

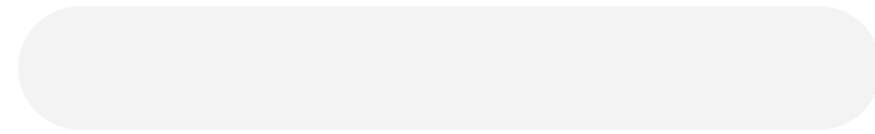
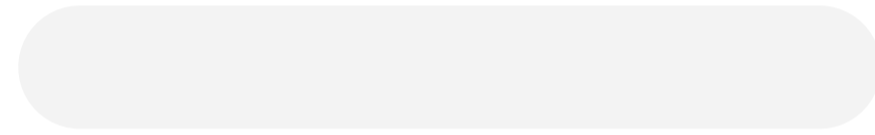
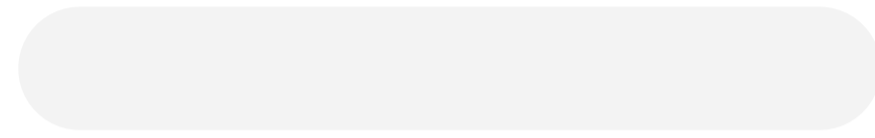


# Ranking Factors

## SEMrush Study 2.0

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# About SEMrush

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SEMrush is a SaaS product used by over 1,500,000 marketers worldwide.

Over the past nine years, SEMrush has grown into an all-in-one marketing suite consisting of more than 30 tools and reports that help companies market better online. On top of being one of the best keyword research tools worldwide, SEMrush now helps users to fix technical website issues, improve the health of their backlink profile, and track local rankings on both mobile and desktop. Marketers can easily spot opportunities they are missing compared to their top ten search competitors and get ideas for their SEO, PPC, content marketing and social media campaigns. Our vision is to create the only tool a digital marketing team will ever need to improve their online marketing results, ensure a smooth workflow between team members and save time on routine tasks.

Because the web is evolving so quickly, and with constant updates from giants like Google and Facebook, marketers can easily get lost without the right data, unable to make the right decisions and adjust to the new reality. Having software that changes with the latest trends and updates and makes data quick and easy to obtain is crucial. At SEMrush, agile methodology is applied at all levels within the company (both in development and marketing), which means we react to market changes as quickly as possible to ensure every change is an opportunity for our clients.


## ■ SEMrush in numbers

 **1,500,000+**  
users

 **30**  
tools

 **140**  
databases

 **3.6**  
billion keywords

 **4**  
trillion backlinks

# About this research

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We at SEMrush are working hard to create the best SEO tool in the world. Our main goal is to help our customers organise their SEO priorities and learn how to do first things first. Having large volumes of data at our disposal, we decided to use it to help the marketing community answer one of the most important questions of today's digital world: what makes your website rank high? There are many valuable resources on the Internet that explain which ranking factors are the most important, including the official information from Google. But we couldn't resist our natural curiosity and decided to investigate how things really are.



## ■ What community thinks

“ Advice and reports on SEO can be dubious at times, but I have to hand it to SEMrush for putting together an interesting and well-researched report. ”

Jason DeMers, Forbes

“ The results are not only interesting, they'll make you re-think your SEO strategies. ”

Edgylabs

“ The folks at SEMrush just did a BIG ranking factors study (with some interesting results). ”

Brian Dean, Backlinko

# What's new?

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The core of SEMrush's success is agile philosophy. We believe that providing results in small iterations is more efficient than managing projects for years. Not only does it help us focus on the most urgent issues, it also allows us to gather more feedback and promptly act on it. We apply this approach to everything we do, including our research work, so we listened to your feedback and decided rather than wait for another year to publish our new findings, we would update the study right away!

In our previous research, we investigated what factors have the biggest influence on the position of the **domain** regardless of what particular page appeared on the SERP for a certain keyword. What we saw on the graphs for each factor were the drops on the first position in every keyword volume group. To explain these drops, we added another dimension to our study: now we also check how the analyzed factors impact the rankings of a particular **URL**.

Last but not least, we updated the study with new data and provided more insights on the most controversial points.

## ■ We investigated 5 more ranking factors from the website's backlink profile

- Total number of referring IPs
- Total number of backlinks
- Total number of follow-backlinks
- Total number of various backlink anchor texts
- Presence of keyword in the backlink anchor text

# Research Methodology

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We started by taking a set of big data consisting of 600,000 keywords from our worldwide base (US, Spain, France, Italy, Germany and others) and the first 100 SERP positions for each of them. We also had a list of alleged ranking factors that might influence the page positions.

To reveal the importance of these factors, we applied a machine learning algorithm called **Random Forest**. As a result, we received a **list of 17 factors** that influence page position in order of significance, from most to least influential.

■ **For every resulting page we analyzed the following factors**

- On-page factors
- Backlink profiles
- Traffic data

■ **We believe that businesses operate differently in various competition niches, so we classified the results according to four keyword volume classes**

- Low volume (1–100)
- Mid volume (101–1,000)
- High volume (1,001–10,000)
- Very high volume (10,001+)

During our research, we tried classifying the results by keyword difficulty, but the results remained the same, so we took keyword volume classification as a standard for the report.

We also segmented the results within each volume class by **keyword length**. Whenever the difference between short-head and long-tail keyword results was substantial, we included this information in the report and presented it in an additional graph. By long-tail keywords we mean phrases of four and more words.

# Why we didn't use correlation analysis

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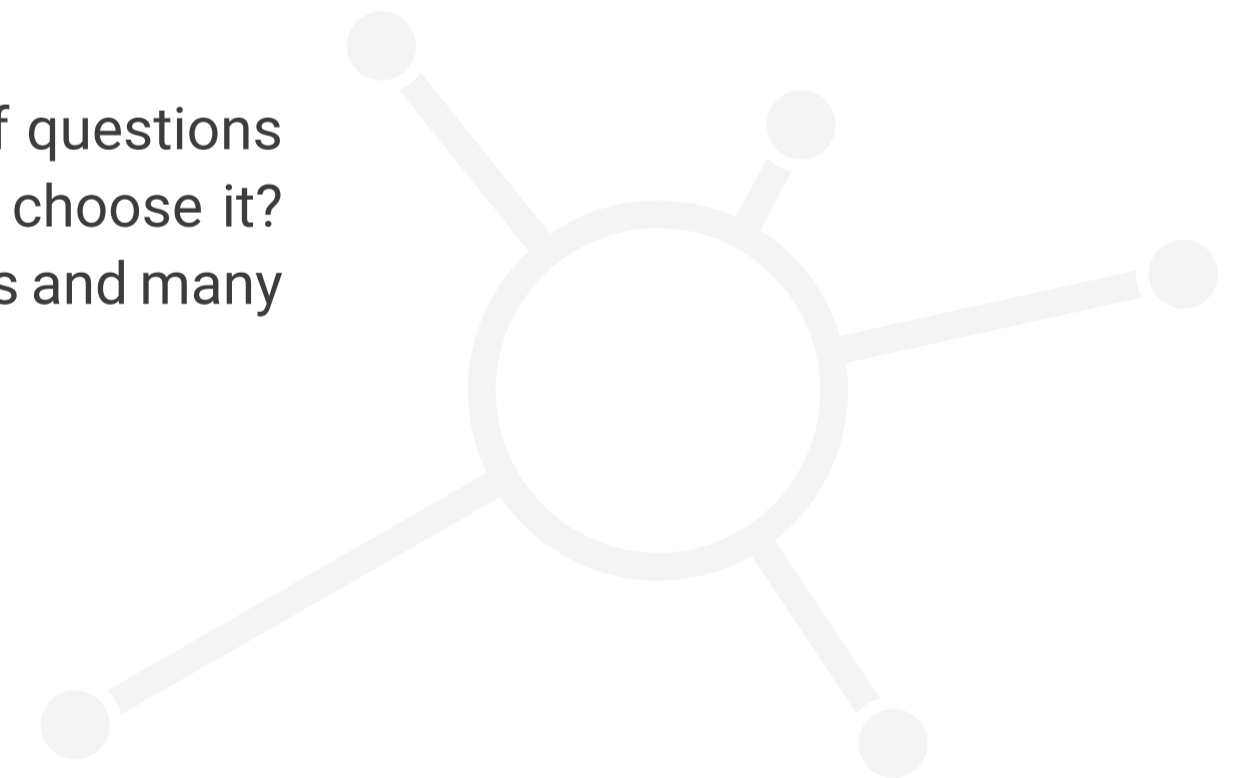
Our colleagues tend to calculate the correlation between a factor value (for instance, the number of referring domains) and a page's position and then sort the factors by correlation size. However, **correlation analysis is not a good match** for this type of research because:

- It doesn't work when one variable depends on several other variables (such as ranking factors).
- Correlation analysis is sensitive to outliers, and the data for various keywords suggests there are a lot of them.

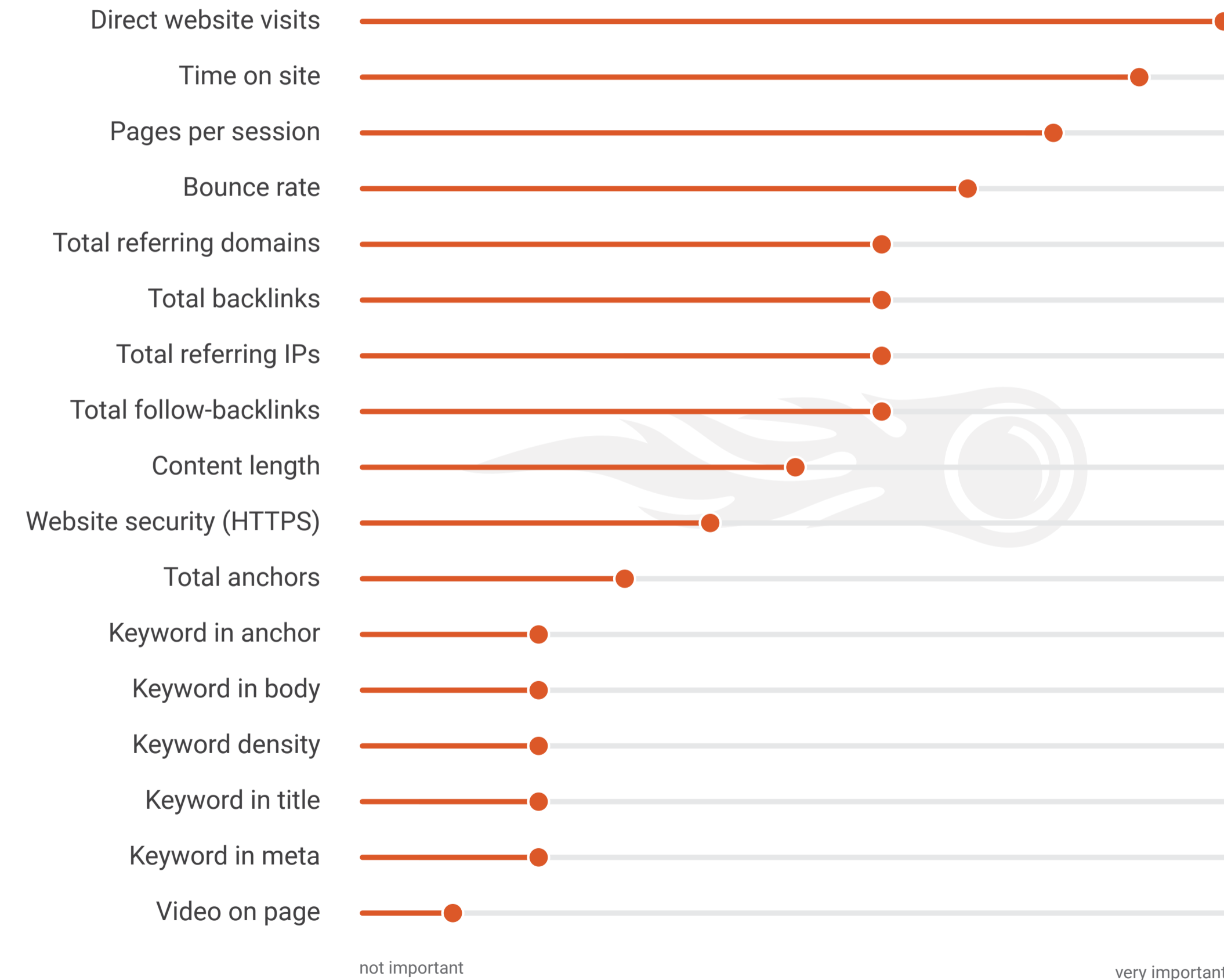
Initially we applied the correlation analysis, and the results were disappointing: the correlation between the alleged ranking factors and the page positions was less than 0.3, with a high standard deviation value, which didn't allow us to come to a solid conclusion about which factors were important and which were not. So we put our thinking caps on and decided to use more complex methods for data analysis.

The results we received don't let us state explicitly that if you improve the factor X, you will rank higher for Y. However, we have come up with a list of observations regarding the nature of these alleged ranking factors and their influence on the SERP that we wanted to share with the SEO community.

After publishing the research for the first time, we were asked a lot of questions about the algorithm we had applied: How does it work? Why did you choose it? Why is it better than correlation analysis? We answered those questions and many more in detail in a special post about the [methodology of our study](#).



# The results of the research at a glance



**45%**  
is the difference in content length between Top-3 and 20<sup>th</sup> position

**65%**  
of domains ranking for high-volume keywords are HTTPS

**10,000**  
is the difference in the number of referring domains between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> positions in high-volume segment

**49%**  
is the bounce rate for the domains ranking within Top-3

**18%**  
of domains ranking for high-volume keywords don't have the keyword in the body

**3-3.5**  
pages are visited per one session when user lands on the website from search

**20%**  
more referring domains link to websites on the second position than to websites on the first — "branded keywords drop"

**2.2**  
times more backlinks lead to URLs on the first position than to the URLs on the second — "high-volume spike"

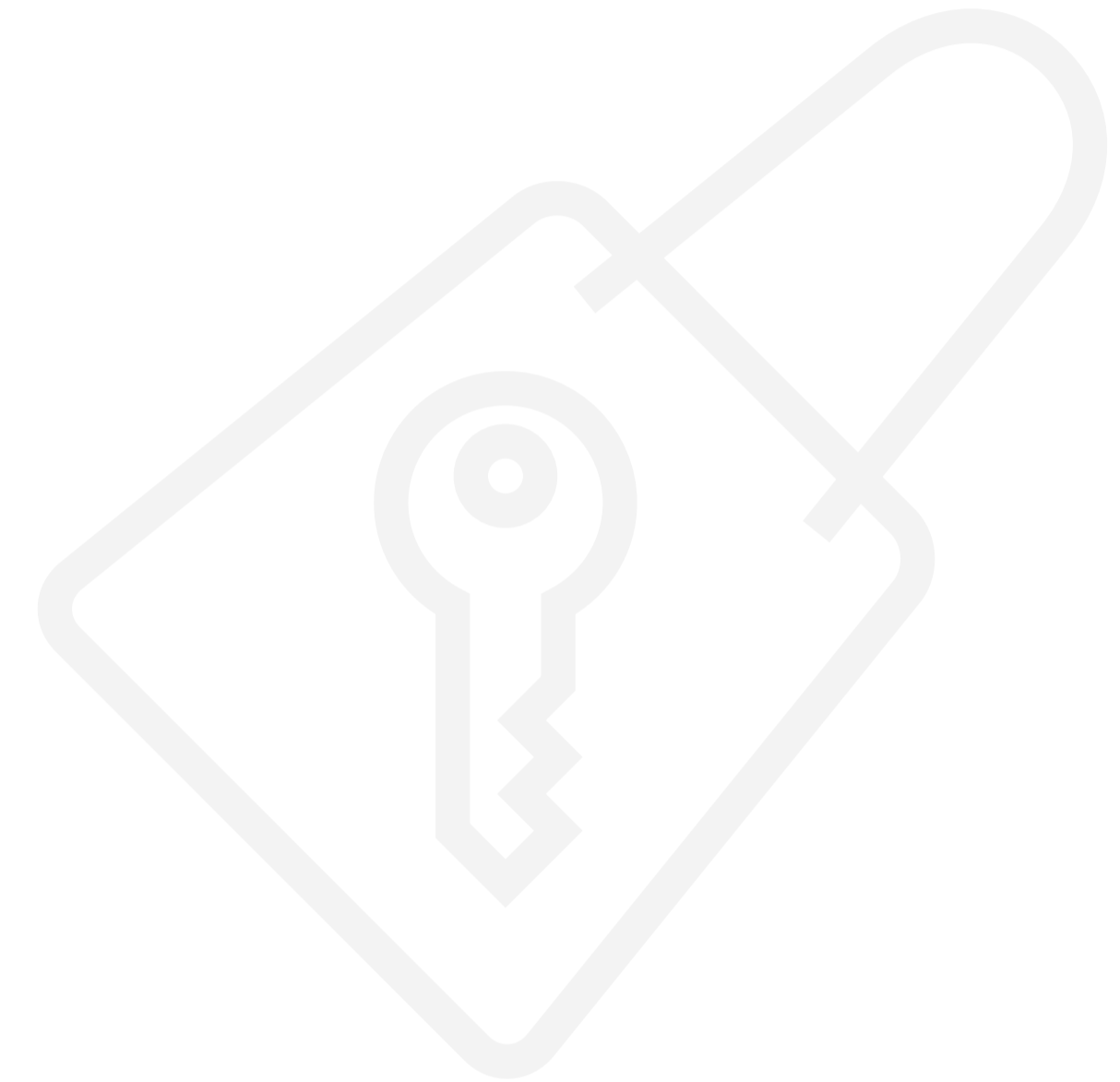
**3%**  
backlinks contain a keyword in the anchor text



# Key takeaways

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- After adding 5 new factors, we can still see that direct website traffic is the most influential ranking factor. That is, when many users go to a website directly it is a good sign to Google that the domain has high authority and value.
- User behavior signals such as time on site, pages per session and bounce rate also influence website rankings, since they indicate website quality and relevance for users.
- Backlink factors are extremely important for rankings. Except for the factors related to anchor texts, all the backlink factors share 5th place in the importance chart — **NEW!**
- All backlink factors impact one another. So your positions are unlikely to change if you boost the values for one factor but ignore others — **NEW!**
- Branded keywords will always return more relevant but less popular websites on the first position — **NEW!**
- The majority of domains in the high-volume group have an HTTPS version. But in the low-volume keyword groups the adoption rate is not so high, so implementing HTTPS would be a strong advantage against your competition.
- The on-page SEO factors such as the presence of keywords in title, meta description and body of the text proved to be significantly less influential than other factors, however the adoption rate is impressive — keyword usage is one of the most popular SEO techniques.





# Backlink profile factors<sup>NEW</sup>

# Backlink profile factors <sup>NEW</sup>

In the previous version of our study, we researched how the total number of referring domains influences the website rankings. This time, we took a closer look at other backlink profile factors to define how they influence the page rankings. We investigated the following factors:



Number of referring domains



Number of backlinks



Number of referring IPs



Number of follow-backlinks



Number of anchors



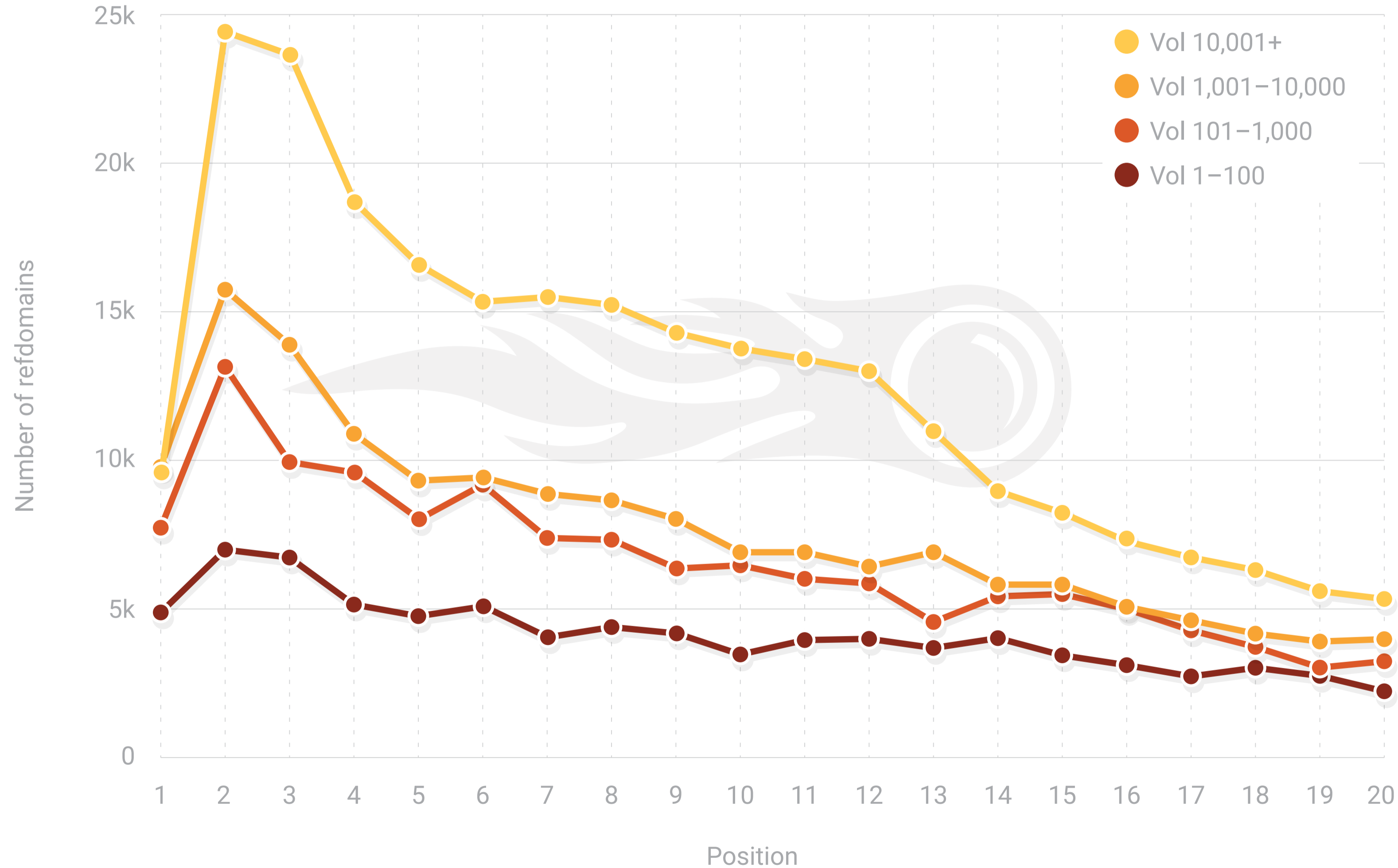
Keyword presence in the anchor

## What we did

- To discover the influence of the backlink portfolio parameters on the website's position on the SERP, we analyzed 600,000 search queries and calculated the value of these parameters for each top-100 page.
- To see if there was a significant difference between volume classes, we segmented the results by four search volume groups.
- We included the first 20 positions in the graph since the trend line for the rest of the positions does not demonstrate any variation.

# Total number of referring domains

segmented by search volume

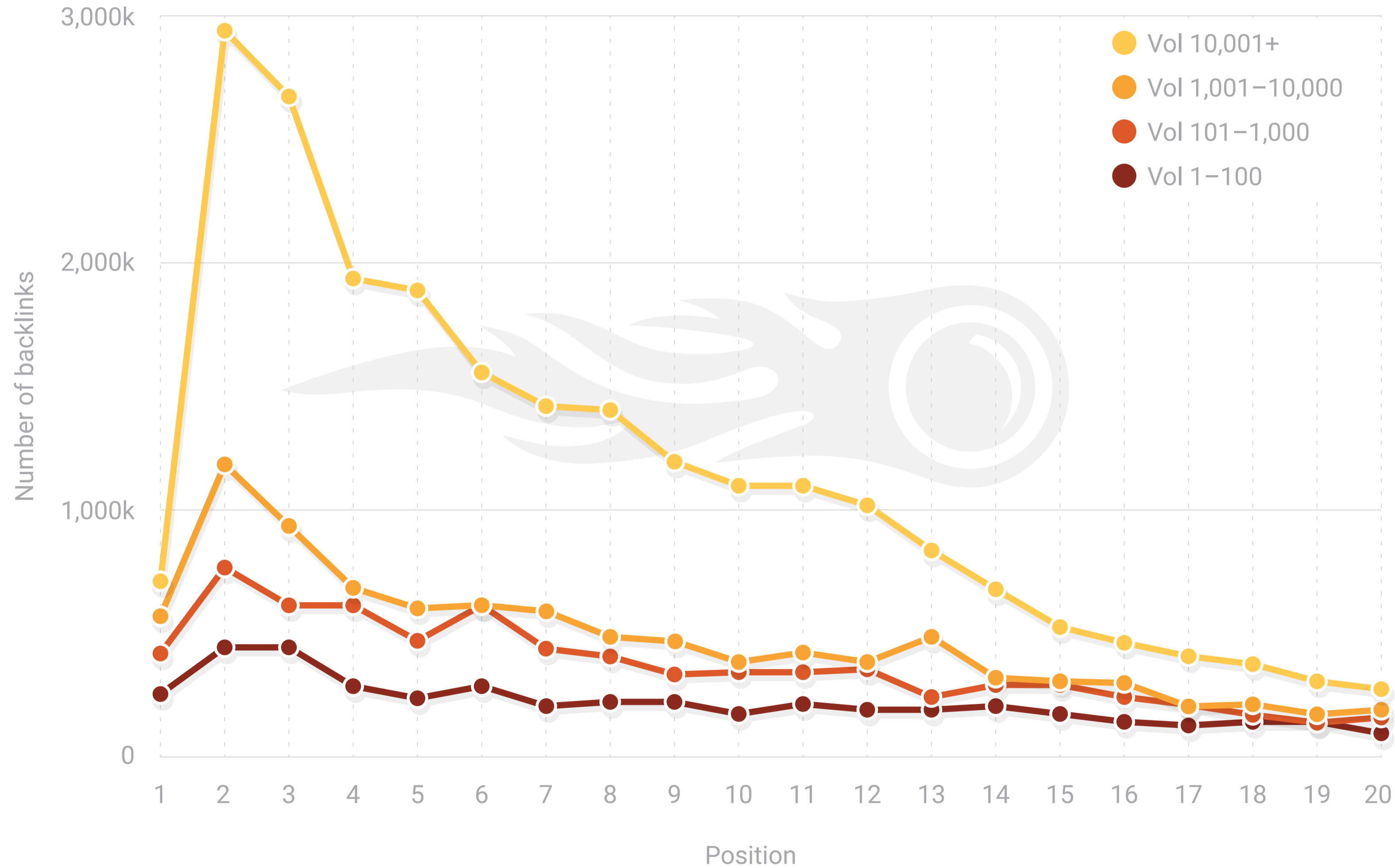


## Comments

- The higher the domain's position on the SERP, the more referring domains it has. This tendency is consistent for all search volume groups.
- The more popular the keyword for which the domain ranks, the more referring domains it has.
- Every domain that ranks for a high-volume keyword has on average four times more referring domains than the domain from the low-volume group on the same position.
- The lower the keyword volume, the less impact a number of referring domains has on the position of the domain.

# Total number of backlinks

segmented by search volume

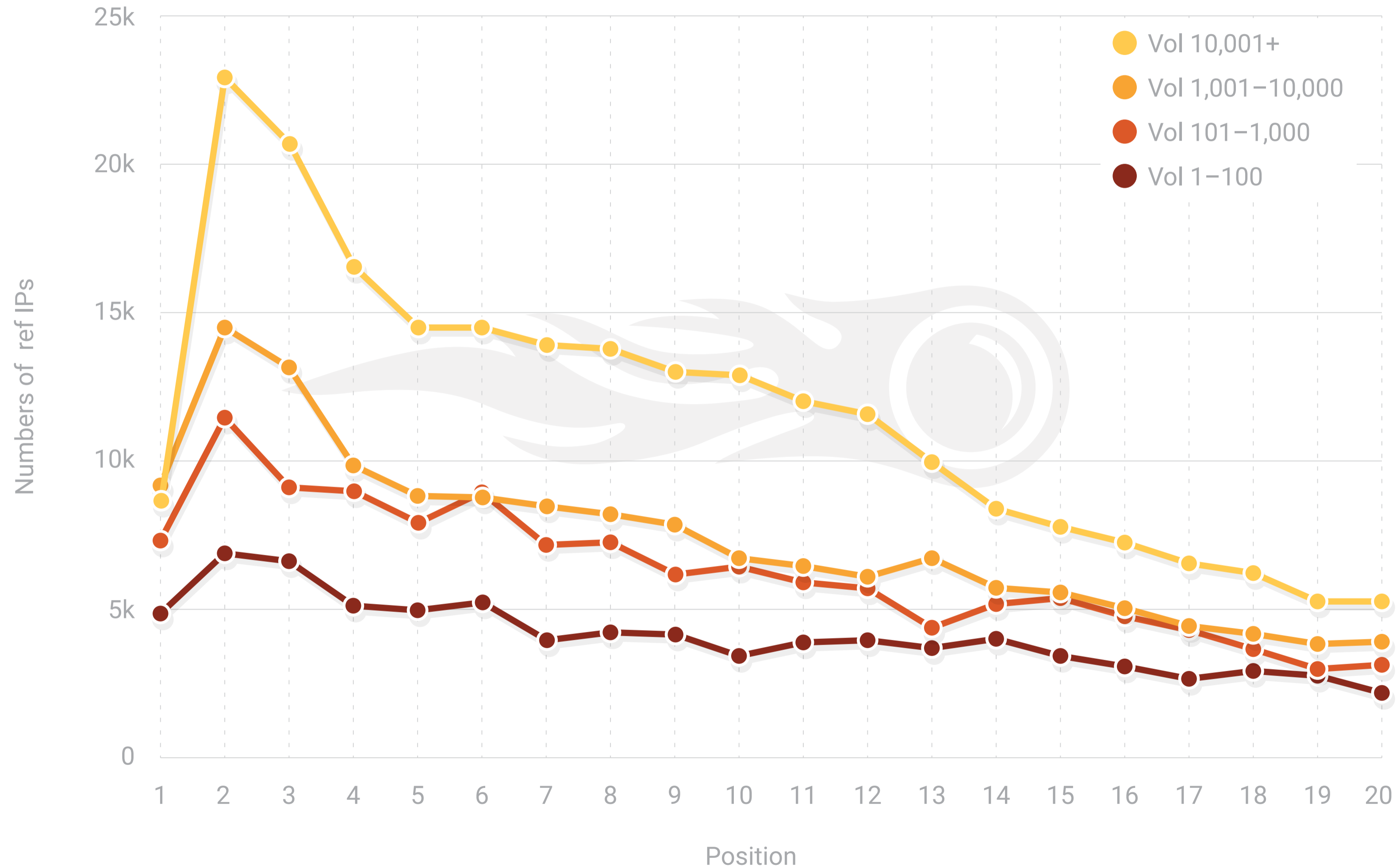


## Comments

- The more backlinks a domain has, the higher is its position on the SERP. This tendency is consistent for all search volume groups.
- The more popular the keyword for which the domain ranks, the more backlinks lead to this domain.
- Every domain that ranks for a high-volume keyword has on average three times more backlinks than the domains from the three lower-volume groups on the same position.
- The lower the keyword volume, the less influence the number of backlinks has on the position of the domain.

# Total number of referring IPs

segmented by search volume

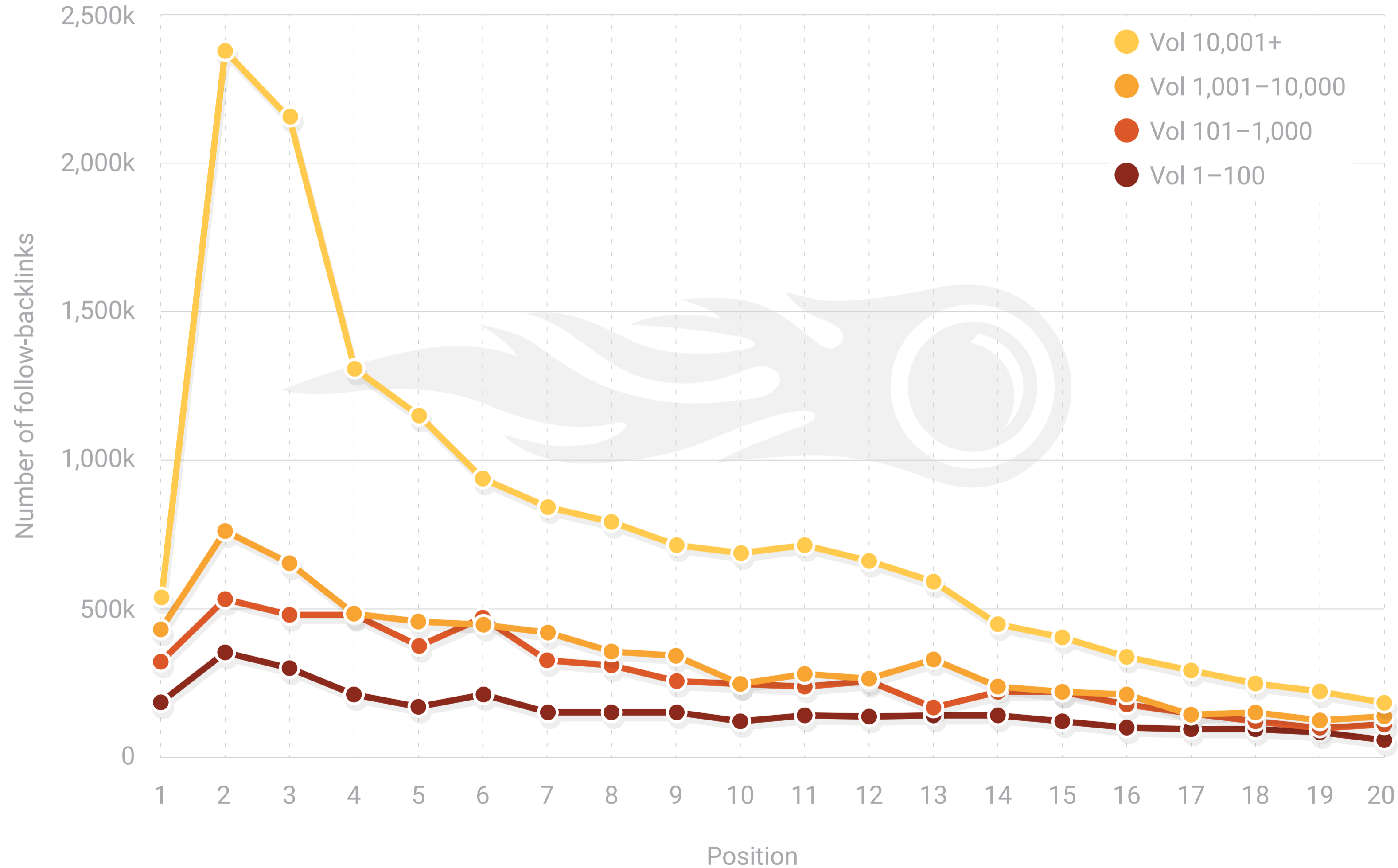


## Comments

- The number of referring IPs addresses is not equal, but is connected to the number of referring domains, so it influences the rankings of the particular domain in the same manner.
- Top pages have more referring IPs, and this statement is accurate for every search volume group.
- Starting from the fifth position, the trend curves become flat in the lower keyword volume groups, indicating that the factor loses its influence on the SERP positions.
- The lower the keyword volume group, the less impact the number of referring IPs has on the position of the domain.

# Total number of follow-backlinks

segmented by search volume

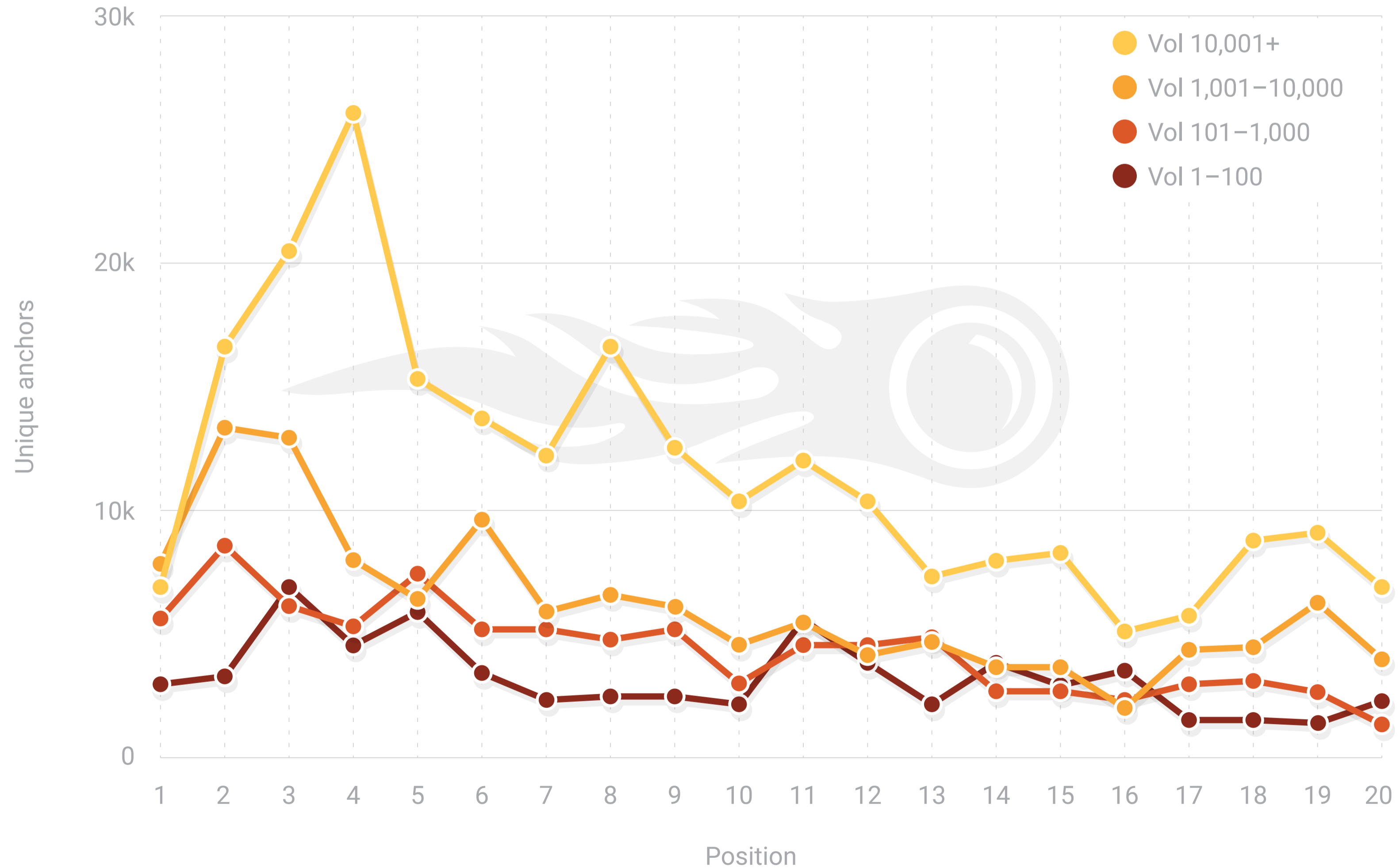


## Comments

- The number of follow-backlinks is connected to the total number of backlinks that the domain has, so it influences the domain rankings in the same way.
- Starting from the fifth position, there is no significant difference in the number of follow-backlinks between the positions in the lower keyword volume groups, indicating that the influence of the factor has dropped.
- The lower the keyword volume group, the less important is the number of follow-backlinks for the domain rankings.

# Total number of anchors

segmented by search volume



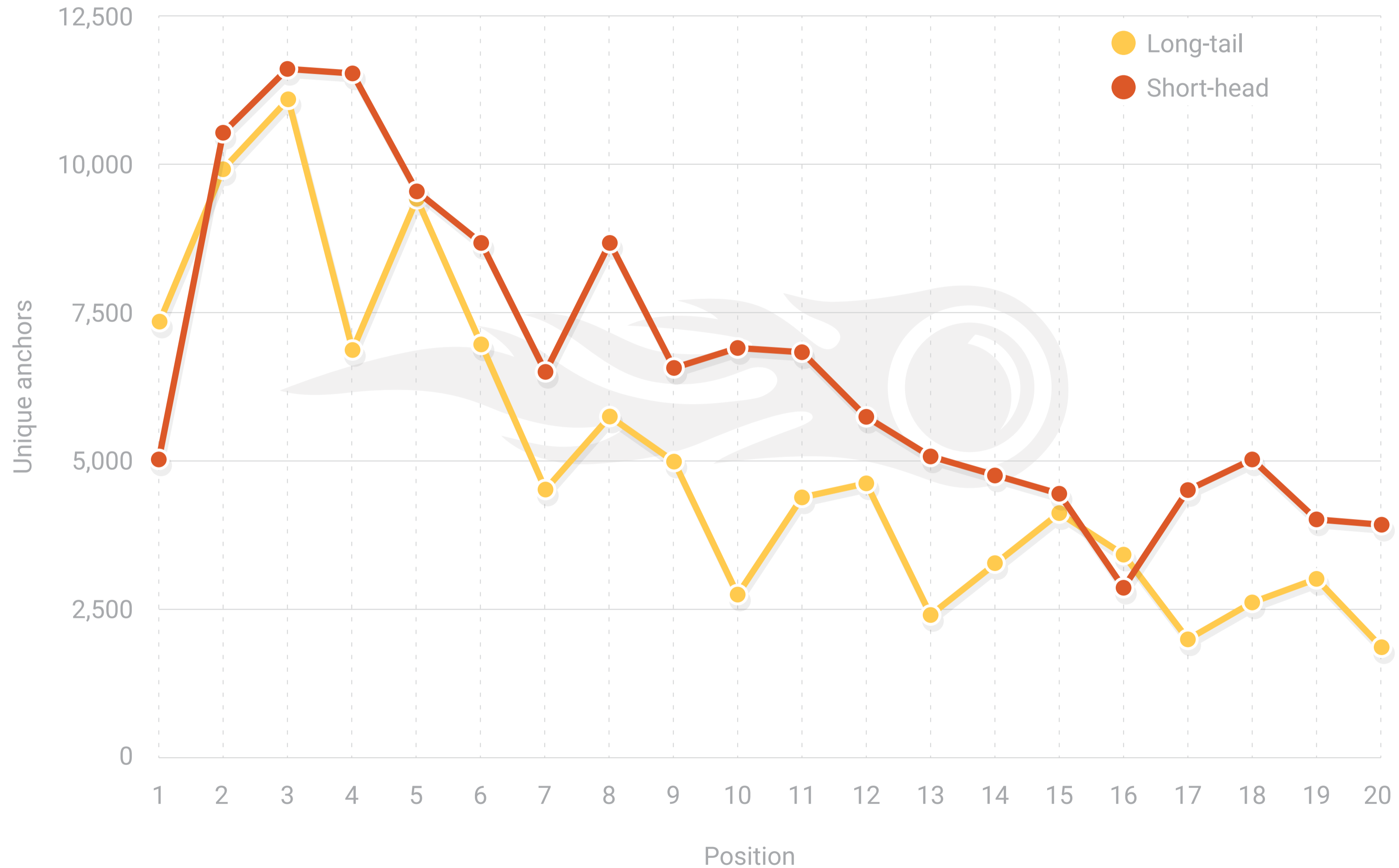
## Comments

- There is a noticeable connection between the position of the domain and the number of various anchors in its backlink portfolio. However, it is not as direct as for all the other backlink factors.
- The domains ranking for high-volume keywords have significantly more backlink anchors than the domains from other volume groups.



# Total number of anchors

segmented by keyword length

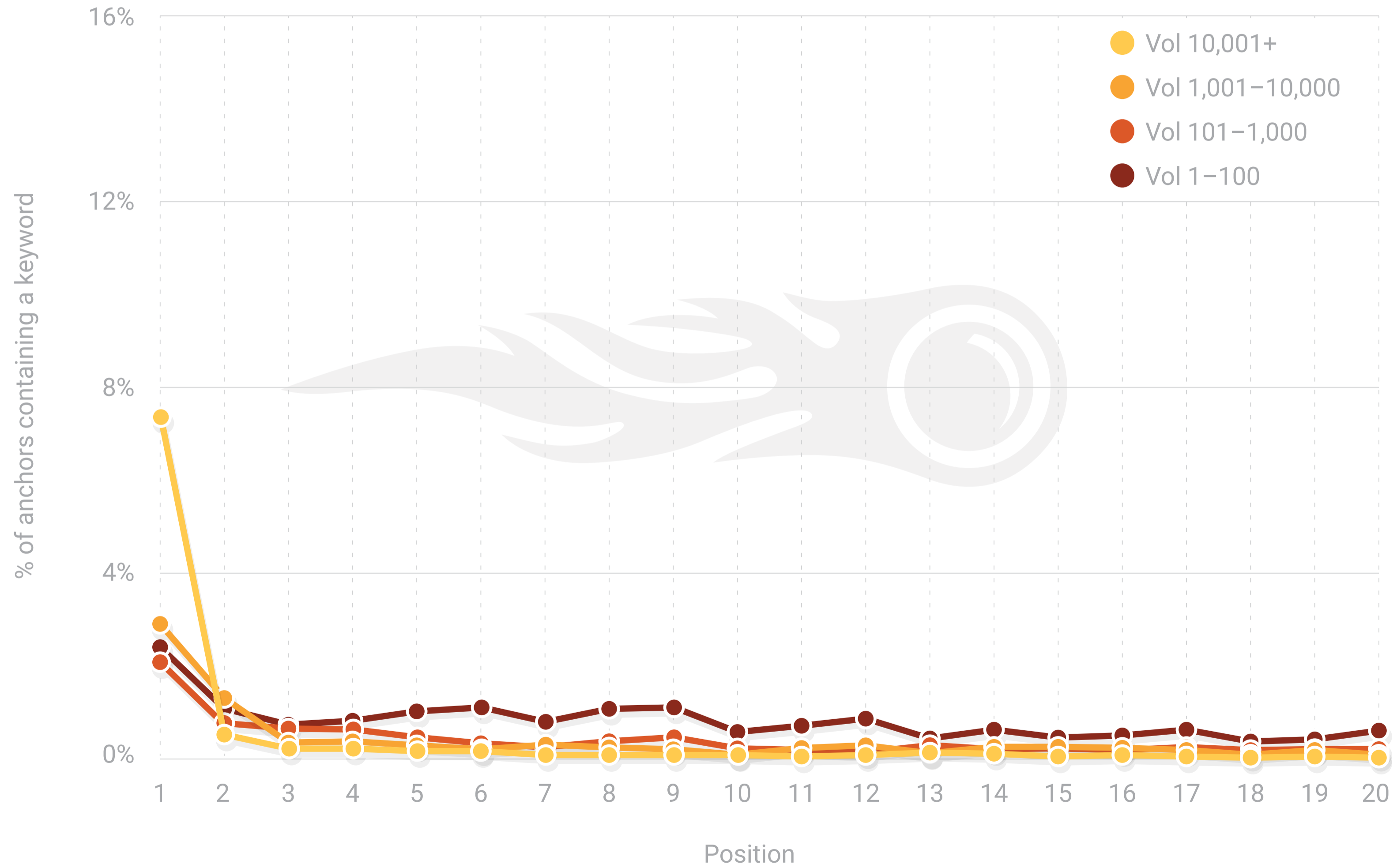


## Comments

- The trend lines for short-head and long-tail keywords are similar: the higher the position of the domain, the more anchors it has.
- However, the domains ranking for short-head keywords (less than 3 words in a keyword) have on average more unique anchors on every position.

# Keyword in anchor

segmented by search volume

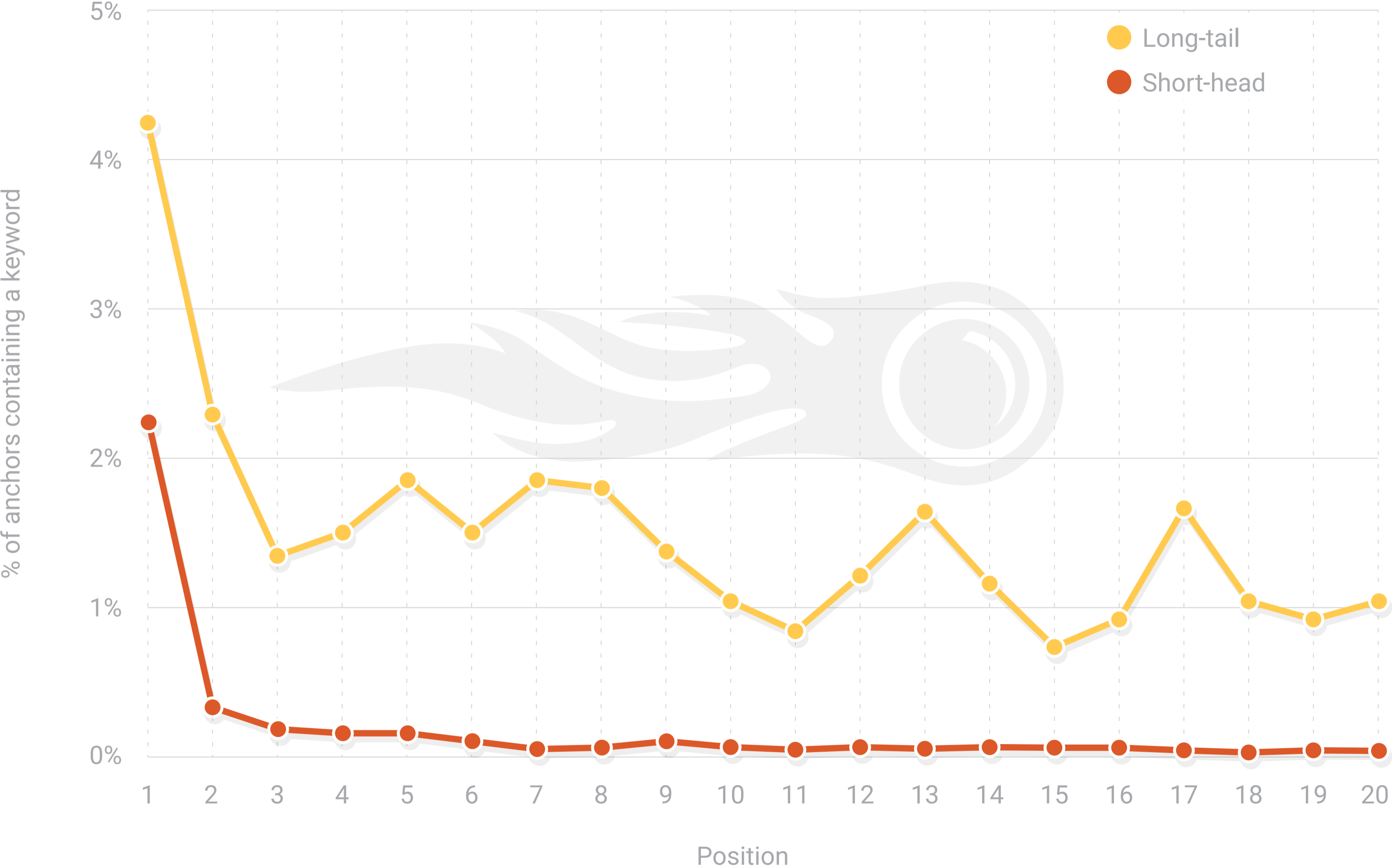


## Comments

- Across all search volume segments, target keywords rarely occur in anchors.
- Of all backlink factors, this factor has the least influence on the domain rankings.

# Keyword in anchor

segmented by keyword length



## Comments

- For the domains ranking for long-tail keywords, there is more likely to be a keyword in the anchor.
- The domains that rank for short heads are highly unlikely to have a keyword in the anchor

# What it means to you as a marketer

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As confirmed by Google, a strong backlink portfolio is crucial for website rankings.

All the metrics of the backlink portfolio are interconnected and a blind manipulation of only one of them will not increase your rankings, unless you also work on the other metrics. Focus on your natural backlink profile, and try various link-building strategies.

The high search volume niche is extremely competitive and the first positions are occupied by the giants with the richest backlink portfolios.

The competition is lighter in the low-volume SERPs, so extra link-building efforts will make all the difference for the page/domain rankings.

“  
*All the metrics of the backlink portfolio are interconnected and a blind manipulation of only one of them will not increase your rankings.*  
”

## How SEMrush helps

### Backlink Analytics

compares your backlink profile to your rivals' profiles and helps you build a competitive pool of referring domains.

[Find backlink ideas](#) →

### Backlink Audit tool

allows to reveal and disavow toxic backlinks in your backlink profile, and monitor all your new and lost links from unique domains.

[Manage backlink profile](#) →

### Link Building tool

allows you to uncover and acquire the highest quality backlinks in your niche.

[Reveal outreach opportunities](#) →



# Website security

# Website security

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In past years, Google promoted the idea of a more secure web. By applying new policies and imposing new rules, Google sent a clear message – make the Internet safer for users. By migrating to HTTPS, you are being proactive in protecting your users' security, which strengthens the authority of your website. While it is a costly undertaking, it can significantly impact your business.

In our research, we tracked down how the HTTPS migration affects domain/page rankings.

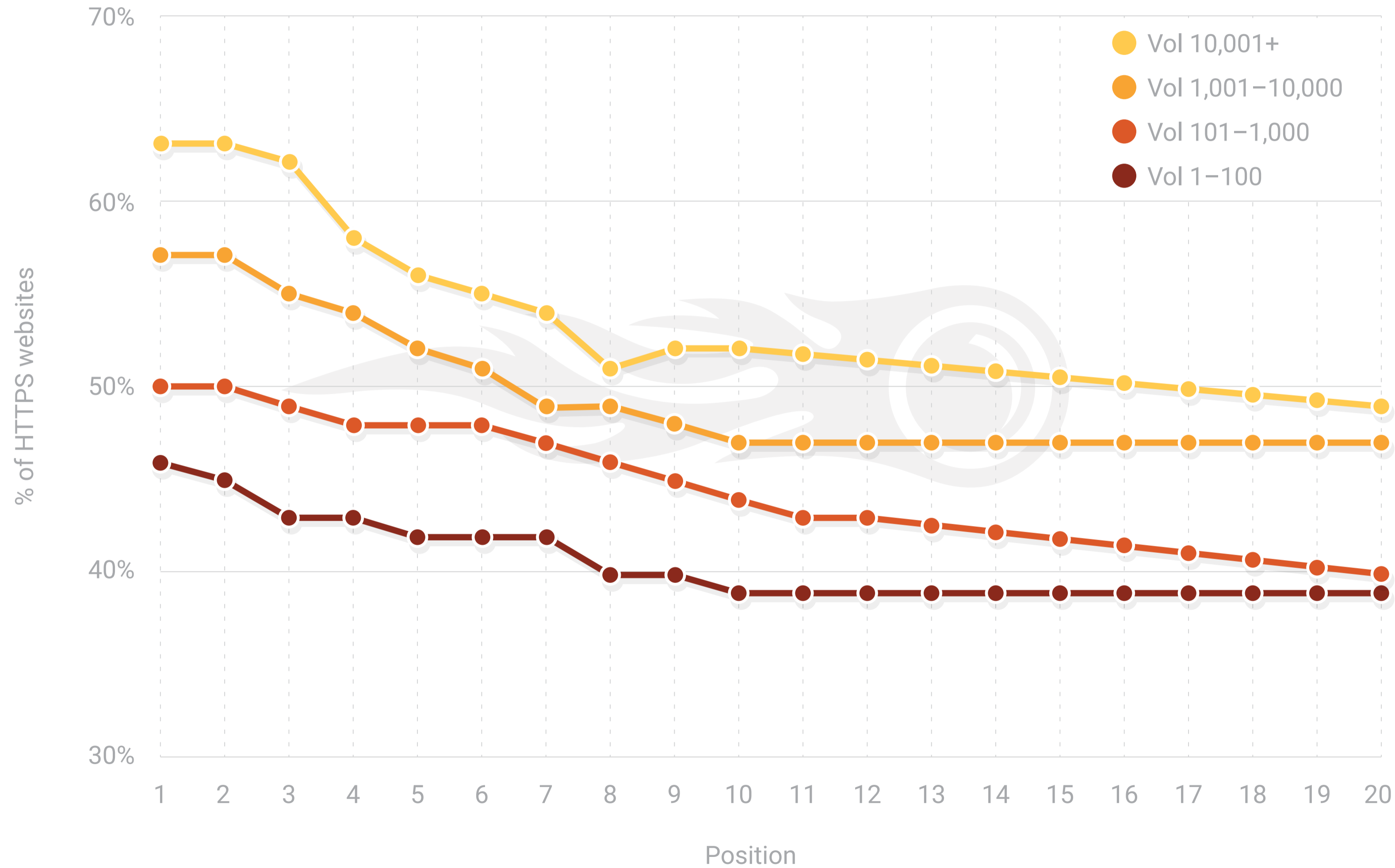


## ■ What we did

- We analyzed 600,000 search queries and calculated the percentage of domains that have an HTTPS version for every top-100 SERP position. We segmented the analyzed keywords according to four volume intervals to see if trends for different keyword groups vary.
- We also segmented the results in the high-volume keyword group by keyword length (from 1 up to and including 3 words in a keyword phrase = short-head keyword; 4 and more words in a keyword = long-tail keyword) to see the opportunities in both segments.

# Website Security (HTTPS)

segmented by search volume

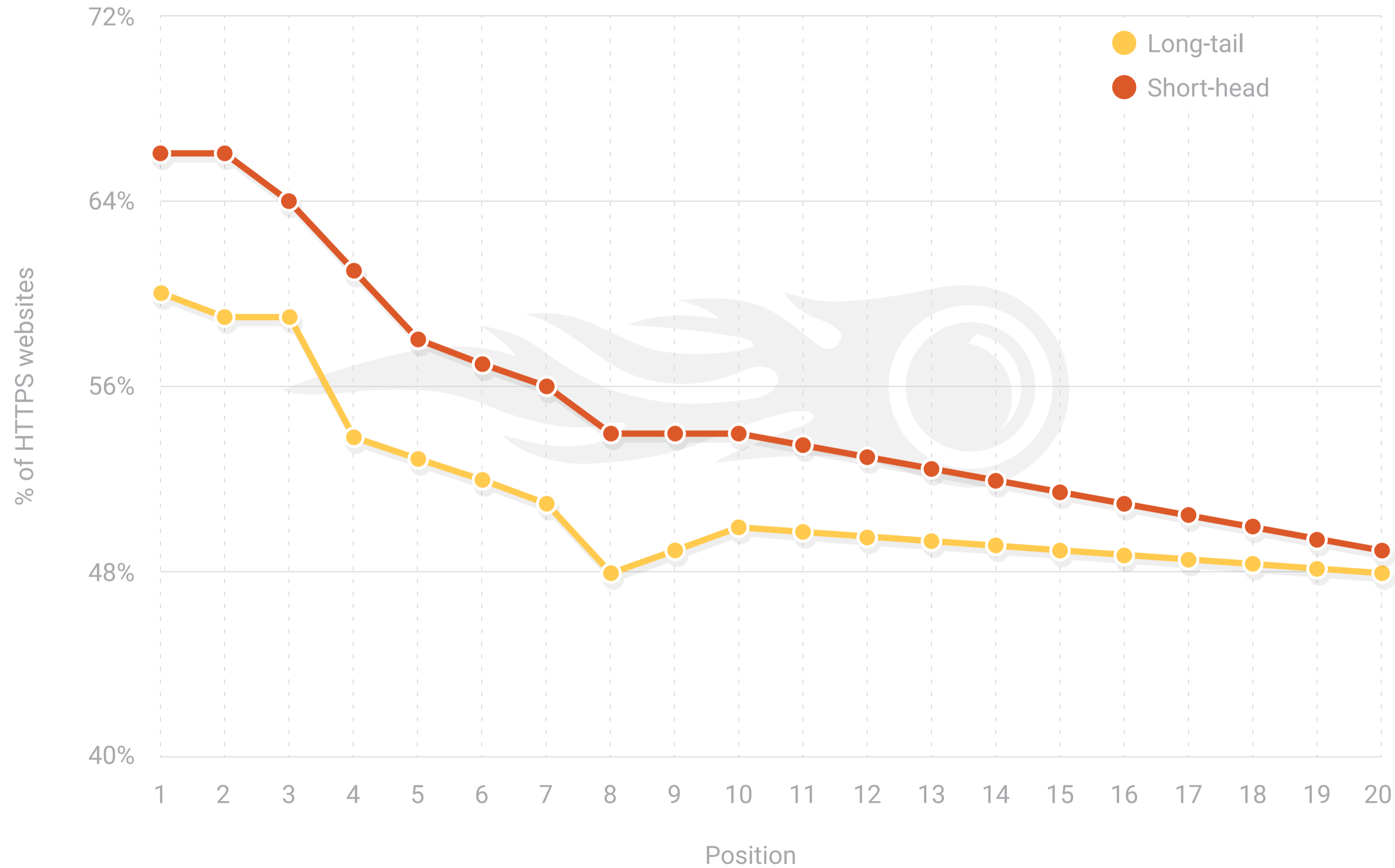


## Comments

- The higher the SERP position, the more domains with an HTTPS version reside on it.
- This trend is similar for all keyword volume intervals.
- The higher the keyword volume, the more HTTPS domains can be found on every SERP position.

# Website Security (HTTPS)

segmented by keyword length



## Comments

- There are significantly fewer domains with an HTTPS version that rank for the long tail than for the short heads. This means that if you plan to rank for a long-tail keyword, creating an HTTPS version of your site would be a good opportunity for promotion in the search results.
- Starting from the tenth position, the trend curves for both short heads and long tails are more flat than for the first ten positions.



# What it means to you as a marketer

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The HTTPS adoption rate is very high in the high-volume keyword group. That is, the more popular the keywords are, the more possible it is that the top positions will be occupied by HTTPS domains. So if you want to compete for high-volume keywords, having an HTTPS version of your site is extremely important.

In the low-volume keyword segment, the HTTPS adoption rate is not so high, so having a secure version will significantly distinguish you from the competition.

“  
*The HTTPS adoption rate in less competitive niches is up to 20% lower, which creates a great opportunity to outrun the competition.*  
”

## How SEMrush helps

### Site Audit Tool

helps you during an HTTPS migration. It monitors your website and discovers any issues in the implementation and maintenance of your secured pages.

[Fix migration mistakes](#) →

### Sensor

allows you to see how the HTTPS domains are filling your category over time.

[Check your niche](#) →



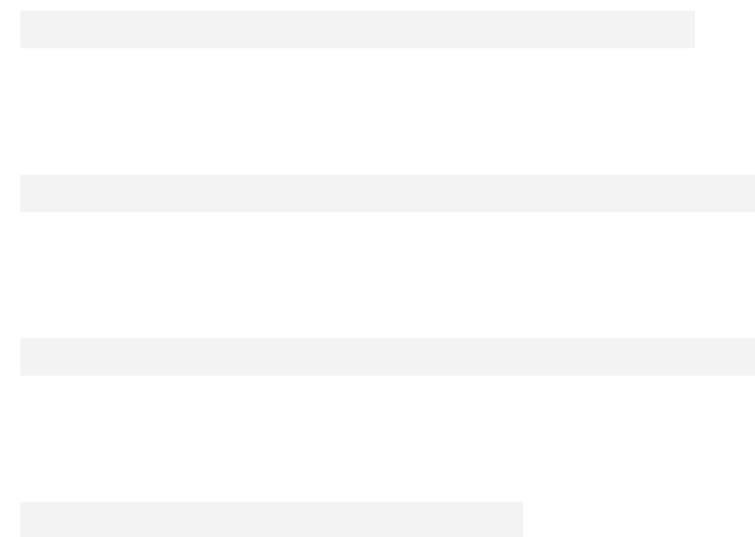
**Content length**

# Content length

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An article's length, or the article's word count, is one of the first things that informs a user's opinion about a page. The exact numbers for ideal content length are debatable, as the main advantages of a text are its quality and relevance. However, long-form content creates the impression of in-depth analysis and therefore looks more trustworthy.

Our main intention was to see if there is a correlation between content length and a page's position in the search results.

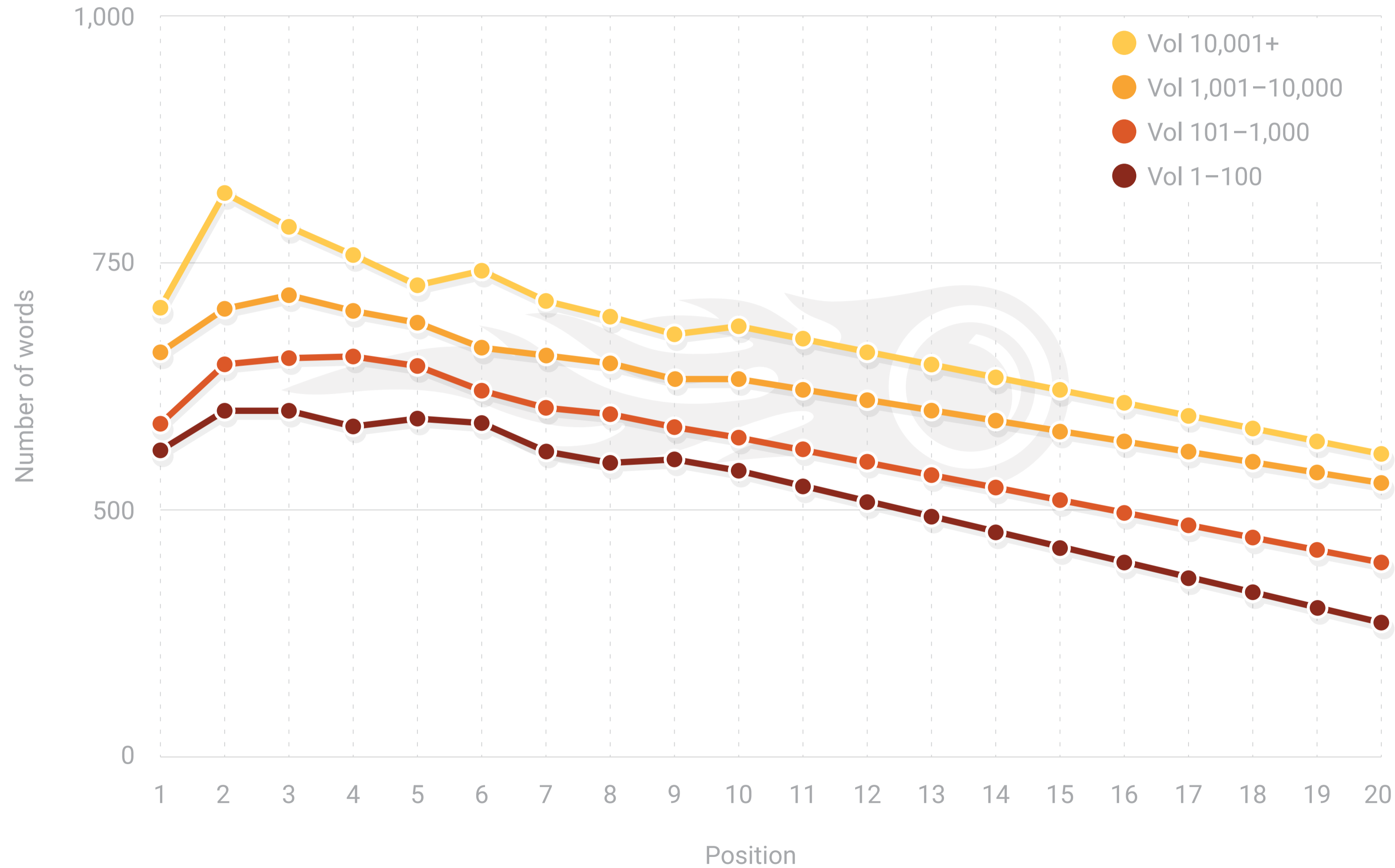


## ■ What we did

- To track down the correlation between those numbers, we calculated the median-value content length for the top 10 pages for 600,000 keywords from our worldwide base. The results were broken down into four keyword volume intervals. We presented the data for the first 20 positions on a graph, as the trend remains the same for all the following positions, with no extreme values.
- We also took keywords from the middle-volume interval (101 – 1,000) and segmented them by keyword length to see if trends for the short-head and long-tail keywords are similar.

# Content length

segmented by search volume

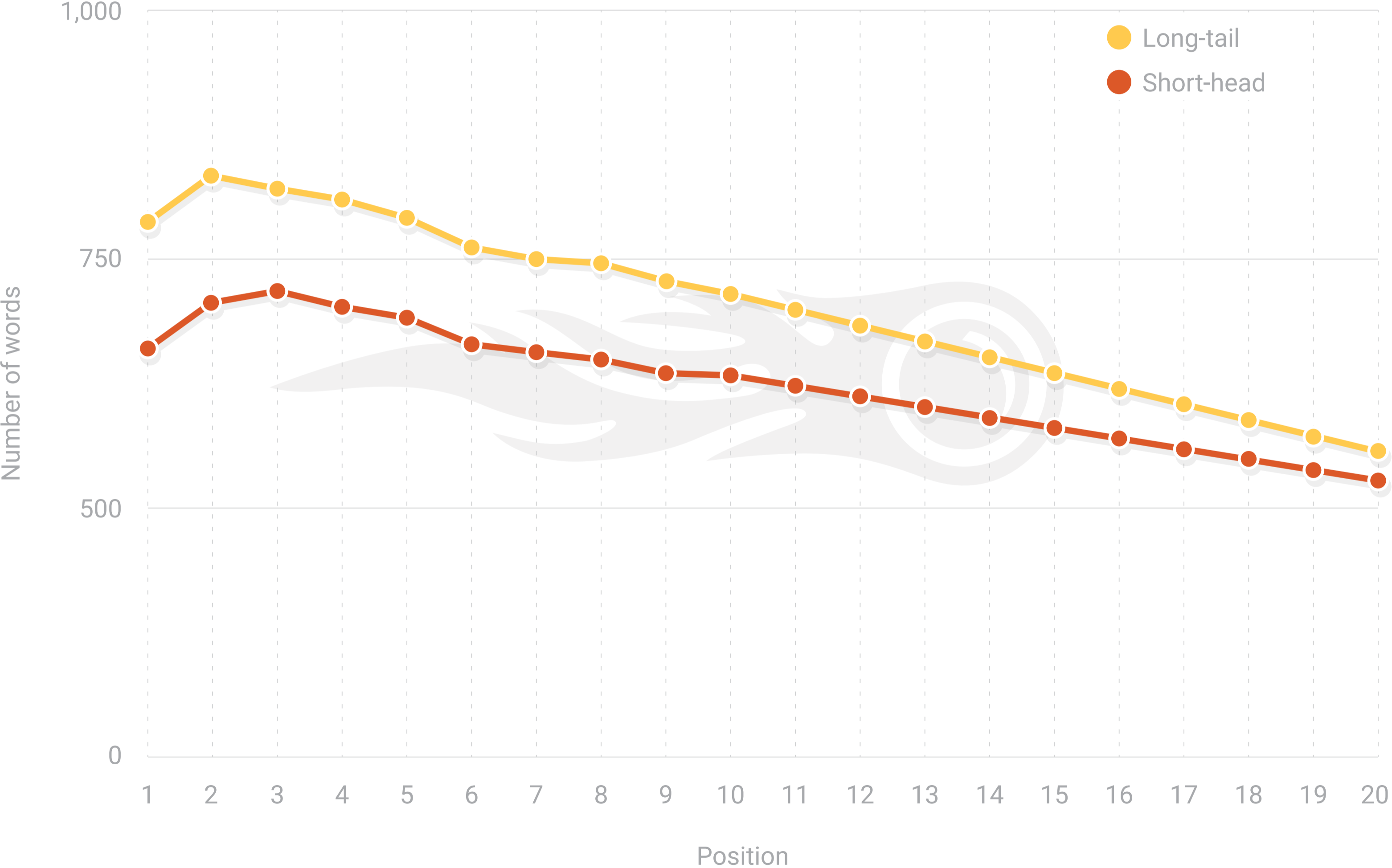


## Comments

- What we saw first was that there is generally more content on the pages that rank higher in all search volume intervals.
- Long content tends to rank higher for keywords with higher volume.
- For high-volume keywords the median curve is more abrupt than for low-volume keywords, indicating that the factor has more influence in the high-volume segment.
- The pages that rank for highly popular keywords have on average 1.5 times more content than the pages in the low-volume segment.

# Content length

segmented by keyword length



## Comments

- In the middle-volume interval (101–1,000), the trends are similar for short-head keywords and long-tail keywords.
- There is more content on the pages with long-tail keywords than on those with short-head keywords. This proves a popular opinion: when users search for short keywords they expect to see a concise summary of the topic and searching for long-tail keywords they expect a comprehensive deep-dive longread.

# What it means to you as a marketer

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As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the quality and relevance of your content play a crucial role in the page rankings. Solely creating content of a certain length is not a panacea, and if the content is irrelevant to the user's query it doesn't matter how long it is – it will still be irrelevant. However, the results of our research indicate that pages that rank higher have longer content on average. So, content length is important for your page's success as long as it is valuable, well-written, and optimised, especially if you target high-volume keywords.

We also discovered that long-tail search queries return pages with more content on average than short heads – almost 20% more. For instance, an average top-100 article on 'graphic design' will be shorter than an average top-100 article on 'graphic design trends in 2017'. That is, if you are writing on a broader topic, your users do not expect a long read. If your article's topic is narrowed down to a precise statement, then it should provide a more in-depth view.

The research also shows that high-volume search queries return better SEO-optimised content, which we will show later on.

“  
*The larger the search volume, the longer the content. Write longreads if you want to rank for popular keywords.*  
”

## How SEMrush helps

### SEO Content Template

allows you to see the average content length of the top 10 pages that rank for your target keywords. This saves a lot of time, as you do not need to google each keyword manually and perform a word-count for every one of your competitors' pages.

Create killer content →

### On Page SEO Checker

shows how competitive your content is compared to your rivals' materials in terms of content length and other parameters.

Boost content rankings →

### Keyword Magic Tool

helps you to find the best keywords for your new longread.

Find the best keywords →



# On-page SEO elements

# On-page SEO elements

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These days, content specialists know better than to stuff their texts with keywords. And though keyword stuffing is not *comme il faut* anymore, it is a commonly accepted rule to include keywords in your articles' main on-page elements such as their title, meta description and body. So, we checked if the presence of keywords in the on-page elements influences the page rankings.

A video is considered to be a valuable contribution to almost any piece of content these days. Sometimes it is essential to include a video in an article or post, and in other cases it is not absolutely necessary, though websites often do it anyway because it will, allegedly, make the post rank higher. We checked if the presence of a video on a page has any impact on its SERP position.



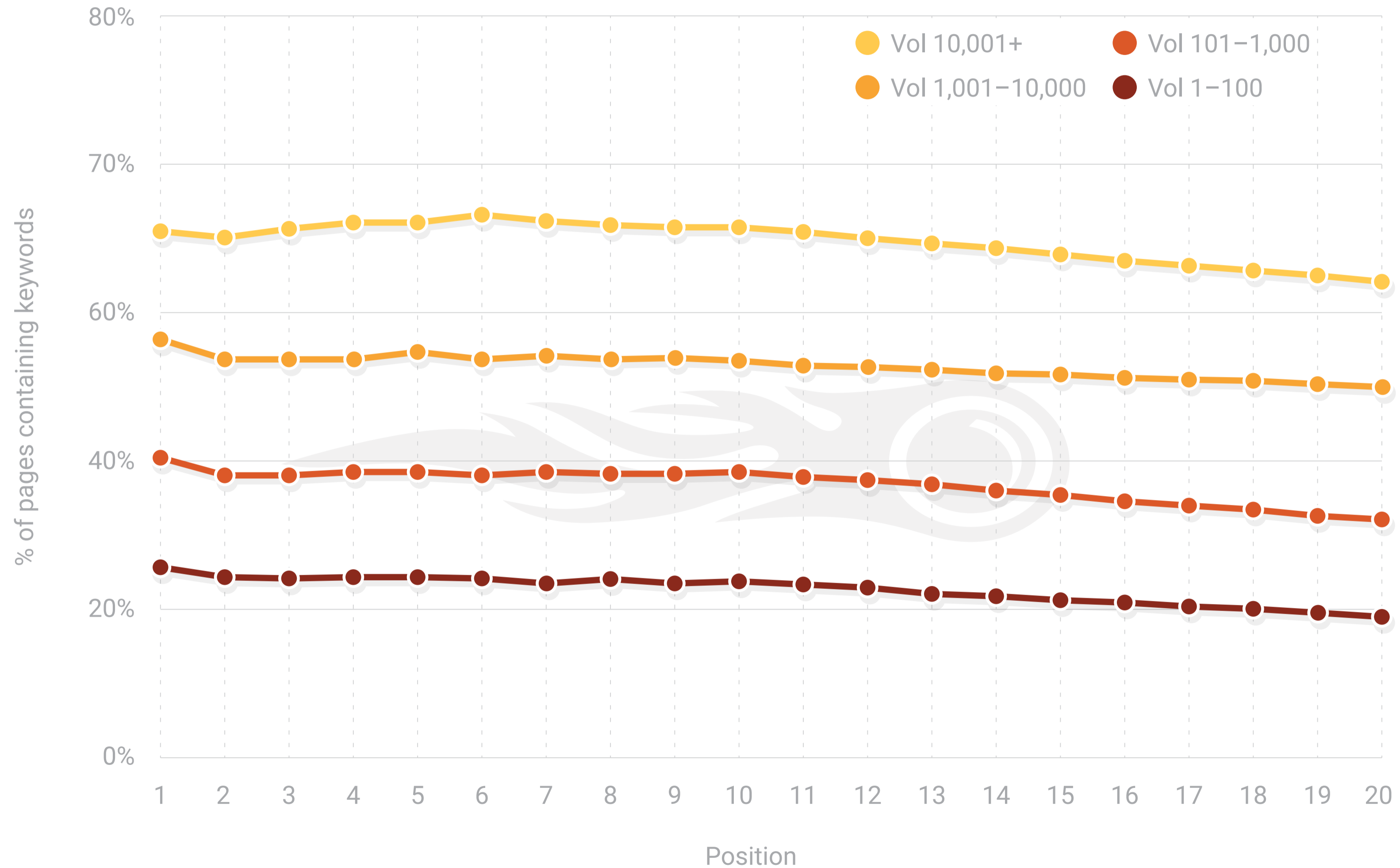
## What we did

- We analyzed 600,000 search queries and calculated the percentage of pages that had a keyword in different page elements. Apart from the exact match keywords, we also applied keyword stemming to include all keyword variations. We also checked how many of those pages had a video.
- We segmented the results into four keyword volume intervals to track the difference between group trends. We also decided to take the mid-volume interval and compare the trends for short-head and long-tail keywords.



# Keyword in title

segmented by search volume

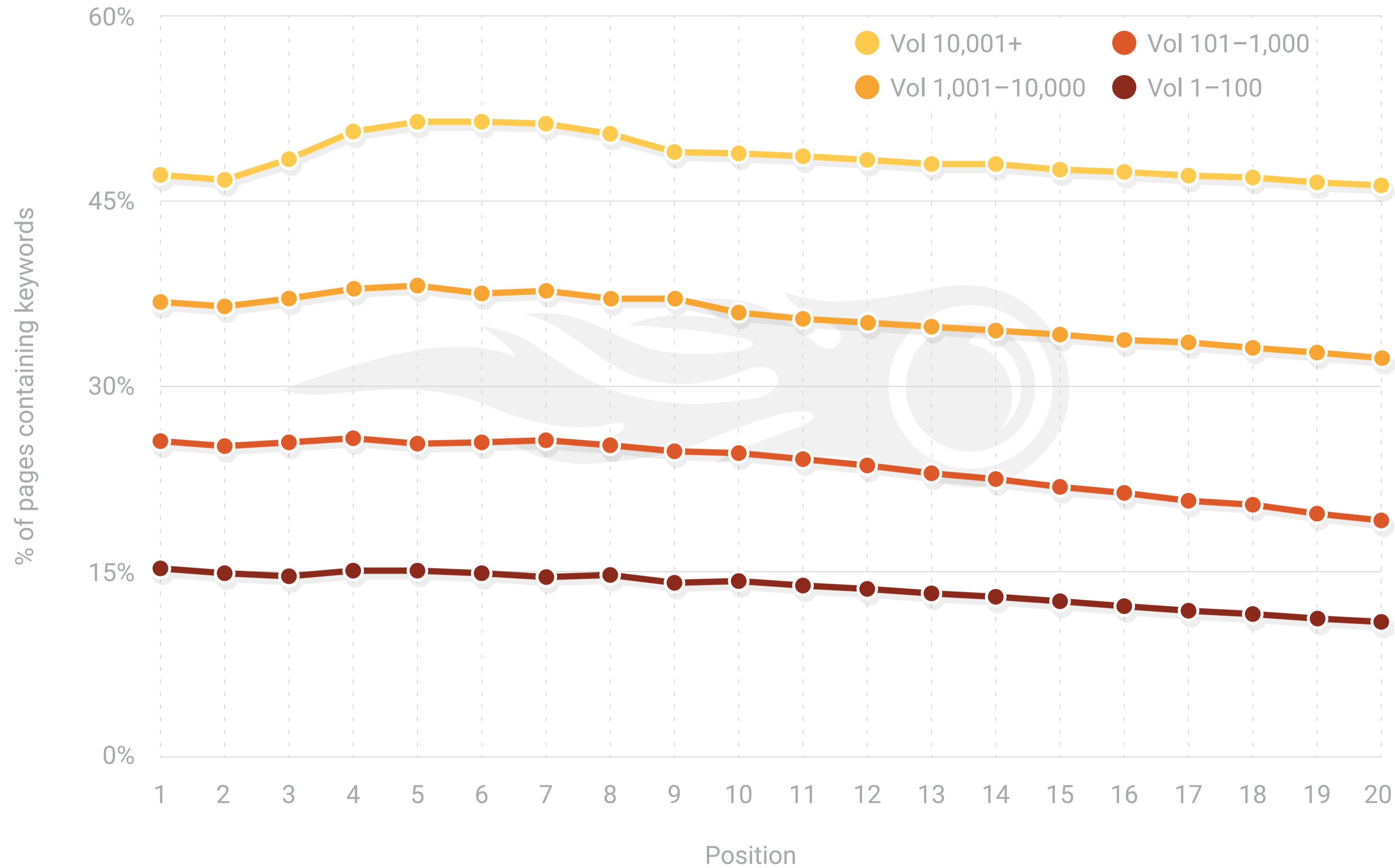


## Comments

- The trend curves for keyword occurrence in the title are flat for each keyword volume group, that is, the number of pages that have a keyword in the title remains on the same level within a volume interval.
- The higher a keyword's volume, the higher the percentage of pages that include the keyword in their title.
- In the high-volume keyword group the majority of pages add a keyword to their title.

# Keyword in meta

segmented by search volume

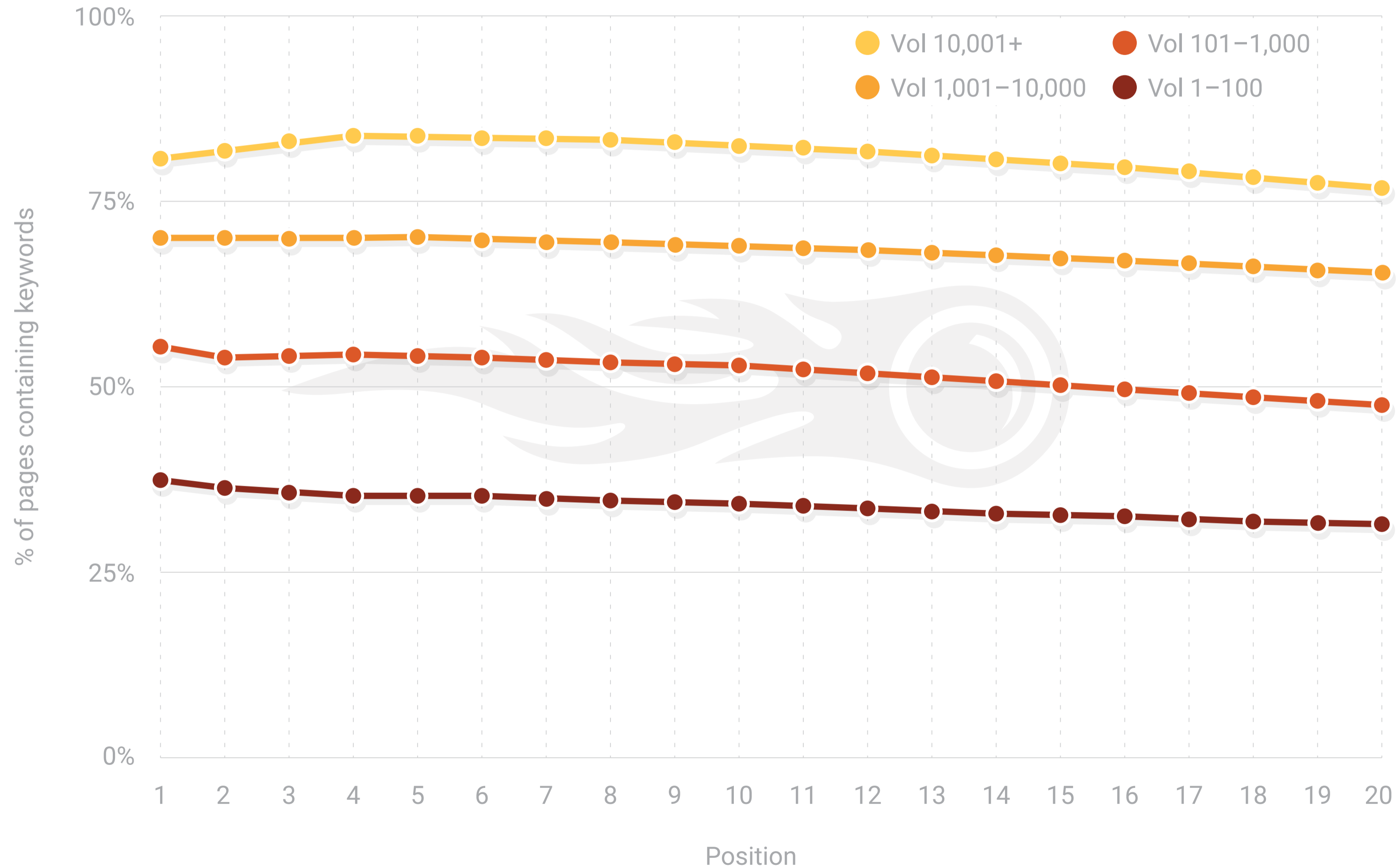


## Comments

- The trend curves are flat across all volume groups, which means that the occurrence of the keyword in the meta description does not influence the page rankings.
- The higher the keyword volume is, the more pages include keywords into their meta description.
- Less than 50% of the pages that rank for a high-volume keyword have a keyword in their meta description.
- Of the pages that rank for a low-volume keyword, only 15% have a keyword in their meta description.

# Keyword in body

segmented by search volume

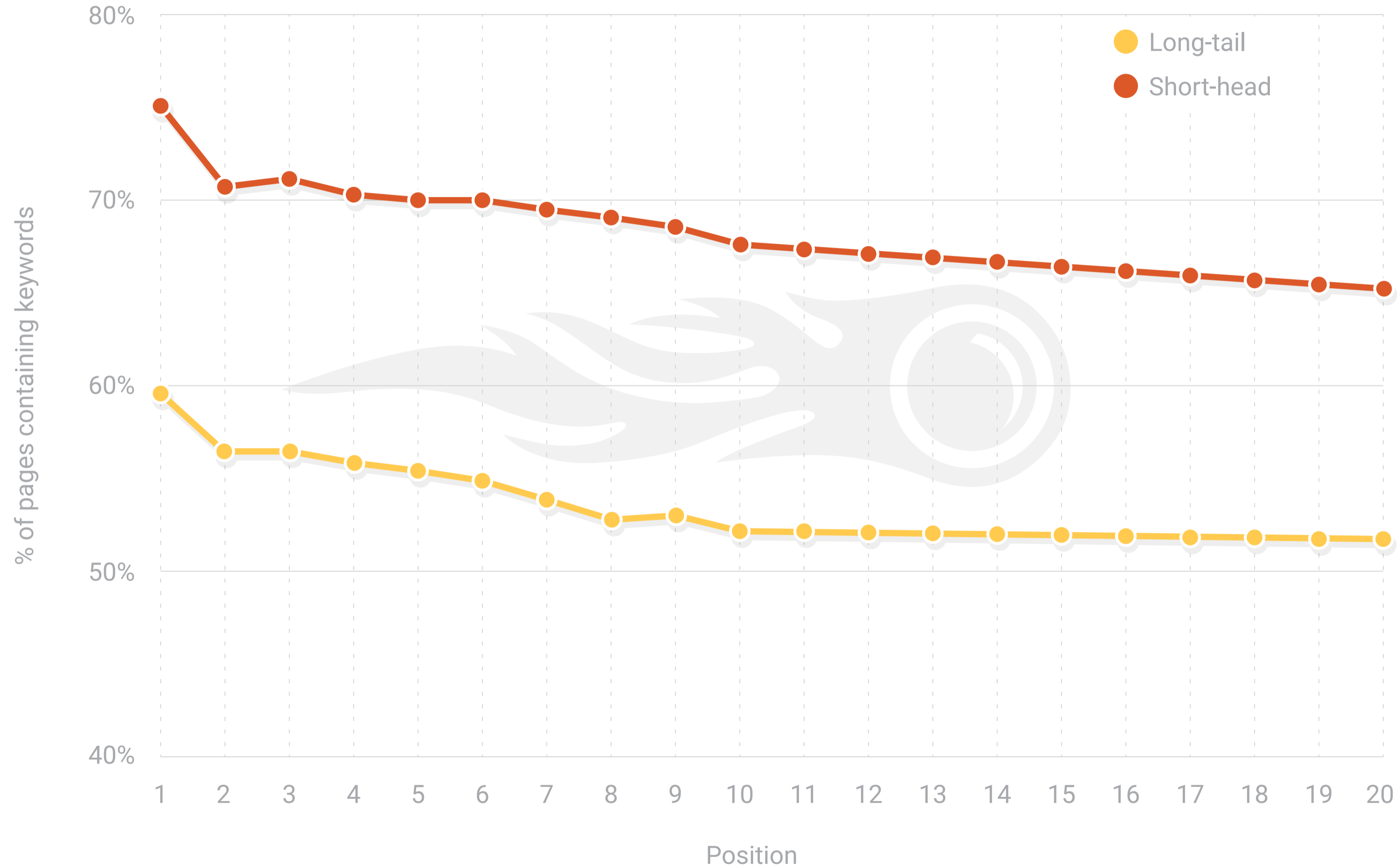


## Comments

- The trend curves for each keyword volume group are almost flat, showing no drastic difference between position values.
- Over 75% of the pages that rank for a high-volume keyword have a keyword in the body of their text.
- The higher a keyword's volume is, the more pages include the keyword in their body copy.

# Keyword on page

segmented by keyword length



## Comments

- The trend curves for the page rankings are flat for both short-head and long-tail groups; that is, there is no drastic difference between the positions.
- Pages that rank for long-tail keywords repeat those keywords less often than pages that rank for short-heads.
- The pages on the first positions (for both long-tails and short-heads) have noticeably more keywords than all other pages.

# What it means to you as a marketer

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Over 75% of the top-20 pages have keywords in their body and over 60% have them in their title. While it seems to be a common practice, the data proves that it doesn't have a strong impact on rankings.

One time-proven approach in SEO is using longer keywords for promotion, as they usually bring more relevant traffic to a website. If this is your case and you plan to rank for long-tails, having an exact-match keyword in your on-page SEO elements is not necessary. In fact, it is more important to diversify the semantic core of your text and make it relevant to the target keyword rather than copying it.

The presence of a video didn't show a significant influence on page rankings, so we came to the conclusion that video itself is not a silver bullet. However, in certain niches clients expect video content, so it makes sense to provide it. Consider your audience's demands, and if they include visual support, include a video.

“  
*The longer the content, the higher the ranks. Write long-reads if you want to rank for popular keywords.*  
”

## How SEMrush helps

### On Page SEO Checker

verifies if you have included target keywords in your on-page SEO elements and checks your content for signs of keyword stuffing, performing standard density and TF-IDF analysis.

[Check your content](#) →

### Content Analyzer

performs comprehensive content audit of your site and allows you to see meta tags for all of your articles in one place, together with other content performance metrics such as traffic, social engagement and backlinks.

[Audit your blog](#) →



**Website visits**

# Website visits

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One of the main indicators of a website's popularity is its number of visits. There are a lot of ways for visitors to find your website: organic search, paid ads, social networks, direct visits, referring domains, emails, etc.

In our research, we checked how traffic influences page rankings and whether organic search traffic has the greatest influence.

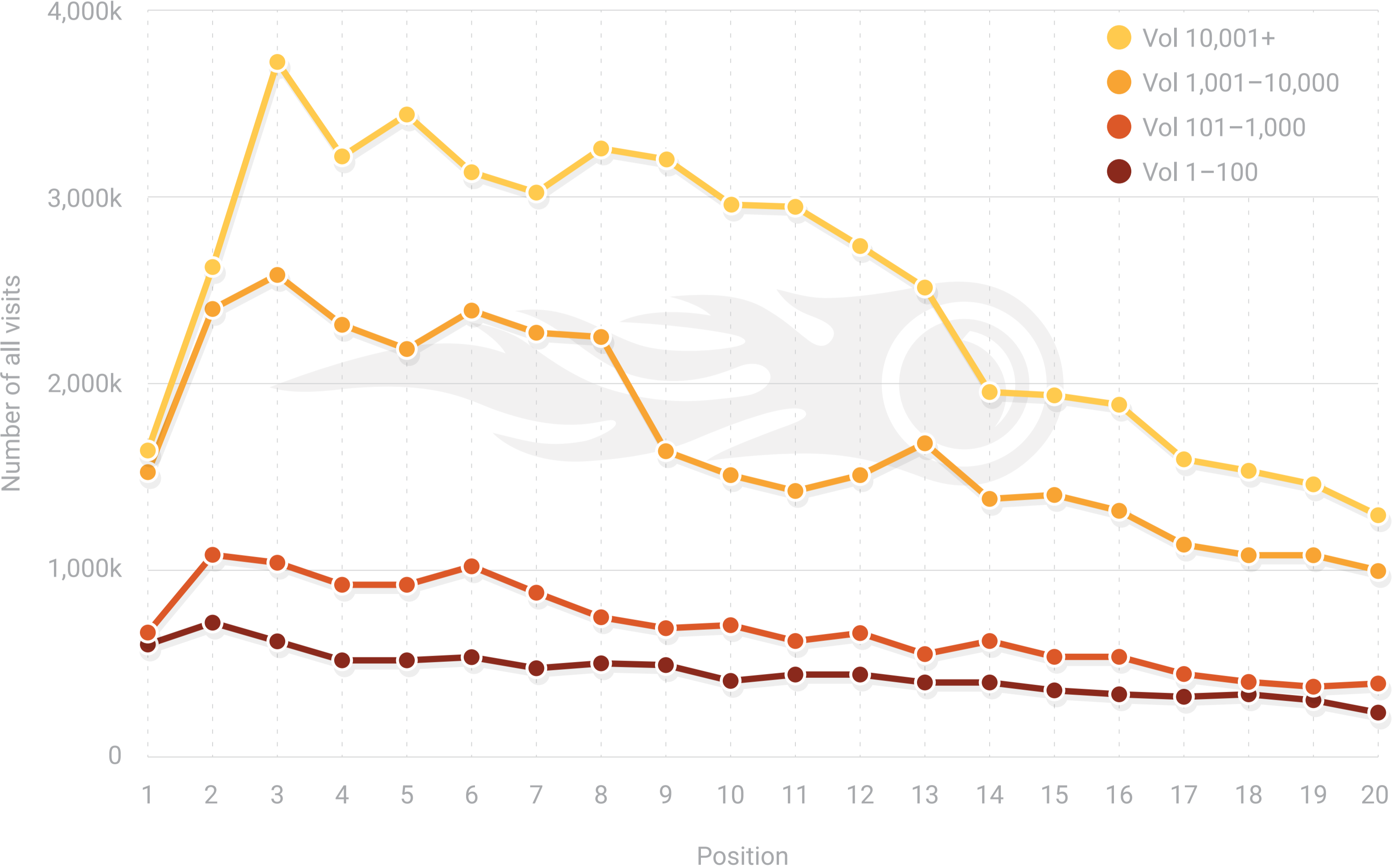


## ■ What we did

- We analyzed 600,000 search queries and calculated the total number of visits per month. Then, to determine whether a particular traffic channel has any impact on the page rankings we consequently excluded organic and other traffic channels from the data set. In the end, we built a graph for the total number of direct website visits for each of the top-100 positions and saw that direct visits had the most influence on the SERP.
- We segmented the results by four keyword volume groups to see if this influence differs from niche to niche.

# All website visits

segmented by search volume



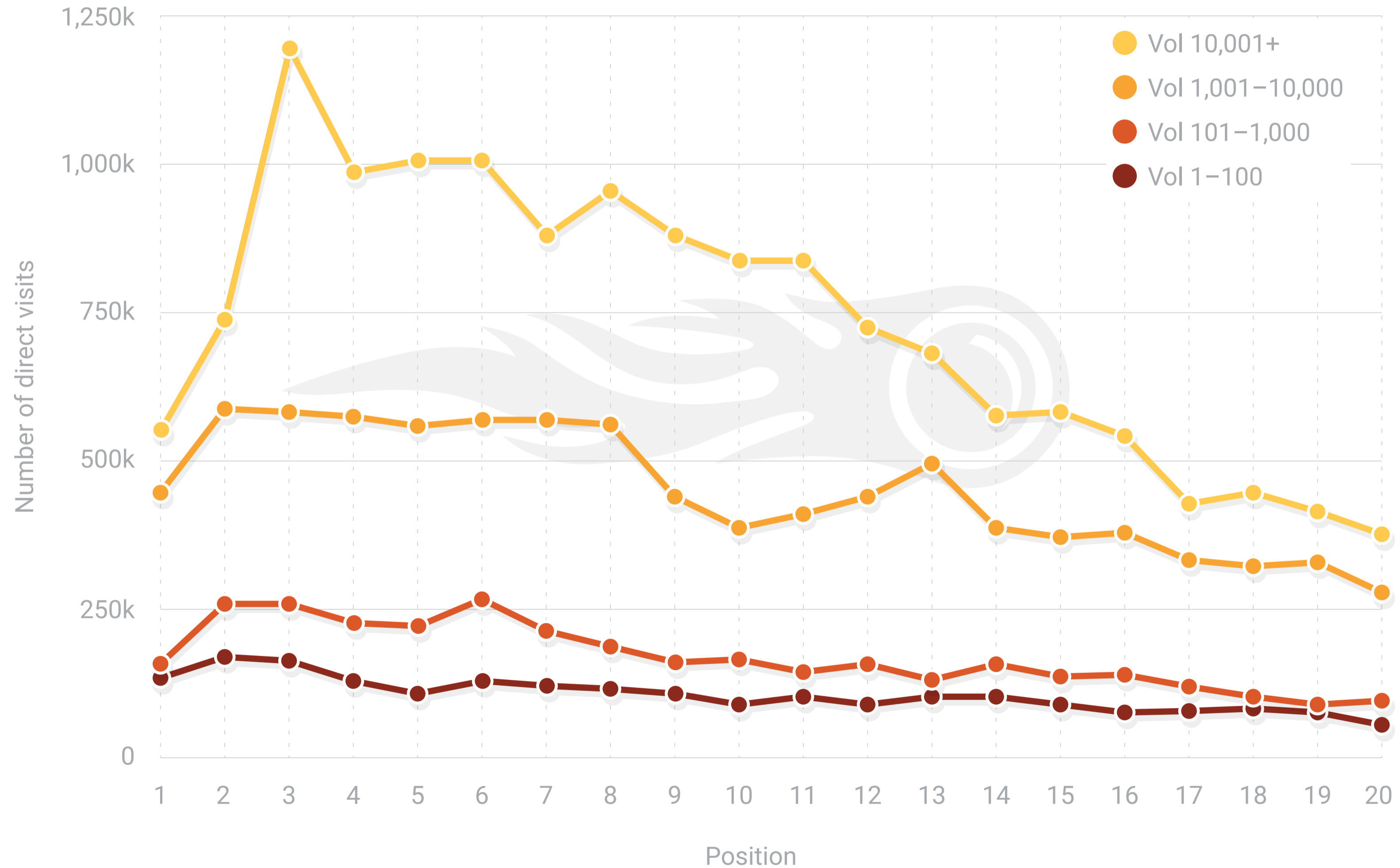
## Comments

- The chart shows a direct connection between the number of visits and the page rankings; the trend lines are steep, especially in the high-volume segment.
- The lower the keyword volume, the less is the influence of the factor.
- However, since the data on organic traffic can skew the trend lines, we need to exclude it to make a decision about the influence of other traffic channels.



# Direct website visits

segmented by search volume



## Comments

- After consequently excluding visits from other traffic sources, we can see that direct traffic has the most influence on the page rankings; the trend line is very steep, especially in the high-volume segment.
- The lower the keyword volume, the less influence the number of direct visits has on the page positions.

# What it means to you as a marketer

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After excluding organic search and other traffic data, we can see that there is a strong connection between the number of direct visits and the page position on the SERP. This could indicate that Google prioritizes domains with more authority and consequently more direct traffic when ranking the high-volume keyword group.

This also means that organic rankings is not the only thing you should be concentrating on. Direct visits are fueled by your brand awareness, so building a strong brand image should be an essential part of your promotion strategy.

“  
*Building brand awareness is as important as putting efforts into SEO.*  
”

## ■ How SEMrush helps

### Traffic Analytics

allows you to see the channels that fuel your competitors' website traffic. You can see organic, paid, social, direct and referral traffic all together or broken by category. Our estimates are based on clickstream data that comes from multiple proprietary and third-party data sources.

[Check competitors' traffic →](#)



# User behavior signals

# User behavior signals

While conducting our research, we analyzed several user behavior signals such as bounce rate, the time that the user spends on the website in general and how many pages per session the user opens. These signals help identify user behavior patterns and can provide information on whether your content is engaging, whether the navigation on your website is convenient and how users generally react to your website.



## Bounce rate

This is the number of website visitors who leave the site after viewing only one page. It does not necessarily mean that the page wasn't useful, but it could be a red flag for your content specialist.



## Time on site

This figure is the total amount of time that the user spends on your website navigating from page to page. This figure characterizes your website, so it makes sense to check if it also influences the page rankings.



## Pages per session

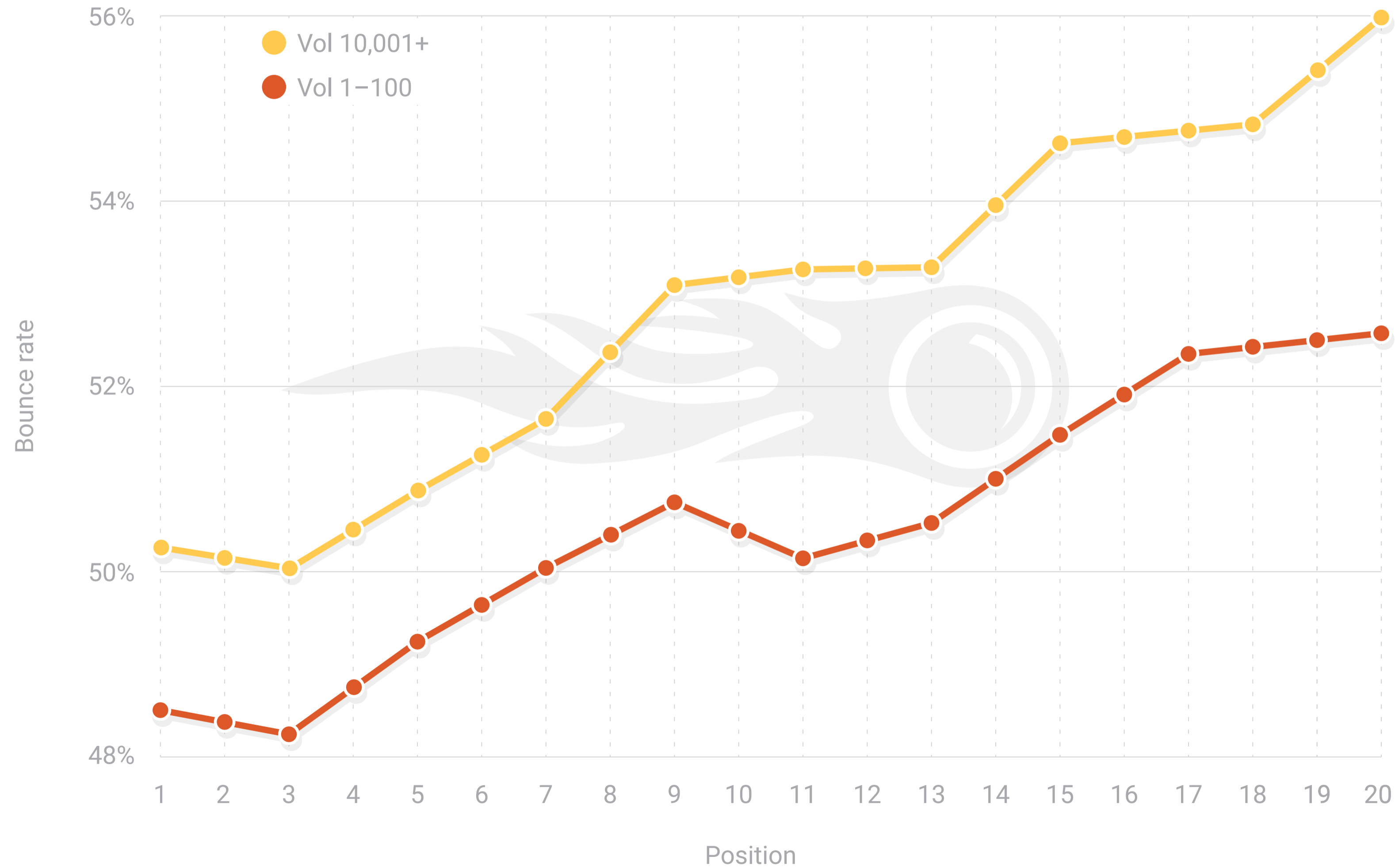
This metric shows how many of the website's pages the user navigates through during one session. Along with other user behavior signals, this could indicate how engaging your content is, how clear the navigation is and how obvious the user path is.

## What we did

We analyzed 600,000 search queries and for every top-100 SERP position we calculated the median-value bounce rate, the amount of time that the user spends on the domain in general, and the number of pages that the user visits during a single session. We also segmented the results according to two keyword volume groups – high and low.

# Bounce rate

segmented by search volume

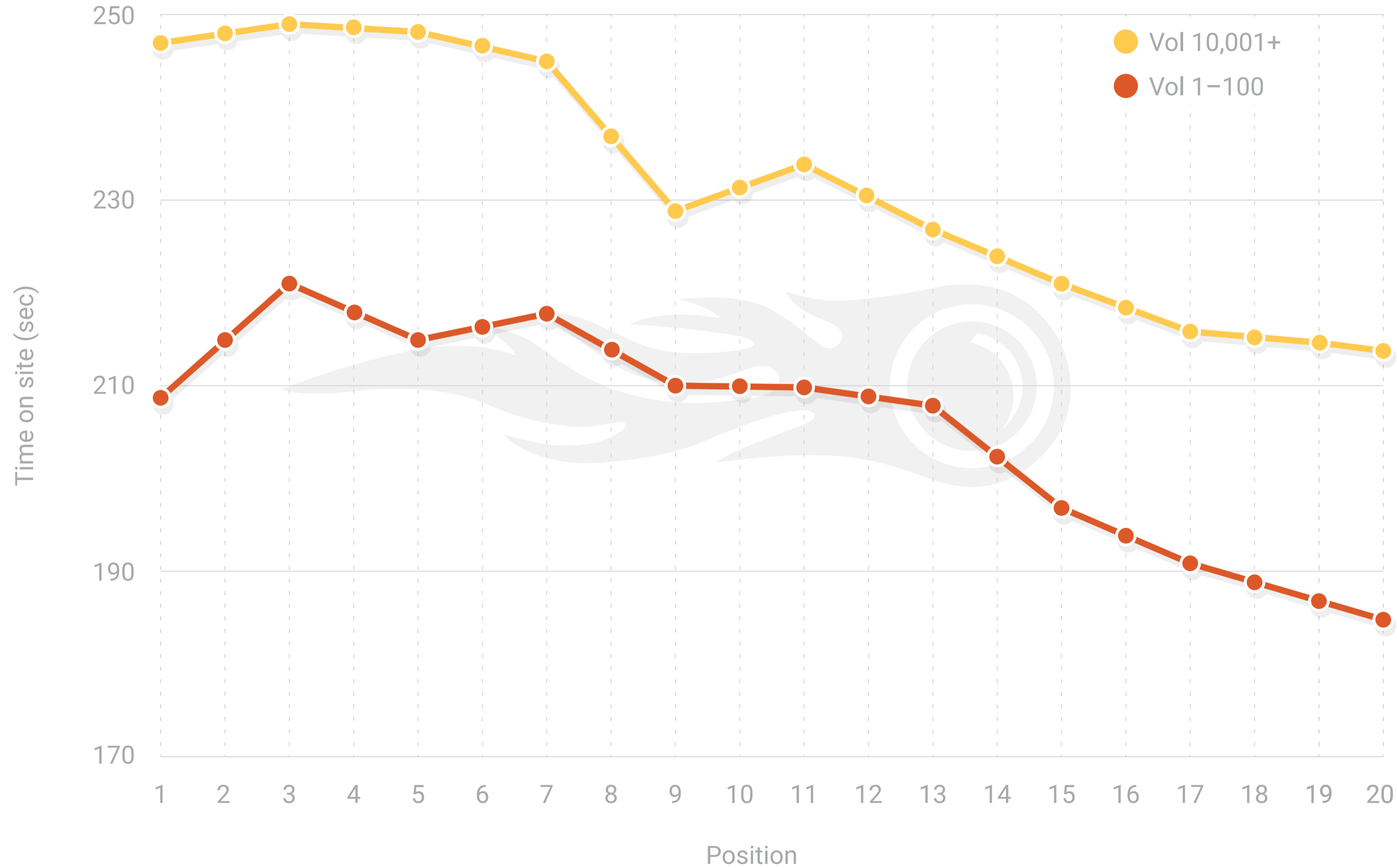


## Comments

- The higher a page's position, the lower is its bounce rate.
- The bounce rate of the top position for the low-volume keywords is approximately 49%; for the high-volume keywords – around 51%.

# Time on site

segmented by search volume

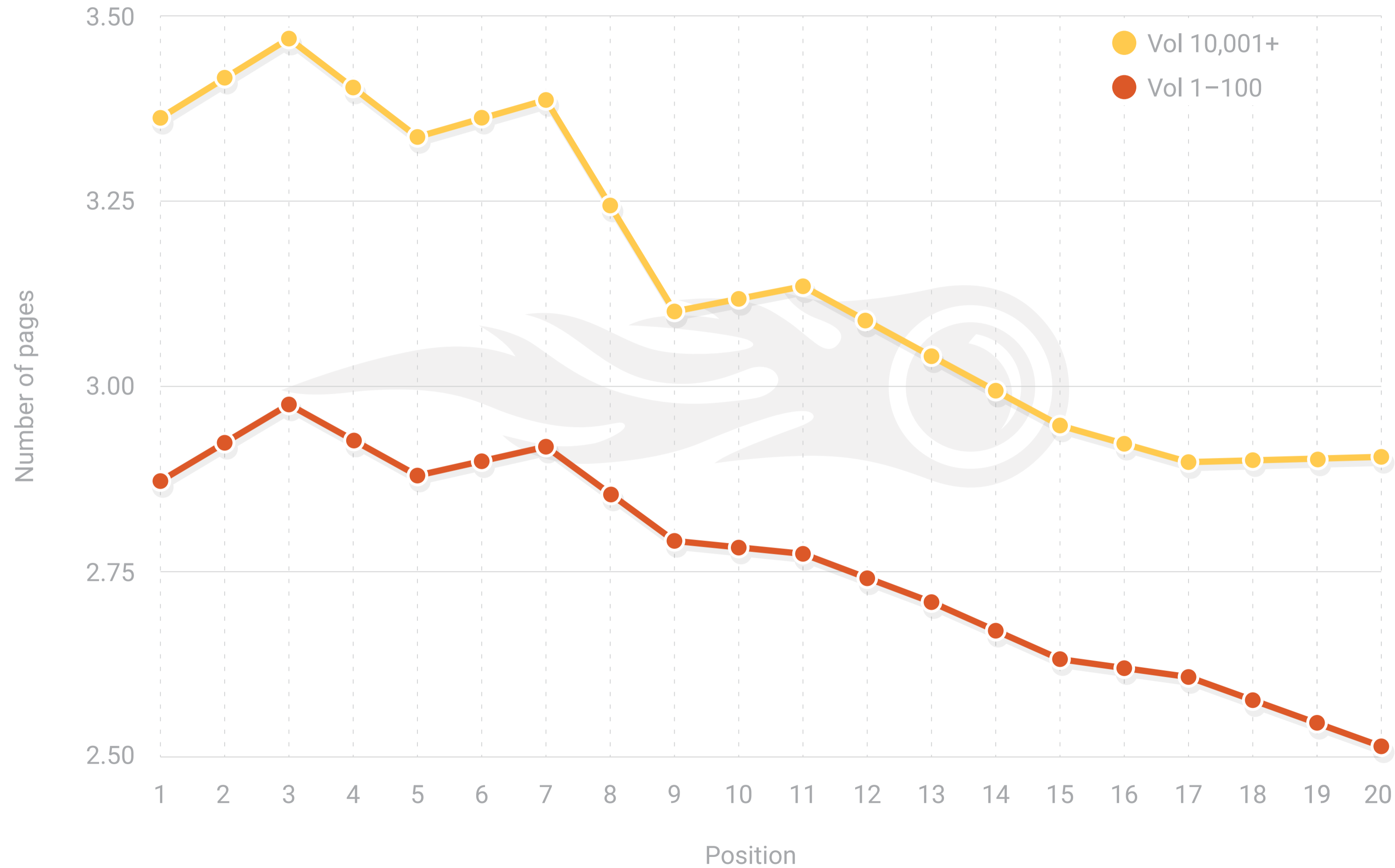


## Comments

- The more time users spend on site in general, the higher a page rank is.
- The time-on-site metric is similar for the first four positions in the high-volume keyword interval.
- The average amount of time spent on the site is 40 seconds less for the low-volume keywords than for the high-volume keywords.

# Pages per session

segmented by search volume



## Comments

- The user navigates through three to three-and-a-half pages per website, per visit.
- As we move towards the top of the SERP, there are more pages per session for every domain. The number of pages per session is similar, on average, for the first four SERP positions.

# What it means to you as a marketer

It is clear that high-ranking pages have lower bounce rates. This could be the result of the level of trust that users have for top-ranking pages, or it could mean that the lower-ranking pages are less relevant. And though Google reps declare that all user behavior signals are too noisy to be considered during the page qualification, a high bounce rate could indicate that the page content is irrelevant, which is bad for both users and search engine bots.

These results indicate that users tend to spend more time on websites that rank higher in SERPs. This could be explained by the same fact: users trust top-ranking pages more than lower-ranking ones.

Just like the bounce rate and time on site trends, these results confirm that users tend to visit more pages on websites that are in the top of organic search results.

*“User signals might be too noisy for Google, but a high bounce rate, little time spent on site and a small number of visited pages indicate that users are not engaging with your site as they should be!”*

## How SEMrush helps

### Traffic Analytics

allows you to determine the approximate bounce rate, time on site and number of pages per session for every domain.

[Analyze your rivals](#)

### Organic Traffic Insights

allows you to connect to your Google Analytics account and see the precise user behavior metrics, in addition to the Not provided keywords from the SEMrush database and Google Search Console.

[Find low-performing pages](#)

### On Page SEO Checker

helps you identify pages with high bounce rate and low time on page.

[Improve your pages](#)





**Why we had drops  
on the 1<sup>st</sup> position**

# Why we had drops on the 1<sup>st</sup> position <sup>NEW</sup>

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In our previous research, we investigated what factors influence the domain's positions in the search results, and found out that direct website visits, user behavior signals and the total number of referring domains are the most important ones.

While investigating the factors, we saw that on every chart the numbers for the first position are always less than for the second one, that is, every trend line has a drop on the first position. This was a surprise since we assumed that the most optimised websites – the websites with the biggest factor value – would be at the top.

We explained this fact by the branded keyword search queries. When the user searches for a brand name, a more relevant but less optimised website will appear on the first position.

To prove this, we decided to look at our data from a new angle: we investigated how the ranking factors impact single **URLs\*** that appear on the SERP.

For each factor, we built separate graphs showing the distribution of URLs and domains across the first 10 SERP positions. In this section, we included the graphs only for the **top-3 most influential factors**, but the tendency that we discovered persists for other factors as well.

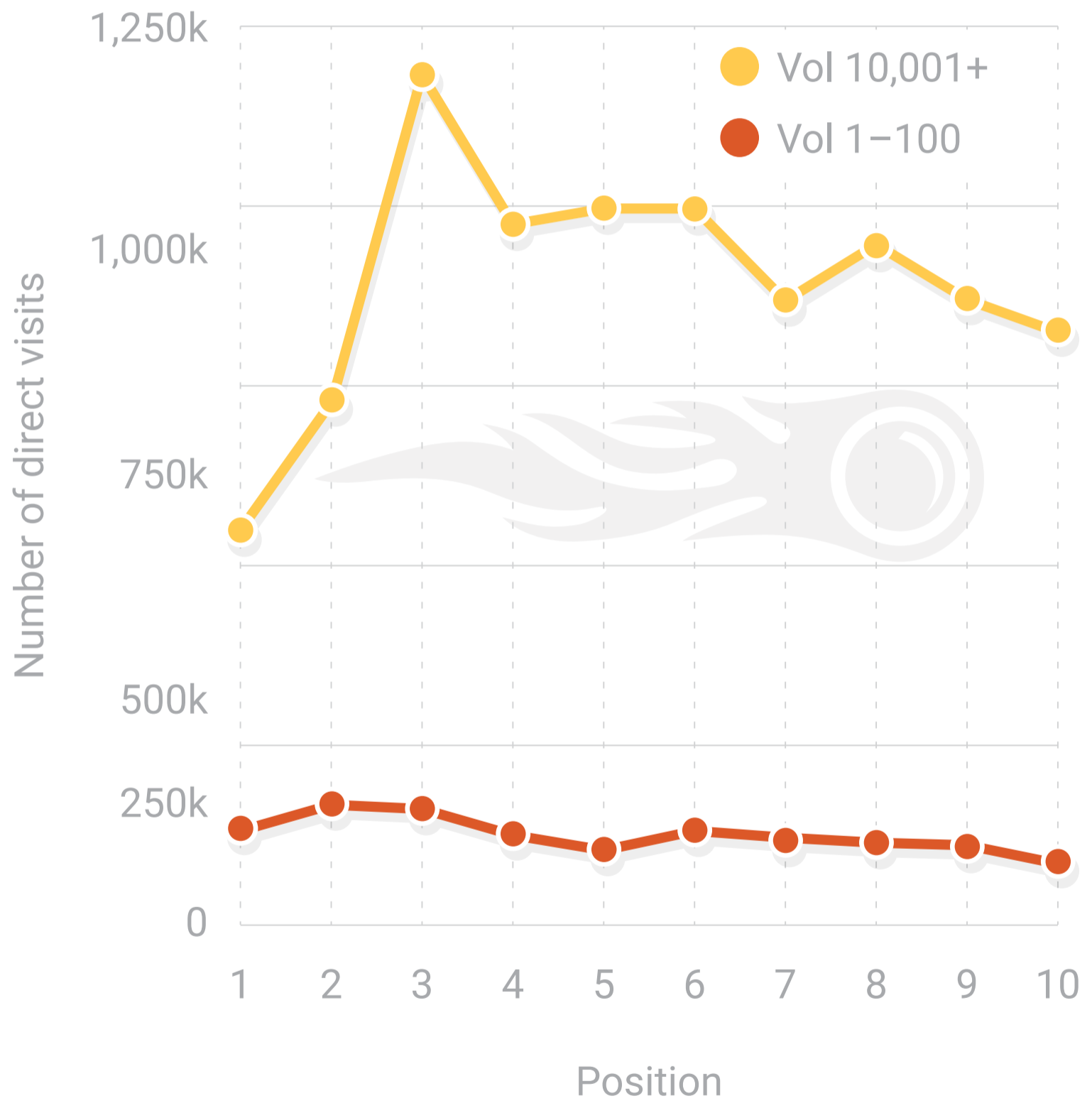
\* – By URL we mean a particular page residing on the analyzed domain.



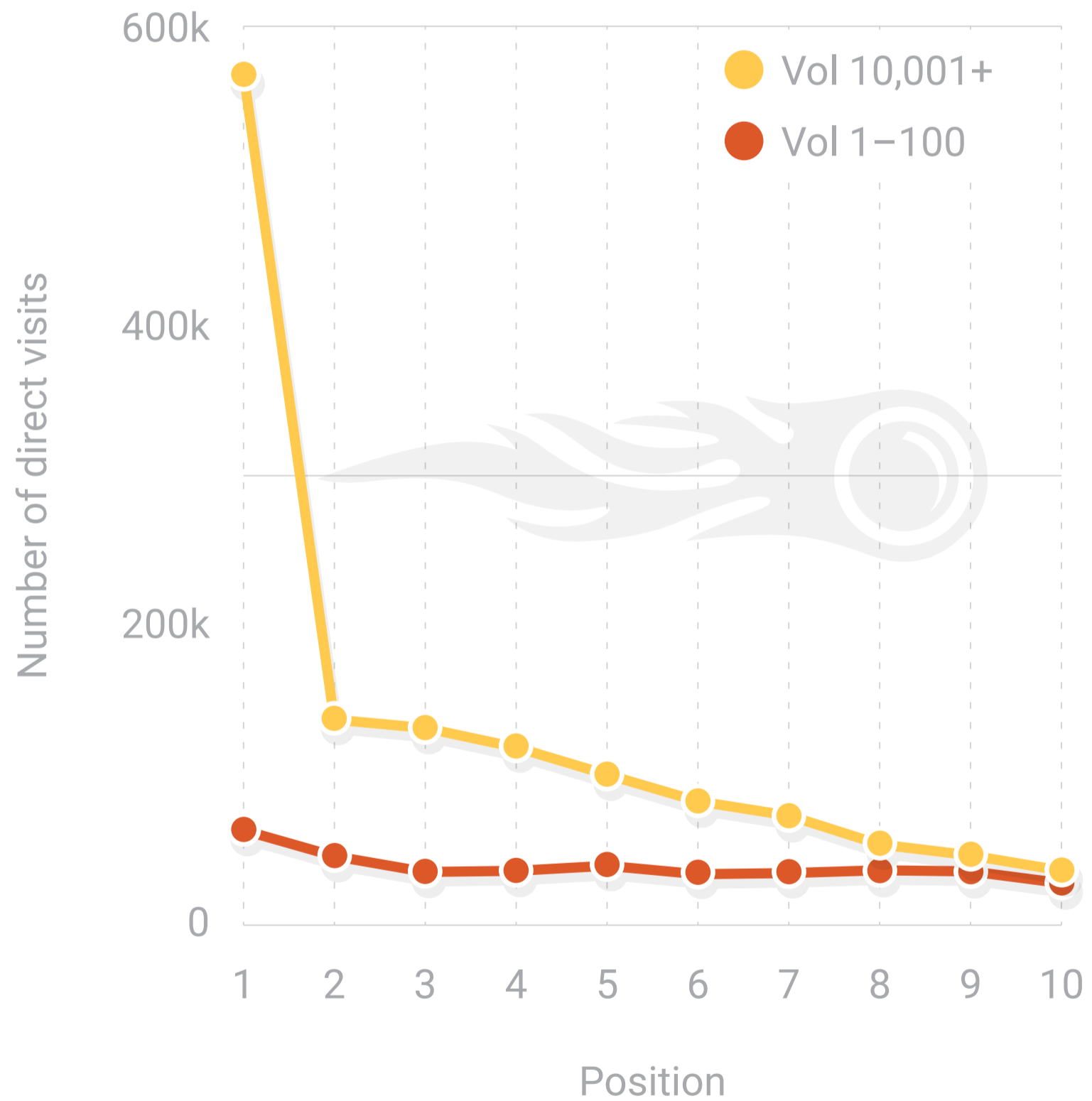
# Direct visits

segmented by search volume

### Direct website visits



### Direct page visits



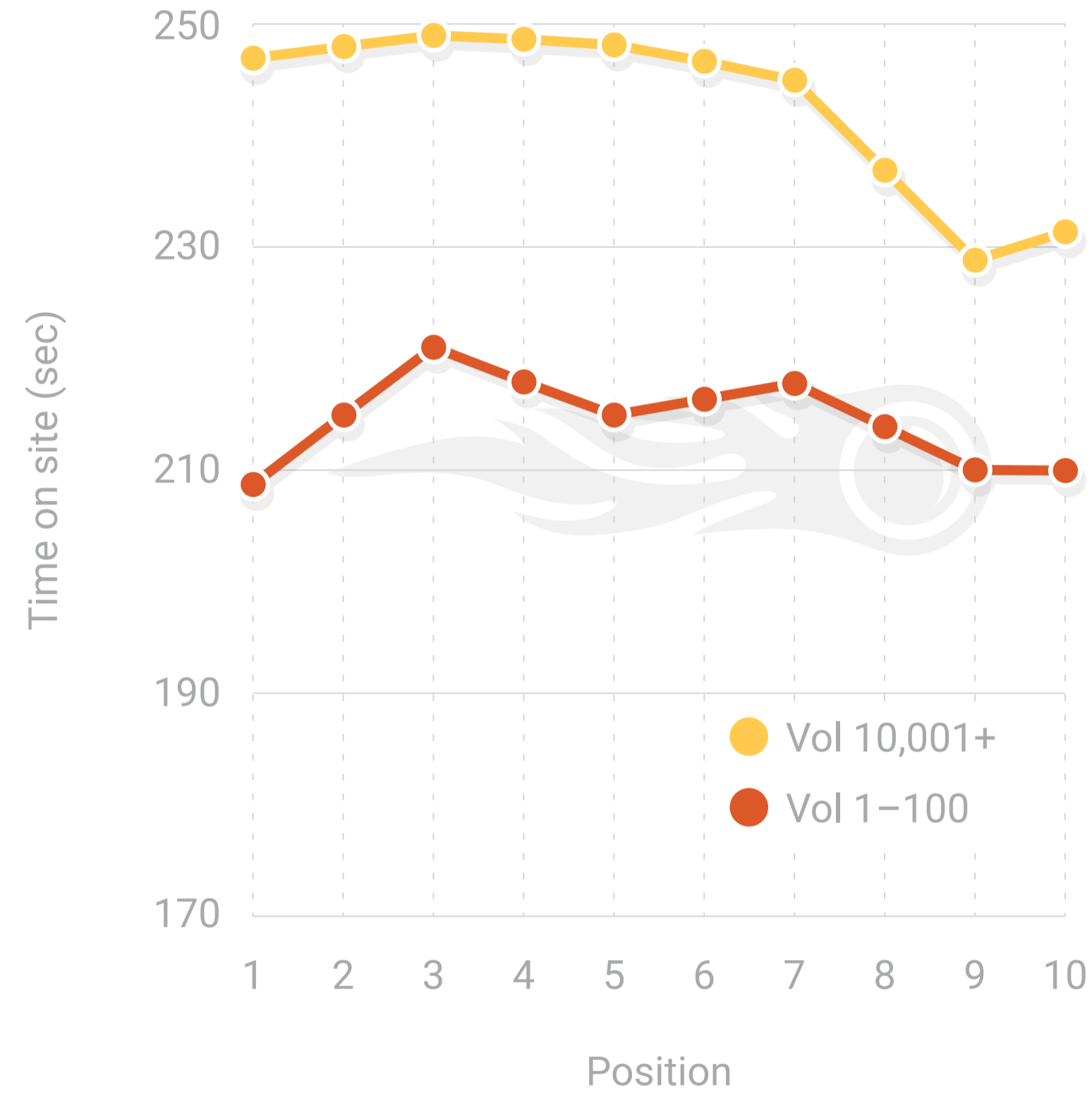
## Comments

- On the domain chart, the websites on the first two positions have significantly less direct visits than the ones on the third.
- On the URL chart, however, there are significantly more direct visits on the pages that are at the top of the SERP than on the pages from second position.
- In the high-volume segment, this difference is dramatic: top pages get on average three times more direct visits than the pages on the second position.

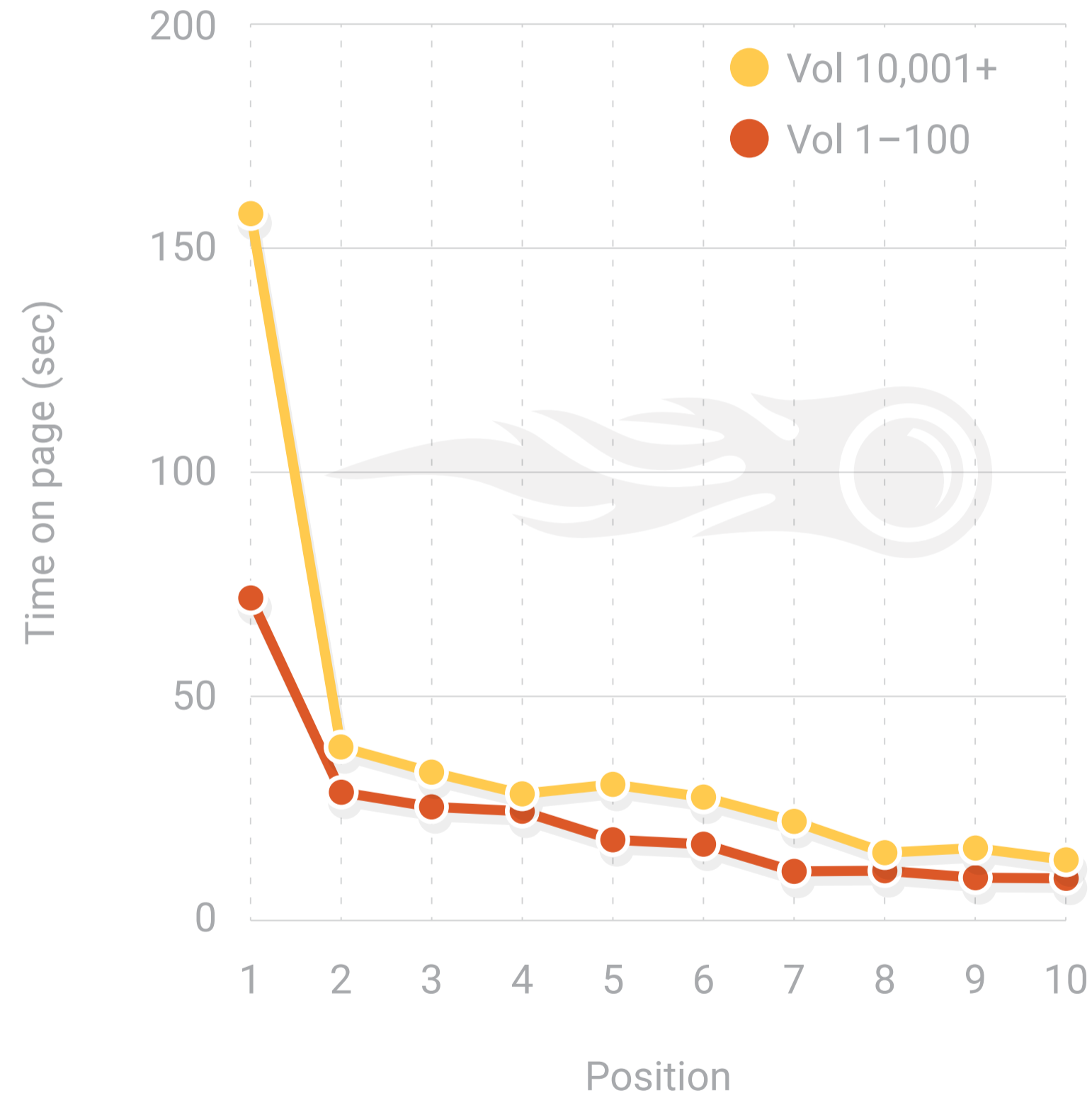
# Time on site

segmented by search volume

## Time on site



## Time on page



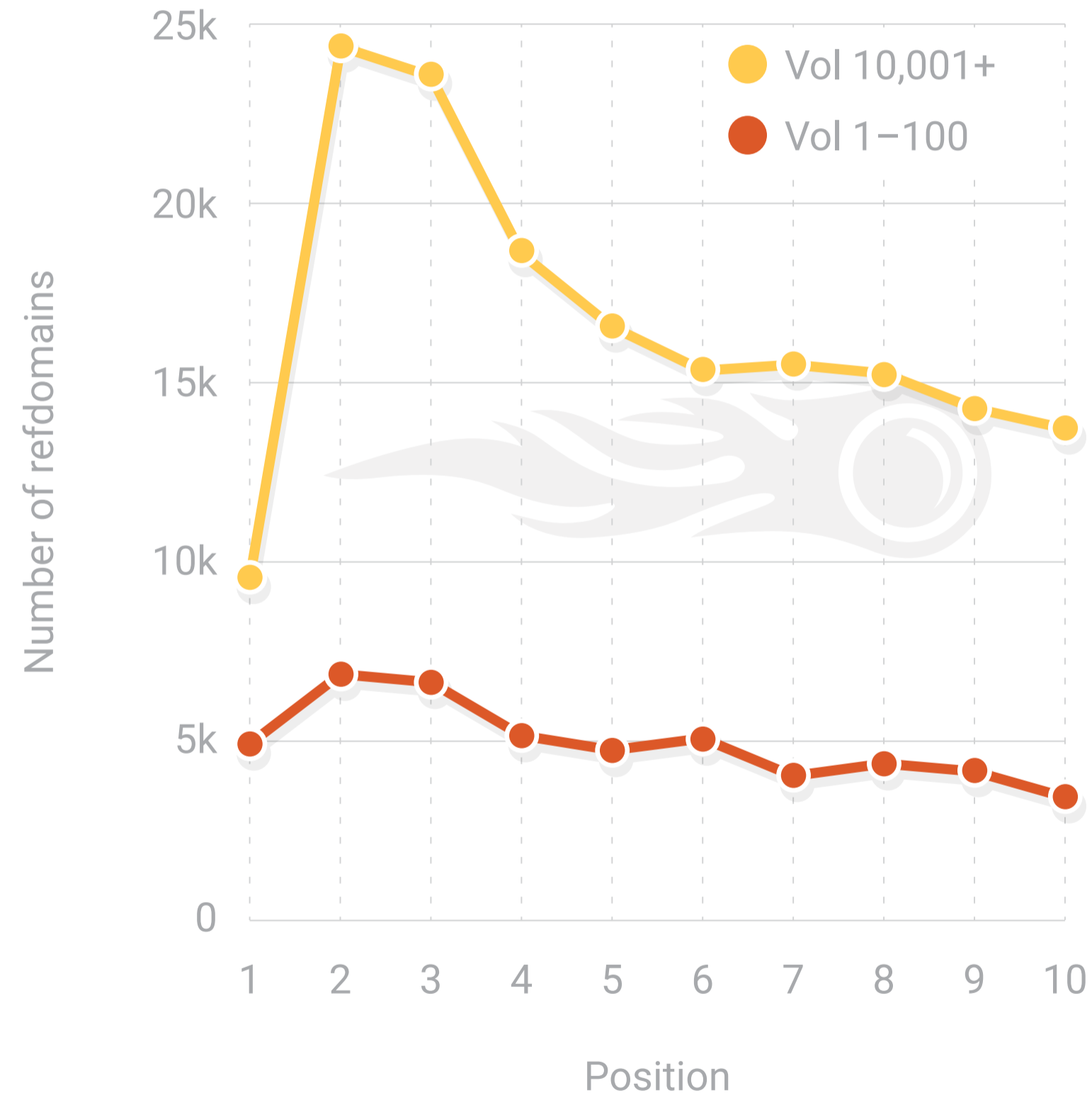
## Comments

- Users spent slightly less time on the domains ranking at the top of the SERP than on the ones on the second position.
- This difference is more noticeable in the lower volume segments.
- The URL chart shows that top-ranking pages get significantly more attention: users spent 3.5 times more time on the first-ranking pages in the high-volume segment and 2 times more in the low-volume segment.

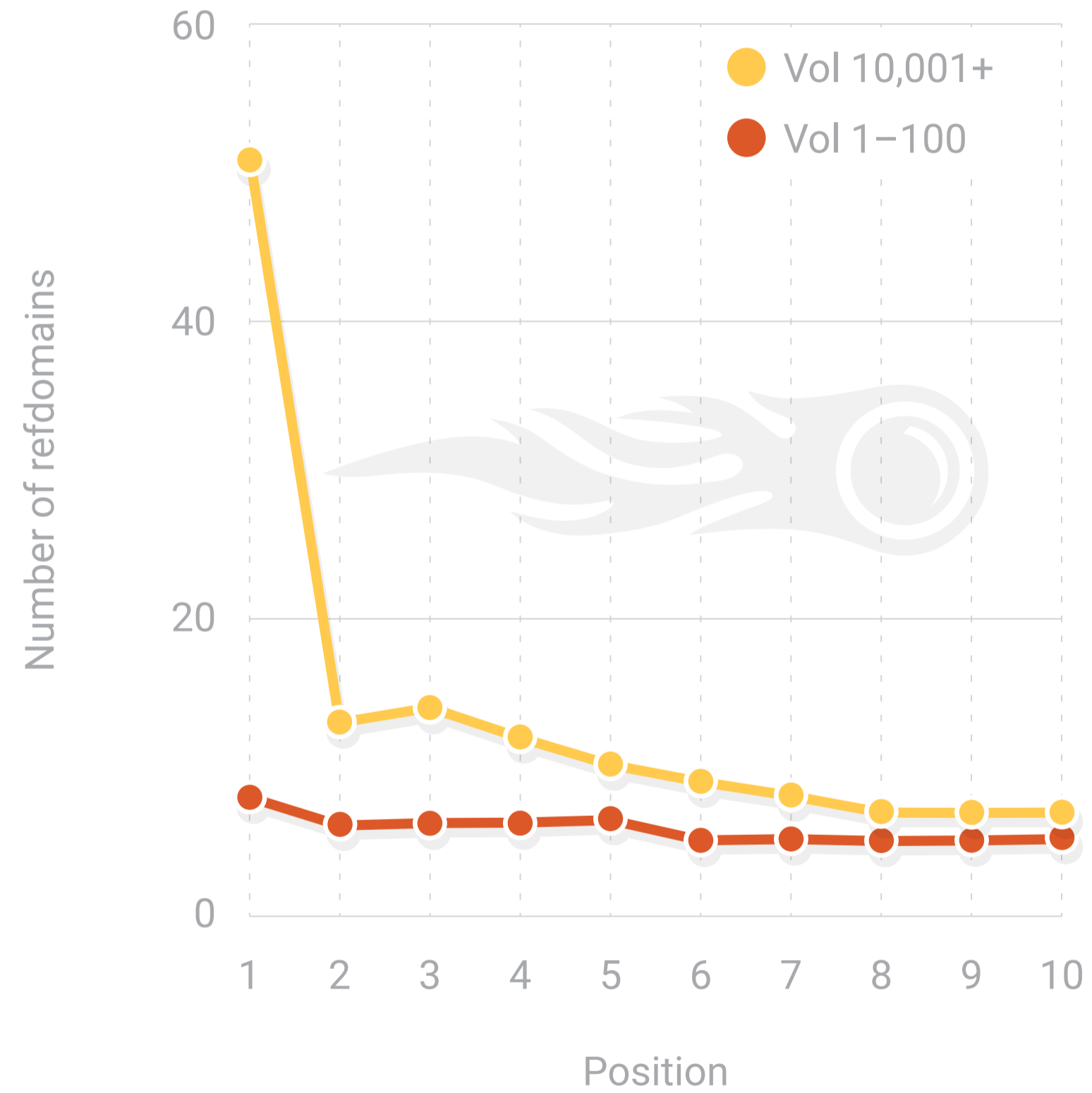
# Referring domains

segmented by search volume

## Website referring domains



## Page referring domains



## Comments

- The domains on the first position have significantly less referring domains than the ones on the second position. That is, the domains ranking at the top do not have the richest backlink portfolio, however they are still at the top.
- The URLs on the first position in high-volume segment have dramatically more referring domains than URLs on the second position.

# What it means to you as a marketer

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When it comes to the rankings of the domain, there will be more relevant but less popular resources in the top of the SERP. The reason for this is branded keywords. When the user searches for keywords containing a brand name, the brand domain will appear higher in search results than Wikipedia or other popular resources.

The data also proves that the analyzed ranking factors have more influence on the positions of the single URL than the domain on which it resides. That means that the rankings of a particular page are more sensitive to on-page optimisation, link-building efforts and other optimisation techniques.

“  
*Branded keywords return more relevant but less popular domains on the first position.*  
”

## ■ How SEMrush helps

### On Page SEO Checker

helps you find and boost even your highest ranking pages.

Skyrocket your rankings →



Did you like the study? We would love to hear your thoughts about it! If you have any feedback about our research or have suggestions about other ranking factors to research, mail us at

[ranking-factors-feedback@semrush.com](mailto:ranking-factors-feedback@semrush.com)