:

- Using the keyword phrase in the title
- Using the keyword phrase in the meta-description
- Using the keyword phrase in the H1 tags
- Optimizing photos to have keyword phrase in title
- Using the keyword phrase in the URL

Not all blog posts were shared via social media, especially the “colleges in Utah” blog posts. Figure 2.1 in the results section will share number of views for each post during Q1 and how they were shared. Two sharing methods were consistent for all blog posts because of the influence of SEO. Each blog post was shared on SUU’s official Google+ page, and the URL was submitted to google.com/addurl. Blog posts that were shared on SUU’s social media pages like Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest were done so because the content was not created solely by a keyword strategy. The T-Bird Nation blog has a mix of types of content, which is further explained in the discussion and limitations section.

Results

Success for the professional project is determined by the number of blog posts, the number of views, and the type of views - direct, organic, or social. These analytics, as shown in Table 2.1, are important as the Marketing Communication Office determines a schedule for upcoming blog posts.

The aim as outlined in the original prospectus, was to have five blog posts using the keyword phrase, “colleges in Utah.” This goal was met, as there were a total of six blog posts made. Overall, there were 19 blog posts made in the 13-week period, averaging 1.5 blog posts a week.

The data for the number of views is an important insight because broad conclusions can be drawn about what kinds of posts do well. Further research can be conducted relating views to intended audience, author’s tone, topic of post, and social media sharing plan. Because not many of the posts were shared heavily on SUU’s social media accounts, this preliminary data can help the advisee as she looks for what types of content do well on the blog.

The type of views is the most important piece of data because it says how the specific blog post was found. There are a couple different categories for views, but for this project the advisee will focus on organic views, social views, and direct views. All other views, referrals, paid search, and email marketing, will be placed in an other column. Organic views are counted when traffic is directed directly from a search engine (Wainwright, 2013). Sometimes the keywords typed into the search engine are listed, but not a majority of the time. Social views count any traffic derived from any social media outlet ranging from Facebook and Twitter to StumbleUpon and Digg (Wainwright, 2013). Direct views are any views outside of organic,

social, referrals, paid search, and email marketing (Wainwright, 2013). Most of the Direct views are not from searches, but rather people going directly to the website.

Table 2
Quarter 1 2016 Blog Posts and Views

<u>Blog Title</u>	<u>Total Views</u>	<u>Organic</u>	<u>Social</u>	<u>Direct</u>	<u>Other</u>
6 Ways College Has Changed Since You Attended	11	4	4	3	0
8 Thrill-Seeking Date Ideas	14	4	1	9	0
What You Need to File Your Taxes	13	2	1	9	1
Public Colleges in Utah	27	4	3	20	0
SUU NFL Draft Updates	148	31	55	60	2
The Making of a Coach: Demario Warren's Journey	24	3	1	20	0
ICYMI: Great Facts about SUU	87	10	33	44	0
Last Minute Spring Break Ideas	281	1	237	42	1
How are Admissions & Scholarship Decision Made?	5	0	1	4	0
SUU Professors Do More Than Teach: Faculty Books and Publications	5	0	1	4	0
Choosing the Right College in Utah for You	24	5	1	18	0
What is the ACCUPLACER Test and how is it used?	5	2	0	3	0
What is the ACT and When Should Students Take It?	4	0	0	3	1
What is ACT Aspire?	3	1	0	2	0
What are AP (Advanced Placement) Classes?	4	0	1	3	0
Division 1 Colleges in Utah	9	5	0	4	0
Colleges in Utah: Things to Consider	13	1	0	12	0
Colleges in Utah	5	0	0	5	0
Where are all the Colleges in Utah?	1	0	0	1	0
Totals	683	73	339	266	5

Table 2.1 is organized in chronological order by when posts were made. Only posts made during Q1 2016 are included. All of the views are from January 1, 2016 to April 1, 2016. There are blog posts that were published before Q1 2016 that received views during the quarter. Since the start of Q2 2016, the views on posts published during Q1 2016 have increased. This is especially true for “Colleges in Utah” and “Where are all the Colleges in Utah?” as they were made on the last day of the time frame.

Discussion & Limitations

The views on the Q1 2016 blog posts show that when shared on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, the blog views increase. The two posts that were shared on Facebook and Twitter were “Last Minute Spring Break Ideas” and “SUU NFL Draft Updates.” As a result,

those are the top two performing blog posts of the quarter. Not all blog posts were shared through social media sites, because the purpose of the blog was to create content for SERP.

In order to measure if the content is being found online, organic views are the focus for this project. The posts the advisee is most interested in are the ones for “colleges in Utah” because they were designed specifically to be found through keyword searches. The first four “colleges in Utah” blog posts all show organic traffic. Though the numbers may seem small, they show that the SEO tactics on the blog posts are working. As time passes, the organic traffic should increase, particularly as high school students are starting to look for schools in late summer and early fall. The last two “colleges in Utah” blog posts show no organic traffic because they were published on the final day of the time frame for the project. Given the proper amount of the time, the organic views should increase for all “colleges in Utah” blog posts.

The blog posts during Q1 2016 were created as a stand-alone strategy and not integrated into any campaign. This is a possible reason why the blog traffic in general is not as high as it could be. Seeing the impact social sharing had on “SUU NFL Draft Updates” and “Last Minute Spring Break Ideas” is an indication that sharing blog posts through social media will help drive traffic. The reason why many of the blog posts were not shared through social is that because the purpose was to use the blog for SERP, the best way to attract views was organically. Any social views on the “colleges in Utah” blog posts are most likely from Google+.

In the future, the blog posts will be integrated into marketing campaigns for prospective students. As SUU is reaching out to younger audiences, the blog posts serve as unbiased content about choosing a college in general, not specifically SUU. The blog posts will be integrated in email and social posts in the future to further the reach. A majority of the blog content is not time sensitive so it has longevity and does not need to be recreated every year.

The aim of this professional project was to capture organic search and drive traffic to the SUU website. This goal was achieved and while the numbers may not seem significant, they show that the process of SEO is working. As noted earlier, SEO is not an overnight process and takes time to fully develop (Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, 2010). The data gathered in this project show that SUU is on track to reach the goal of being on the first page of Google for the search “colleges in Utah.”

Conclusion

Marketing is shifting from the traditional model of interrupting consumers through advertisements to content marketing where brands are providing valuable information (Scott, 2013). The Internet makes content marketing easy through the use of search engines and the proper SEO tactics. Companies are using blogs to create content for consumers and share through social media (Kilroy, 2015). The completed professional project created T-Bird Nation, a blog for Southern Utah University. Posts were created using a keyword search strategy around the phrase “colleges in Utah” to start increasing the domain authority and search ranking of suu.edu.

During quarter 1 of 2016, 19 blog posts were made, six using “colleges in Utah” as the keyword phrase. The posts were written by either the advisee or a member of the SUU Marketing Communication Office and then reviewed for SEO by the advisee. The advisee scheduled and posted all of the articles to the blog, making sure to adhere to SEO tactics like creating a meta-description, optimizing photos, and writing URLs.

Of the 19 blog articles posted in Q1 2016, there were 73 organic views, meaning traffic was directed from a search engine like Google or Yahoo. This is a good start in creating a larger blogging strategy, as directing organic traffic was one of the main goals of the project.

The data for the blog posts should be continually collected as time passes. SEO and SERP tactics do not happen overnight, so while the project of creating the posts during Q1 2016 is complete, the implication of the articles will continue as more people begin to search for “colleges in Utah” online. While SUU has not made it on the first page of Google for keyword phrase “colleges in Utah” yet, as time passes and more people find the T-Bird Nation blog, SUU may achieve its goal.

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<http://wommapedia.org/>

Appendix A – Colleges in Utah Blog Posts

Figure 1.1 Public Colleges in Utah

The image is a screenshot of a blog post from Southern Utah University. At the top, there is a red header with the text 'SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY' and the 'SUU' logo. Below the header, the blog title 'T-Bird Nation' is displayed in a large, bold, black font, followed by the subtitle 'PUBLIC COLLEGES IN UTAH' in a slightly smaller, bold, black font. The post is attributed to 'Southern Utah University' and dated 'Feb 19, 2016 3:38:44 PM'. Below the text are social media sharing buttons for Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google+, each with a 'Share' label and a count. The main content area features a large image of a university campus with a dark green banner overlaid that reads 'PUBLIC COLLEGES IN UTAH' in white, bold letters, with the subtitle 'WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT SCHOOL' in smaller white text below it. Underneath the banner is another photograph of students walking on a green lawn. A short paragraph of text follows, discussing the importance of choosing the right school based on factors like location, tuition, and programs. At the bottom left, the 'SUU SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY' logo is shown. To the right of the logo, a list of university details is provided: 'Southern Utah University', 'Location: Cedar City, Utah', 'Student Population: 8,881', 'In-state tuition: \$6,300', 'Out-of-state tuition: \$19,132', and 'Website: www.suu.edu'.

Figure 1.2 Chosing the Right College in Utah for You

SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY

SUU

T-Bird Nation

CHOOSING THE RIGHT COLLEGE IN UTAH FOR YOU

Posted by [Lexi Carter](#) on Mar 16, 2016 1:57:13 PM

[Tweet](#) [in Share](#) [Like](#) [Share](#) [G+](#) [1](#)



Your high school career is drawing to an end. Maybe you are a junior, or are graduating in a few months. You might still be a freshman or sophomore, but time in high school is rapidly dwindling. People are starting to ask questions like:

"What are you doing after you graduate?"

"What do you want to go into?"

"Where do you want to go to school?"

Come on. I know you have heard these questions from parents, teachers, school counselors, friends, etc. Everyone in your life knows that big things are coming after high school. Just one question – do you? Do you know which school to go to? What to major in? Why there are so many different types of colleges and which one is best?

Before we list the endless choices before you, let us consider your two biggest competitors: 2-year colleges and 4-year universities. I'm sure you've heard good and bad about both, but let's set these thoughts aside for

Figure 1.3 Division 1 Colleges in Utah

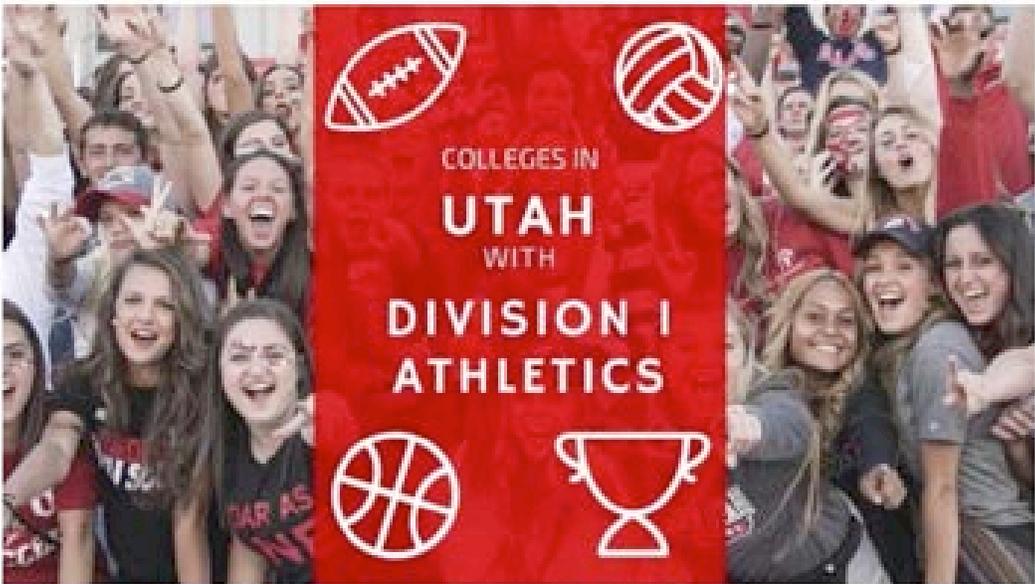
SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY
SUU

T-Bird Nation

DIVISION 1 COLLEGES IN UTAH

Posted by [Southern Utah University](#) on Mar 31, 2016 2:38:43 PM

[Tweet](#) [Share](#) [Like](#) [Share](#) [G+1](#)



COLLEGES IN
UTAH
WITH
**DIVISION I
ATHLETICS**

Sports are a huge part of college and campus life, especially when it comes to Division I. Division I member institutions have to sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women compared to just five for each gender in Division II and III sports. Annually, athletics brings in well over \$1 billion of revenue each year across the nation for Division I schools.

Here is a list of all the Division 1 colleges and universities in Utah:

Southern Utah University
Mascot: Thunderbirds
Sports: Basketball (M/W), Cross Country (M/W), Football (M), Golf (M/W), Gymnastics (W), Soccer (W), Softball (W), Tennis (M/W), Track & Field (M/W), Volleyball (W)
Website: suufbirds.com

Figure 1.4 Colleges in Utah: Things to Consider

SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY

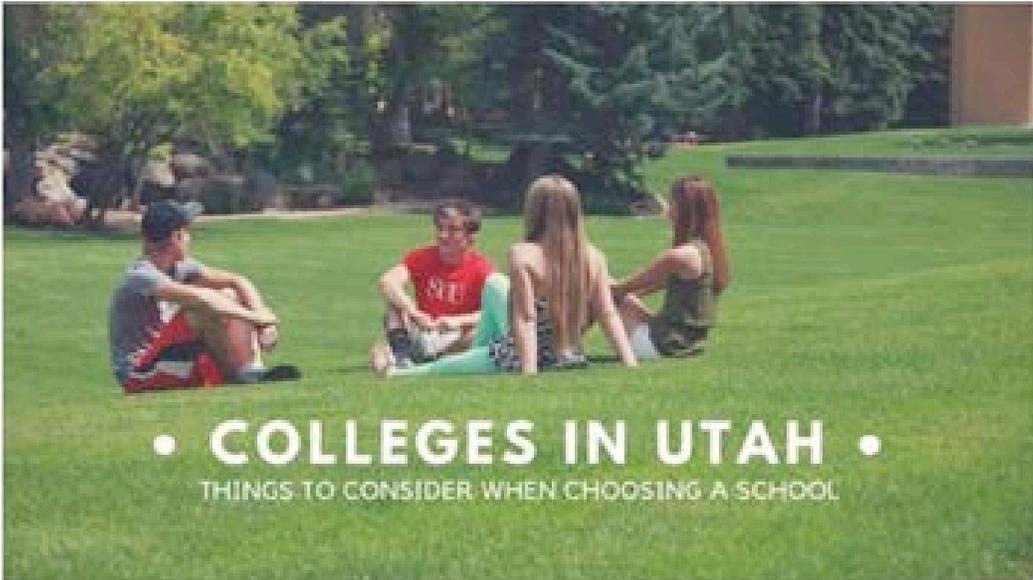
SUU

T-Bird Nation

COLLEGES IN UTAH: THINGS TO CONSIDER

Posted by [Lexi Carter](#) on Mar 31, 2016 3:36:45 PM

[Tweet](#) [in Share](#) [D](#) [f Like](#) [Share](#) [D](#) [G+1](#) [1](#)



• COLLEGES IN UTAH •
THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A SCHOOL

Choosing a university should be more than what color you look best wearing or where your brother went. There are some things that can be vital to the quality of education you'll receive and how you will fare in the job market once graduated.

Here are a few things that you may not have thought about yet:

Student enrollment

Whether a school has 5,000 or 30,000 students will make a huge difference in your undergraduate education. Extracurricular activities and jobs may be plentiful at a larger university, but small class sizes and personalized attention from professors are what the smaller universities offer.

Figure 1.5 Colleges in Utah

The image is a screenshot of a blog post from Southern Utah University. At the top, there is a red header with the text 'SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY' and the 'SUU' logo. Below the header, the title of the post is 'T-Bird Nation' followed by 'COLLEGES IN UTAH'. The post is dated 'Apr 1, 2016 2:40:22 PM'. There are social media sharing buttons for Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google+. The main content area features a photograph of three students sitting on a concrete ledge outdoors. A large yellow box with a black border is overlaid on the photo, containing the text 'COLLEGES IN UTAH'. Below the photo, the text reads 'Here is a list of all the colleges and universities in Utah:'. The list includes 'Southern Utah University' with its location (Cedar City, Utah), student population (8,881), and website (www.suu.edu). The second entry is 'Westminster College' with its location (Salt Lake City, Utah) and student population (2,789).

SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY
SUU

T-Bird Nation

COLLEGES IN UTAH

Posted by [Southern Utah University](#) on Apr 1, 2016 2:40:22 PM

[Tweet](#) [Share](#) [Like](#) [Share](#) [G+1](#)

**COLLEGES
IN UTAH**

Here is a list of all the colleges and universities in Utah:

SUU
SOUTHERN UTAH
UNIVERSITY

Southern Utah University
Location: Cedar City, Utah
Student Population: 8,881
Website: www.suu.edu

Westminster College
Location: Salt Lake City, Utah
Student Population: 2,789

Figure 1.6 Where are All the Colleges in Utah?

SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY

SUU

T-Bird Nation

WHERE ARE ALL THE COLLEGES IN UTAH?

Posted by [Southern Utah University](#) on Apr 1, 2016 4:58:23 PM

[Tweet](#) [in Share](#) [Like](#) [Share](#) [G+](#)



COLLEGES IN UTAH BY LOCATION

Location of a university can make all the difference in your collegiate career. When looking at colleges in Utah, you're sure to surround yourself with beauty.

City locations have a hustle and bustle and may offer more connections to outside employment. More rurally located universities offer unique education settings, like access to public lands, national parks, and specialized research projects. Many students report having a deeper connection to their university and the community in smaller cities or towns.

Here is a list of the colleges in Utah sorted by city and population size.

CEDAR CITY | POPULATION: 28,857

Appendix B – Keyword Tools

Figure 2.1 Google Keyword Planner

The screenshot displays the Google AdWords Keyword Planner interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Campaigns', 'Opportunities', 'Reports', and 'Tools'. A red banner indicates that the account is not active. The main section is titled 'Keyword Planner' and shows the search term 'colleges in utah'. Below this, there are two tables: 'Search terms' and 'Keyword (by relevance)'. The 'Search terms' table shows one result for 'colleges in utah' with 2,400 average monthly searches, low competition, and a suggested bid of \$19.66. The 'Keyword (by relevance)' table lists several related terms with their respective search volumes, competition levels, and suggested bids.

Search terms	Avg. monthly searches (Jan 2015 - Dec 2015)	Competition	Suggested bid	Ad imp. sh.	Add to plan
colleges in utah,	2,400	Low	\$19.66		

Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches (Jan 2015 - Dec 2015)	Competition	Suggested bid	Ad imp. sh.	Add to plan
utah colleges,	1,600	Low	\$15.28		
community colleges in utah,	480	Medium	\$12.51		
colleges in salt lake city,	320	Low	\$12.51		
utah community colleges,	260	Medium	\$10.16		
utah universities,	720	Low	-		
utah college,	590	Low	\$13.42		

Figure 2.2.1 – SERP “Colleges in Utah” pt. 1

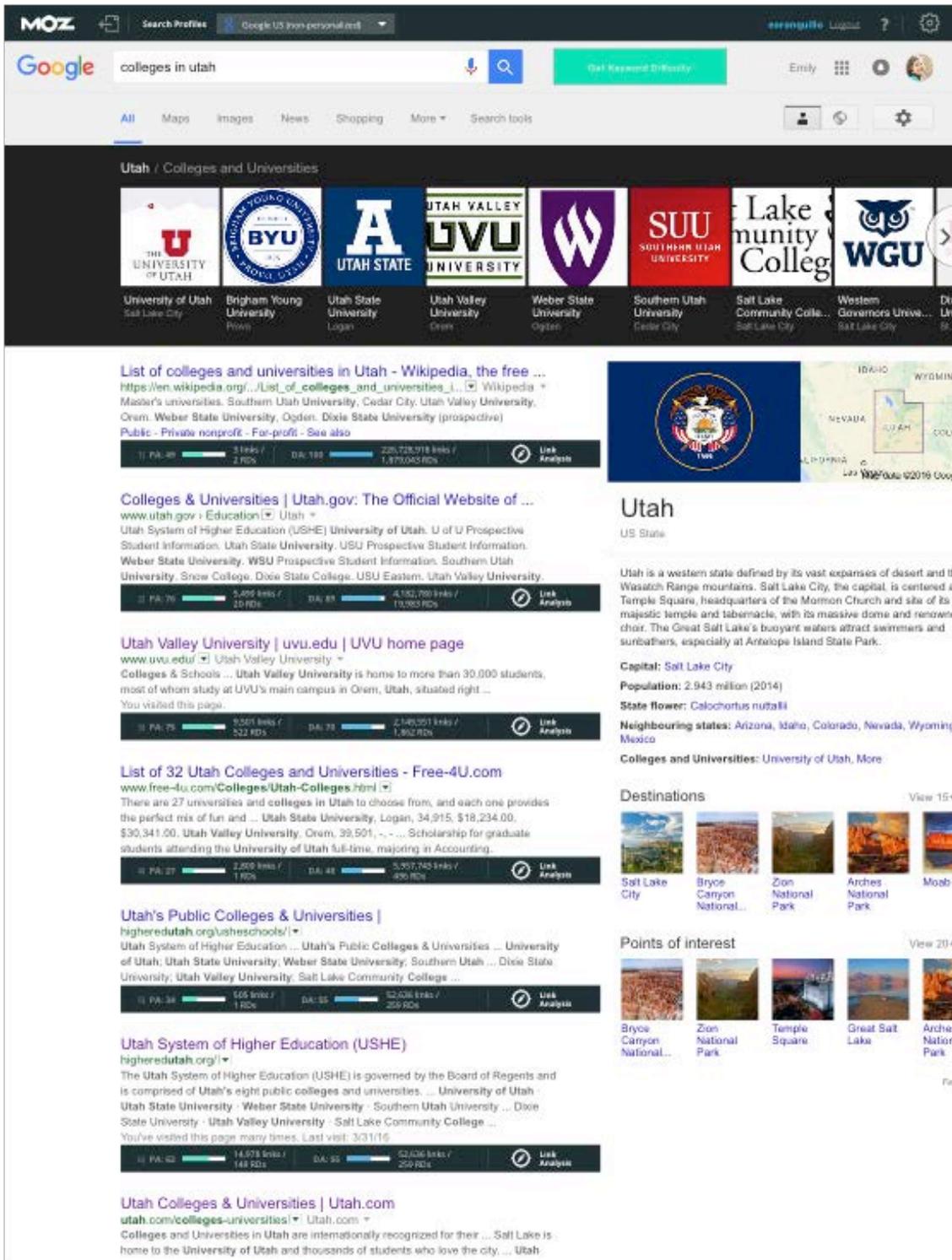


Figure 2.2.2 – SERP “Colleges in Utah” pt. 2

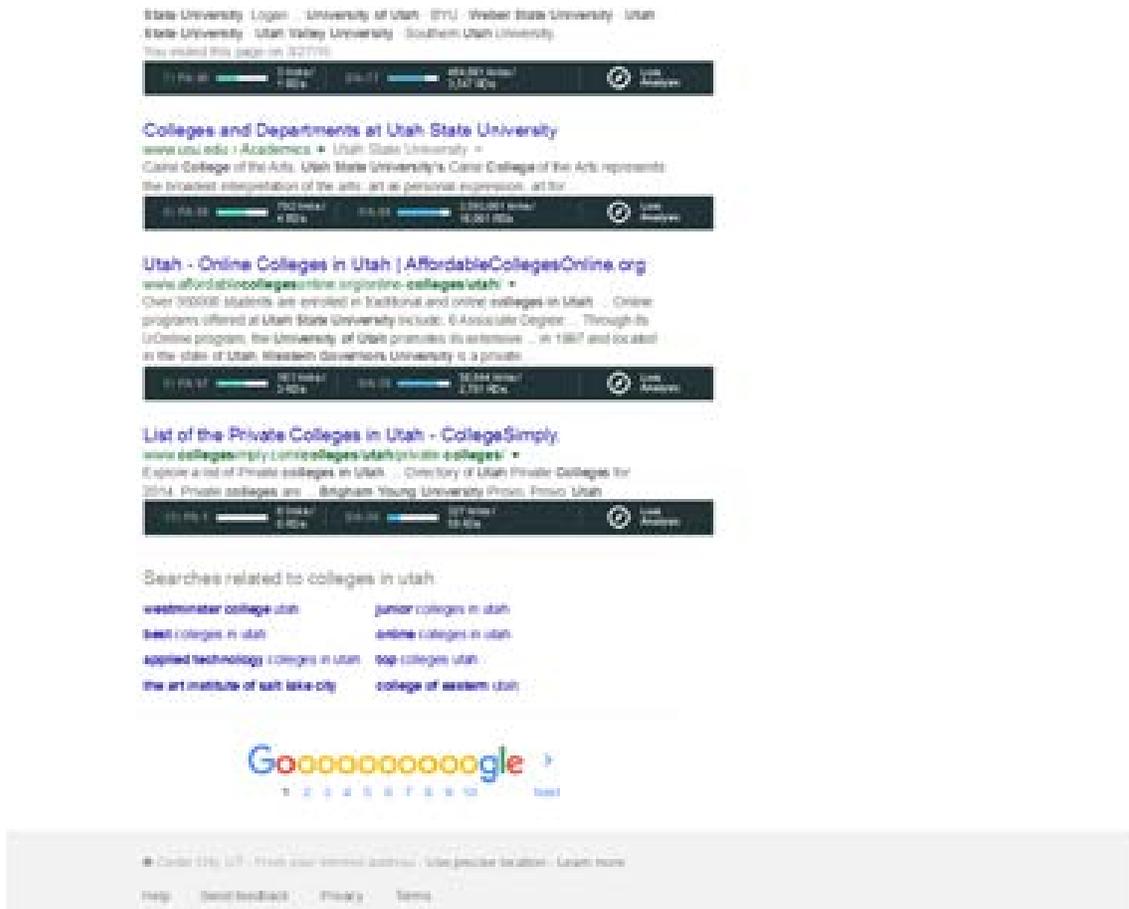


Figure 2.3 Answer the Public “Colleges in Utah” Questions

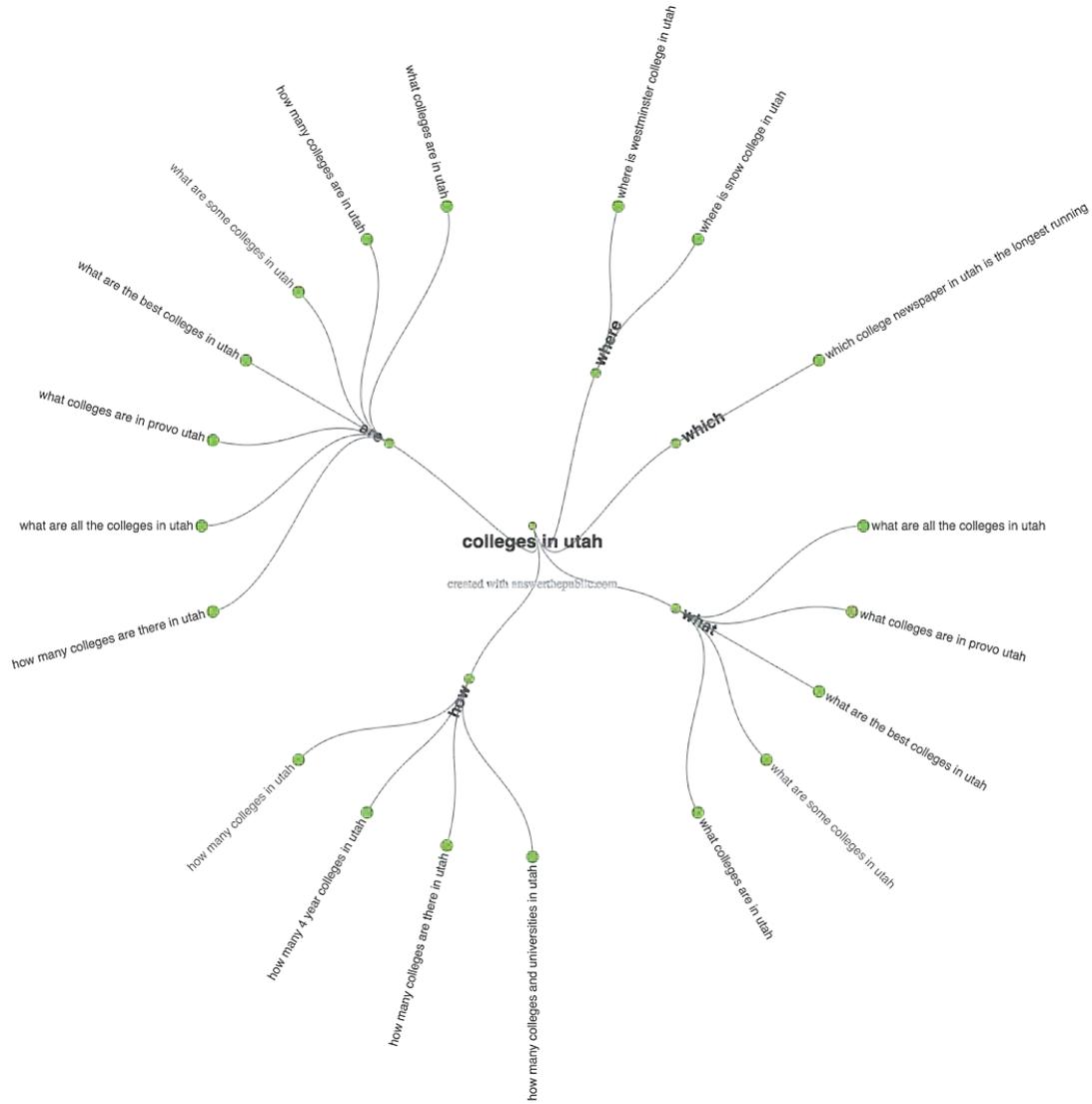
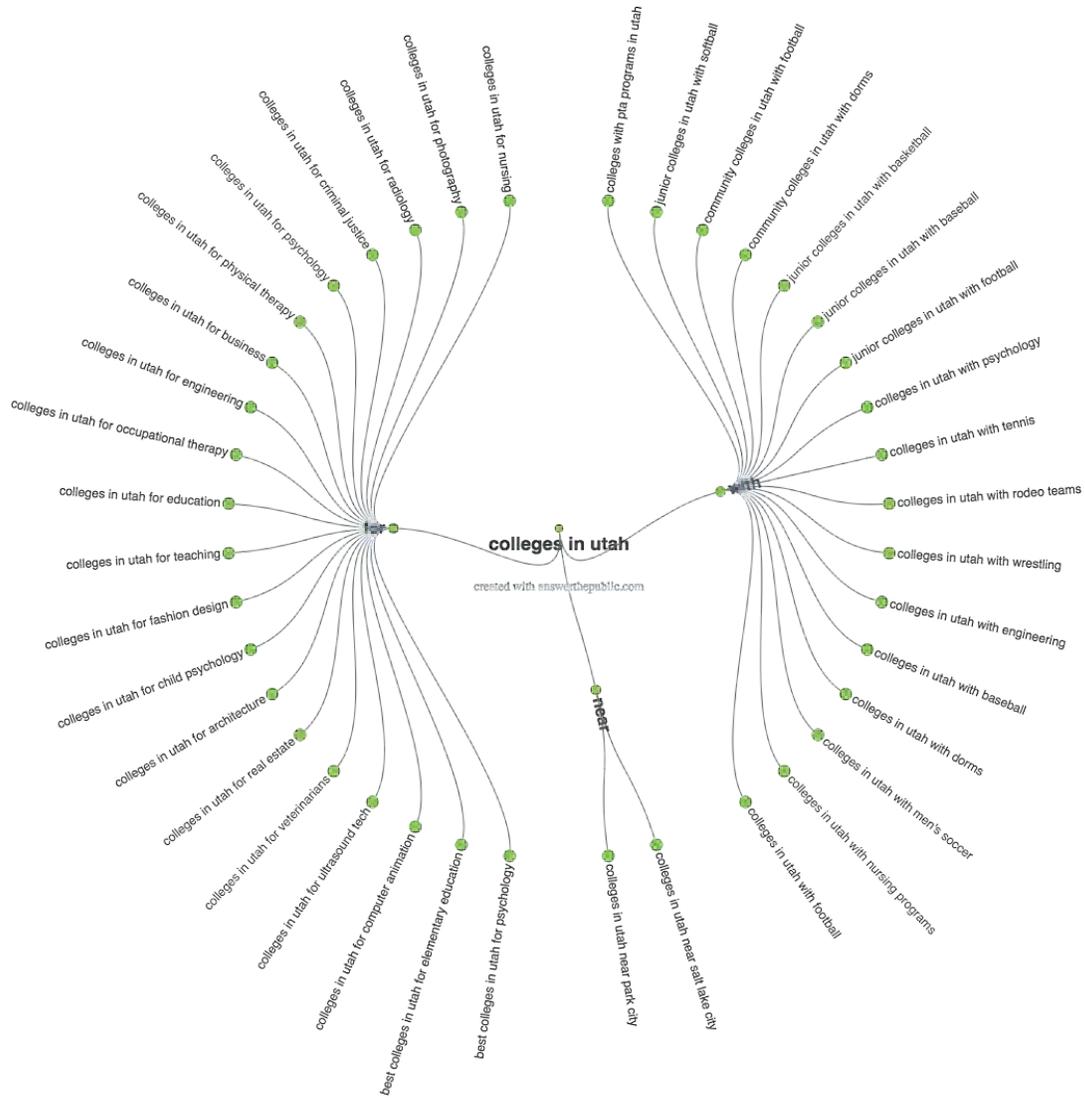


Figure 2.4 Answer the Public “Colleges in Utah” Prepositions



Appendix C – Content Calendar

Figure 3 T-Bird Nation Editorial Calendar

			TOPIC/TITLE	CONTENT/DETAILS	KEYWORD(S)	TARGET PERSON(S)	ART
1	Colleges in Utah						
2							
3	Author: Emily Bonagalli	Colleges and universities in Utah	List of all the colleges in Utah with tuition and location	Colleges in Utah			
4	Due Date:						
5	Publish Date:	5/1/2008					
6							
7							
8	Author: Emily Bonagalli	Public colleges in Utah	List all of the public colleges and universities in Utah with mission statements	colleges in Utah			
9	Due Date:						
10	Publish Date:	2/22/2008					
11							
12							
13	Author:						
14	Due Date:						
15	Publish Date:						
16							
17							
18	Author: Leel Carter	How to choose the right college in Utah for you	Break down types of universities - degrees/certificates offered	Colleges in Utah, college degrees			
19	Due Date:	2/25/2008					
20	Publish Date:	5/6/2008					
21							
22							
23	Author:	Colleges in Utah with B1 Athletics	List of schools with division I athletics	Colleges in Utah, Division I Athletics			
24	Due Date:	3/15/2008					
25	Publish Date:	3/17/2008					
26							
27							
28	Author: Leel Carter	The Most Popular Majors at Each College in Utah	List the top institutions and their best majors	Colleges in Utah			
29	Due Date:	3/17/2008					
30	Publish Date:	3/23/2008					
31							
32							
33	Author:	Best Colleges in Utah for...					

Appendix D – First Page Google Search

Figure 4.1 “Colleges in Utah” Google Search

4/12/2016 colleges in utah - Google Search

Google colleges in utah Emily

All Maps Images News Shopping More Search tools

Utah / Colleges and Universities

University of Utah Salt Lake City
Brigham Young University Provo
Utah State University Logan
Utah Valley University Orem
Weber State University Ogden
Southern Utah University Cedar City
Western Governors Univ. Salt Lake City
Salt Lake Community College Salt Lake City
Dixie State University St. George

Stevens-Henager College - stevenshenager.edu
Ad www.stevenshenager.edu
St. George is Now Enrolling! Begin Your College Journey Today.
Real-World Instructors - New Student Laptop - ACCSC Accredited
Graphic Arts Degrees - Business Degrees - Healthcare Degrees - IT Degrees

List of colleges and universities in Utah - Wikipedia, the free ...
https://en.wikipedia.org/List_of_colleges_and_universities_in_Utah
Master's universities: Southern Utah University, Cedar City; Utah Valley University, Orem; Weber State University, Ogden; Dixie State University (prospective)
Public - Private nonprofit - For-profit - See also

Colleges & Universities | Utah.gov: The Official Website of ...
www.utah.gov/Education Utah
Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) University of Utah, U of U Prospective Student Information, Utah State University, USU Prospective Student Information, Weber State University, WSU Prospective Student Information, Southern Utah University, Snow College, Dixie State College, USU Eastern, Utah Valley University.

List of 32 Utah Colleges and Universities - Free-4U.com
www.free-4u.com/Colleges/Utah-Colleges.html
There are 27 universities and colleges in Utah to choose from, and each one provides the perfect mix of fun and ... Utah State University, Logan, 34,915, \$18,234.00, \$30,341.00, Utah Valley University, Orem, 39,501, - - - Scholarship for graduate students attending the University of Utah full-time, majoring in Accounting.

Utah's Public Colleges & Universities | higheredutah.org/usheschools/
Utah System of Higher Education ... Utah's Public Colleges & Universities ... University of Utah, Utah State University, Weber State University, Southern Utah ... Dixie State University, Utah Valley University, Salt Lake Community College ...

Utah Colleges & Universities | Utah.com
utah.com/colleges-universities/ Utah.com
Colleges and Universities in Utah are internationally recognized for their ... Salt Lake is home to the University of Utah and thousands of students who love the city. ... Utah State University, Logan ... University of Utah - BYU - Weber State University - Utah State University - Utah Valley University - Southern Utah University.

Utah Colleges and Universities - Colleges Search by State ...
<https://www.cappex.com/colleges/states/Utah> Cappex
Search Utah colleges and universities and get exclusive insights on whether they are ... The University of Utah, located in Salt Lake City, is the state's oldest institution. ... The main campus of Utah State University is located in Logan. ... City, Utah Valley University in Orem, Weber State University in Ogden, and many more.

Utah - Online Colleges in Utah | AffordableCollegesOnline.org
www.affordablecollegesonline.org/online-colleges/utah/
Over 350000 students are enrolled in traditional and online colleges in Utah. ... Online programs offered at Utah State University include: 8 Associate Degree ... Through its UOnline program, the University of Utah promotes its extensive ... in 1997 and located in the state of Utah, Western Governors University is a private, ...

A-Z list of Utah Universities & Colleges - 4icu.org
www.4icu.org North America United States
List of accredited Colleges and Universities in Utah sorted by University name, ...

Utah
US State

Utah is a western state defined by its vast expanses of desert and the Wasatch Range mountains. Salt Lake City, the capital, is centered at Temple Square, headquarters of the Mormon Church and site of its majestic temple and tabernacle, with its massive dome and renowned choir. The Great Salt Lake's buoyant waters attract swimmers and sunbathers, especially at Antelope Island State Park.

Capital: Salt Lake City
Population: 2.943 million (2014)
State flower: *Calsiochortus nuttallii*
Neighbouring states: Arizona, Idaho, Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming, Mexico
Colleges and Universities: University of Utah, More

Destinations View 15+

Salt Lake City Bryce Canyon National... Zion National Park Arches National Park Moab

Points of interest View 20+

Bryce Canyon National... Zion National Park Temple Square Great Salt Lake Arches National Park

<https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=colleges+in+utah> 1/2

Figure 4.2 “Division 1 colleges in Utah”

4/12/2016 division 1 colleges in utah - Google Search

Emily

[All](#) [Images](#) [Maps](#) [News](#) [Shopping](#) [More](#) [Search tools](#)

About 654,000 results (0.62 seconds)

List of college athletic programs in Utah - Wikipedia, the free ...
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_college_athletic_programs_in_Utah - Wikipedia

List of college athletic programs in Utah ... The main article is College sports. ... Contents. [hide] 1 NCAA; 1.1 Division I; 1.2 Division II; 2 NJCAA; 3 See also ... NCAA - NAIA - NJCAA - See also

List of NCAA Division I institutions - Wikipedia, the free ...
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_NCAA_Division_I_institutions - Wikipedia

In the 2015–16 school year, there are 351 American colleges and universities classified as Division I for National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) ... Division I institutions - Full Member Institutions - See also - References

NCAA Division I Schools by State | www.niles-hs.k12.il.us
<https://www.niles-hs.k12.il.us/> - Niles Township High School District 219

College & Career Resource Center, NCAA Division I College & Universities ... of Utah; Utah State University; Utah Valley University; Weber State University.

Division 1 Colleges. List of NCAA DI schools.
www.collegesportscholarships.com/division-1-colleges-schools.htm

Play division 1 college sports. Find DI schools and contact coaches. ... Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Alaska, Hawaii).

Utah colleges and universities| Step Up Utah
stepuputah.com - Students

With top-notch faculty, amazing student life, hands-on undergraduate research, NCAA Division 1 athletics, and the largest residential campus in Utah, USU has ...

Utah Colleges & Universities | Utah.com
utah.com/colleges-universities/ - Utah.com

Colleges and Universities in Utah are internationally recognized for their undergraduate, graduate, law, medical and doctoral programs.

Division 1 Colleges in Utah - posts - Southern Utah University
fbirdnation.suu.edu/division-1-colleges-in-utah/

Mar 31, 2016 - A list of the Division 1 colleges and universities in Utah.

Where are all the Colleges in Utah?
fbirdnation.suu.edu/where-are-all-the-colleges-in-utah/

A list of all the colleges and universities in Utah sorted by location. ... Posted by Southern Utah University on Apr 1, 2016 4:58:23 PM ... Colleges in Utah · Colleges in Utah: Things to Consider · Division 1 Colleges in Utah · What are AP ...

2015 Best Colleges in Utah | Rankings & Reviews
colleges.startclass.com/d/d/Utah/

Compare Utah colleges based on rankings, acceptance rate, tuition, reviews, and more. ... Sports Division. All ... Displaying 1 through 30 of 34 listings.

Division 1 Colleges - TheCollegeHelper.com
www.thecollegehelper.com/division-1-colleges/

Division 1 colleges that have football teams are classified as Football Bowl ... Los Angeles - (CA), Marist College - (NY), Southern Utah University - (UT).

Searches related to division 1 colleges in utah

division 1 college list	division 1 colleges by state
division 1 colleges football	division 1 colleges baseball