

# MODULE 3 — SEO AND SEM ESSENTIALS

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## UNIT 12 — SEO: MEANING, PROCESS, ROLE & TYPES

### Meaning and Definition

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation. It is the practice of improving a website's visibility in organic (unpaid) search engine results so that the site appears higher when users search for relevant terms on platforms like Google, Bing, or Yahoo.

When you type "best MBA college in Kerala" into Google, the non-sponsored links that appear are organic results. The entire discipline of earning those positions — and climbing as high as possible — is SEO.

**Definition:** SEO is the process of optimising a website's content, structure, and online authority so that search engines rank it prominently for relevant user queries, generating free, high-intent traffic.

### How Search Engines Work

Before optimising for search engines, you must understand how they operate. Google follows three fundamental steps:

1. **Crawling:** Automated bots called "spiders" browse the internet, following links from page to page to discover content.

2. **Indexing:** Discovered pages are stored in Google's database. Any page not indexed will never appear in results.
3. **Ranking:** When a user searches, Google's algorithm (200+ factors) arranges indexed pages in order of relevance, quality, and authority.

SEO is the work of making your website easy to crawl, easy to index, and worthy of a top rank.

## The SEO Process

Step	Activity	Operational Scope
Step 1	Audit	Examine the website for technical issues, content gaps, and backlink health.
Step 2	Keyword Research	Identify the search terms your target audience uses.
Step 3	On-Page Optimisation	Optimise titles, headings, content, meta tags, images, and URLs.
Step 4	Technical SEO	Fix speed, mobile-friendliness, crawlability, and structured data.
Step 5	Content Creation	Publish original, high-quality, keyword-aligned content.
Step 6	Link Building	Earn backlinks from credible, relevant external websites.
Step 7	Monitor & Refine	Track rankings, traffic, and conversions — adjust continuously.

SEO is never a one-time task. Algorithms update, competition shifts, and content must stay fresh.

## Role of SEO in Digital Marketing

Over 90% of all online experiences begin with a search engine. Google processes 8.5 billion searches daily. SEO plays the following roles in digital marketing:

- Drives organic, high-intent traffic — people actively searching for what you offer.

- Builds long-term brand credibility, since users trust top organic results.
- Reduces dependence on paid advertising over time.
- Supports all other channels — content, social media, and email all benefit from strong SEO as a foundation.

## Types of SEO

1. **On-Page SEO:** Optimising elements directly on the webpage: content, title tags, headings, meta descriptions, internal links, and image alt text. Entirely within the website owner's control.
2. **Off-Page SEO:** Actions taken outside your website to build authority — earning backlinks from other websites, brand mentions, and social signals.
3. **Technical SEO:** Optimising the website's infrastructure: page speed, HTTPS security, mobile-friendliness, XML sitemaps, schema markup (structured data), and fixing broken links.
4. **Local SEO:** Optimising for location-specific searches. Essential for restaurants, clinics, retail stores, and local service providers. Google Business Profile is the primary tool.
5. **E-commerce SEO:** Specialised SEO for online stores, optimising product pages, category pages, and filter structures at scale.
6. **Voice Search SEO:** Optimising for conversational, question-based queries used with voice assistants like Siri and Google Assistant ("Where can I find a biryani near me?").

## UNIT 13 — ON-PAGE vs OFF-PAGE OPTIMISATION

### Difference Table

Parameter	On-Page SEO	Off-Page SEO
Location	Within the website	Outside the website
Control	Fully within your control	Depends on third parties
Primary goal	Content quality and relevance	Authority and trustworthiness

Parameter	On-Page SEO	Off-Page SEO
<b>Result timeline</b>	Faster — days to weeks	Slower — weeks to months
<b>Key activities</b>	Title tags, content, headings, meta tags, URL structure, internal links	Backlink building, guest blogging, brand mentions, social signals
<b>Key metrics</b>	Keyword rankings, bounce rate, CTR	Domain Authority, backlink count, referring domains
<b>Main tools</b>	Google Search Console, Yoast SEO, Screaming Frog	Ahrefs, SEMrush, Moz Link Explorer
<b>Best analogy</b>	What you say about yourself	What others say about you

## Explanation of Each

**On-Page SEO** is everything that happens on your own website — the words you write, the structure you create, and the technical signals you send to Google. It is the foundation. Without good on-page work, no amount of backlinks will produce strong rankings.

**Off-Page SEO** is everything that happens beyond your website that signals to Google that your site is trusted and authoritative. The most powerful off-page signal is a backlink — a link from another website to yours. Google treats each backlink as a "vote of confidence." The more high-quality votes you accumulate from authoritative sources, the more Google trusts your site.

Both work together. On-page makes your site relevant. Off-page makes it authoritative. A site that excels at both is nearly unstoppable in search results.

## UNIT 14 — KEY ELEMENTS OF ON-PAGE SEO & KEYWORDS

### Key Elements of Successful On-Page Optimisation

- **1. Title Tag:** The HTML element defining the page title — it appears as the clickable blue headline in Google results. This is the single most important on-page SEO element. Best practice: 50–60

characters, include the primary keyword, and make it compelling enough to earn a click.

*Poor title:* "Home | My Website"

*Strong title:* "Digital Marketing Courses in Kerala | Enrol Today"

- **2. Meta Description:** A 150–160 character summary shown beneath the title in Google results. Not a direct ranking factor, but a well-crafted meta description improves Click-Through Rate (CTR), which Google considers a quality signal.
- **3. Heading Tags (H1–H6):** These organise content hierarchy. The H1 (main heading) appears once per page and must include the primary keyword. H2 and H3 tags organise subsections. Headings help both users scan content and Google understand what the page covers.
- **4. Keyword Placement:** Strategic, natural placement of target keywords in the title, first 100 words of content, headings, and throughout the body. Keyword stuffing (unnatural overuse) is penalised by Google. Aim for natural, reader-first writing with keywords woven in purposefully.
- **5. Content Quality:** Google's primary mission is surfacing content that best satisfies user intent. Content must be original, accurate, comprehensive, and genuinely useful. Thin, copied, or padded content is penalised by algorithms like Google Panda.
- **6. URL Structure:** Clean, short, keyword-rich URLs perform better in search.  
*Good URL:* yourbrand.com/digital-marketing-guide  
*Bad URL:* yourbrand.com/page?id=347&ref=2
- **7. Image Optimisation:** Every image needs: descriptive alt text (tells Google what the image shows), a compressed file size (for faster page load), and a relevant filename (e.g., seo-types-diagram.jpg).
- **8. Internal Linking:** Linking between your own pages helps Google discover and crawl all content, distributes page authority (link juice) across the site, and keeps users engaged longer — reducing bounce rate.
- **9. Page Speed:** Google's Core Web Vitals are now direct ranking factors. Pages should load in under 3 seconds. Tools like Google PageSpeed Insights diagnose speed issues.
- **10. Mobile-Friendliness:** Google uses mobile-first indexing — it evaluates the mobile version of your site first when determining rankings. Every page must function perfectly on smartphones.

## Keywords for an SEO Campaign

Keywords are the exact words and phrases users type into search engines. The entire SEO strategy is built on selecting the right keywords and creating content that satisfies those searches better than anyone else.

## Types of Keywords

Type	Description	Example	User Intent
<b>Short-tail</b>	1–2 words, broad, very high volume, very high competition	"digital marketing"	Informational
<b>Long-tail</b>	3+ words, specific, lower volume, lower competition, higher conversion	"digital marketing course for beginners in Kerala"	Transactional / Informational
<b>Navigational</b>	User wants a specific site or location	"HubSpot login"	Find / Access
<b>Transactional</b>	User wants to buy or take immediate action	"buy digital marketing course online"	Purchase
<b>Local</b>	Location-specific geographic intent	"SEO agency in Kozhikode"	Visit or contact
<b>LSI Keywords</b>	Semantically related terms that support the main topic	For "SEO": backlinks, SERP, meta tags	Support and context

## Keyword Research Process

**Step 1:** Brainstorm seed keywords related to your business or topic.

**Step 2:** Use keyword tools (Google Keyword Planner, Ahrefs, SEMrush, Ubersuggest) to expand and get data.

**Step 3:** Evaluate each keyword on three factors — Search Volume (monthly searches), Keyword Difficulty (KD: how hard to rank), and Search Intent (what the user actually wants).

**Step 4:** Assign a primary keyword and 2–3 secondary keywords to each page.

**Step 5:** Build a content calendar around your keyword plan.

Long-tail keywords are especially valuable for newer websites — lower competition means faster results, and the specificity attracts users much closer to converting.

## UNIT 15 — SEM: MEANING, IMPORTANCE, GOOGLE ADS & KEYWORDS

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### Meaning and Definition

SEM stands for Search Engine Marketing. It is the practice of gaining search engine visibility through paid advertising rather than earning it organically. The dominant model is Pay-Per-Click (PPC), where advertisers pay only when a user clicks their ad.

Google Ads (formerly called Google AdWords) is the world's dominant SEM platform, accounting for over 80% of global search ad revenue.

**Definition:** SEM is a digital marketing strategy that uses paid advertisements on search engine results pages to drive targeted, immediate traffic for specific search queries, with cost incurred per click.

The results at the very top of Google marked "Sponsored" are SEM ads.

### Importance of SEM

Reason	Why It Matters
<b>Instant results</b>	Ads appear from day one — no waiting months for organic rankings.
<b>Precise targeting</b>	Target by keyword, location, device, language, time of day, and audience.
<b>Budget control</b>	Set daily and monthly caps; spend never exceeds what you allow.
<b>Measurable ROI</b>	Every click, conversion, and cost tracked in real time.

Reason	Why It Matters
<b>Competitive edge</b>	Appear above organic results even if your SEO is weak.
<b>Remarketing</b>	Re-show ads to users who previously visited your website.
<b>Scalability</b>	Increase spend when campaigns work; reduce anytime.

SEM is most valuable when businesses need traffic immediately — new product launches, seasonal campaigns, time-sensitive promotions, or highly competitive markets where SEO takes years.

## Keywords for an SEM Campaign

Keyword selection in SEM is more critical than in SEO because every click costs money. Choosing wrong keywords means paying for irrelevant visitors who never convert.

## Keyword Match Types in Google Ads

Match Type	Symbol	How It Works	Example
<b>Broad Match</b>	No symbol (default)	Ads show for searches Google considers related	Keyword: shoes — may show for "footwear," "buy sandals"
<b>Phrase Match</b>	"keyword"	Ad shows when the search contains the phrase in order	"running shoes" — triggers "best running shoes for flat feet"
<b>Exact Match</b>	[keyword]	Ad shows only for that exact term or close variants	[running shoes] — only "running shoes" or "running shoe"
<b>Negative Match</b>	-keyword	Prevents ad from showing for that specific term	-free stops showing for "free running shoes"

Start campaigns with Phrase and Exact Match for budget control. Broad Match is useful for discovery but can waste spend on irrelevant queries.

Negative Keywords are indispensable — explicitly excluding terms prevents paying for unqualified clicks. A paid tutoring service adds "free" as a negative keyword to filter out people searching for free study material.

## Google Ads (AdWords)

Google Ads is Google's online advertising platform and the world's largest digital advertising system, generating approximately \$230 billion in annual revenue.

### The Auction System

Every time a user searches on Google, an instantaneous auction decides which ads appear and in what order. The winner is not simply the highest bidder — it is whoever achieves the highest Ad Rank.

$$\text{Ad Rank} = \text{Bid Amount} \times \text{Quality Score} \times \text{Expected Impact of Ad Extensions}$$

Quality Score (rated 1–10) measures how relevant your ad, keyword, and landing page are to the user's search. A high Quality Score means you can outrank competitors while paying less per click. Relevance beats raw budget.

### Google Ads Campaign Structure

#### Account

- Campaign (Sets budget, geography, campaign type)
  - Ad Group (Groups of related keywords + ads)
    - Keywords + Ads (What triggers the ad and what users see)

### Types of Google Ads Campaigns

Campaign Type	Format	Where Ads Appear
Search	Text ads	Google Search results

Campaign Type	Format	Where Ads Appear
Display	Image/banner ads	2 million+ websites in Google Display Network
Shopping	Product image + price	Google Shopping tab
Video	Video ads	YouTube and partner sites
App	Various formats	Play Store, YouTube, Search, Display
Performance Max	All formats combined	Across all Google channels simultaneously

## Ad Creation in Google Ads

A Search Ad — the most common format — has three parts:

- **Headlines:** Up to 15 headlines of 30 characters each. Google automatically tests different combinations to find what performs best. Headlines must be compelling, keyword-rich, and directly relevant to what the user searched.
- **Descriptions:** Up to 4 descriptions of 90 characters each. These expand on the headline, communicate benefits, and include a clear Call to Action (CTA) like "Enrol Now," "Get a Free Quote," or "Shop Today."
- **Display URL:** The visible URL shown in the ad. Businesses often add keyword-relevant paths to the URL for context (e.g., [yourbrand.com/digital-marketing](http://yourbrand.com/digital-marketing)).

**Best practices for ad creation:** Include the target keyword in at least one headline — closely match the ad's message to the landing page content (this directly improves Quality Score and lowers CPC) — use Ad Extensions (callouts, sitelinks, call extensions, structured snippets) to add information and expand the ad's footprint on the SERP.

## Keyword Targeting in SEM

The targeting process: research keywords using Google Keyword Planner → group related keywords by theme into Ad Groups → choose appropriate match types for each keyword → set bids per keyword or

choose an automated Smart Bidding strategy → add negative keywords to filter irrelevant searches → monitor the Search Terms Report weekly to discover new additions and exclusions.

## Bidding Strategies

- **Manual CPC:** You manually set bids for each keyword.
- **Target CPA:** Google auto-optimises bids to hit a target cost per acquisition.
- **Target ROAS:** Google optimises bids for target return on ad spend.
- **Maximise Clicks:** Get maximum clicks within the set budget.
- **Maximise Conversions:** Get maximum conversions within the set budget.

## UNIT 16 — SIMILARITIES OF SEM AND SEO

Despite operating through different mechanisms, SEO and SEM share a deep common foundation:

Similarity	Explanation
<b>Both use keywords</b>	Both disciplines begin with understanding what users search for.
<b>Both target search engines</b>	Both operate primarily on Google to reach users during search.
<b>Both aim for SERP visibility</b>	The shared goal is prominent placement on search results pages.
<b>Both need quality landing pages</b>	Traffic from either source requires a relevant, persuasive destination page or results suffer.
<b>Both are intent-driven</b>	Both reach users who are actively searching — expressing explicit need.
<b>Both rely on analytics</b>	Google Analytics, Search Console, and Ads Manager power both.

Similarity	Explanation
<b>Both benefit from good content</b>	Quality content improves organic rankings and Google Ads Quality Score (reducing CPC).
<b>Both drive website traffic</b>	Both strategies bring qualified visitors to the website.
<b>Both require continuous choices</b>	Neither is a one-time activity — both demand ongoing monitoring and refinement.
<b>Both support conversion goals</b>	Both ultimately aim to convert visitors into leads, customers, or subscribers.

The overlap is significant enough that the broader term "search marketing" encompasses both. Smart businesses deploy SEO and SEM together as a unified search strategy — SEM for immediate results while SEO builds sustainable organic authority.

## UNIT 17 — DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEM AND SEO

Parameter	SEO	SEM
<b>Full form</b>	Search Engine Optimisation	Search Engine Marketing
<b>Nature</b>	Organic — no payment for placement	Paid advertising
<b>Cost</b>	No cost per click; investment in time, content, and tools	Direct cost per click — scales with traffic volume
<b>Speed</b>	Slow — 3 to 6 months for meaningful results	Instant — ads go live the same day campaign launches
<b>SERP placement</b>	Organic results, below the paid ads section	Top of page, above organic results, labelled "Sponsored"
<b>Durability</b>		

Parameter	SEO	SEM
	Rankings persist even without continued spend	Traffic stops the moment the budget runs out
<b>User trust</b>	Higher — users trust organic results more than ads	Slightly lower — users recognise it as advertising
<b>Click share</b>	Organic results attract approximately 70% of all clicks	Paid ads attract approximately 30% of clicks
<b>Targeting options</b>	Primarily keyword and content-based	Keyword + location + device + time of day + audience + remarketing
<b>A/B testing</b>	Slow and difficult to test changes	Fast and easy — test ad copy and landing pages simultaneously
<b>Measurability</b>	Good, but some keyword data is hidden by Google	Excellent — every impression, click, cost, and conversion tracked
<b>Competitive factor</b>	Content quality and domain authority win	Bid strategy and Quality Score win
<b>Skills required</b>	Content creation, technical SEO, link building	Campaign management, ad copywriting, bid optimisation
<b>Best suited for</b>	Long-term brand building, content-rich businesses, startups with time	Product launches, seasonal promotions, fast-paced competitive markets

## Which to Choose?

Most businesses benefit from using both strategically. Use SEM when you need traffic right now — a product launch, a seasonal sale, a new market. Use SEO to build long-term organic traffic that compounds over time without continuous ad spend. A mature strategy uses SEM data (which keywords convert best) to inform SEO content priorities, while SEO progressively reduces long-term dependence on paid advertising.

**The simplest analogy:** SEM is renting a prime shop location — instant access and full flexibility, but you pay every month. SEO is buying that location — a large initial investment that eventually becomes a self-sustaining asset.

**End of Module 3 • Subject: Digital Marketing for Business**

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