

ASIM

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Advanced Keyword Research Strategies



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The Importance of Upgrading Your Keyword Research Strategy

The gatekeepers of visibility on the Internet, namely the major search engines and social media hubs, base a significant portion of their search rankings/page order on keyword indexing. However, the simplest keywords that apply to any particular business have likely already been saturated with competition. This means that newer or smaller businesses without the capital to pay for a higher listing or dominate the anchor text of any particular word will likely never be associated with it highly enough to be seen in sufficient manner to affect sales.

The solution for these companies is deep keyword and keyphrase research combined with link building strategies to create stronger impressions between that company and the keywords within the indexing system of the major search engines and social media hubs.

Step One: Choose a Timeline

Proper keyword usage is contingent upon a time frame for research and implementation. Over an infinite time frame and using infinite resources, you could place highly for any keyword. However, you have limited time and resources to place as highly as you can in the major search engines and in social media search results and you must choose your keywords based on that.

Basically, the shorter your time frame is, the longer that your keywords must be. Also, a shorter time frame must correspond to a more consolidated group of related keywords. We will discuss the length of your keywords in Step Two and how keywords should relate in Step Three.

Step Two: Primary Keyword Selection

Although the term for index cues is a key "word," you are really looking for keyphrases - two to three word text strings that describe the product or service of your company specifically.

For instance, if you are selling cat food, you will want to make a list of keywords that relate to your niche in the market such as "organic cat food," "chicken not corn cat food," etc.

These top level terms should describe your products or services generally, as you will be choosing more specific keyword phrases from them later on.

Resources for Keyword Selection

Your top level keyword selection should not be random or based on gut feeling; there are likely terms that are already indexed by the major search engines and social media hubs as relevant to your company's main operations. Your job is to find them and the following resources can help you immensely:

A. The Google Keyword Tool

A free tool administered by the search leader itself, the [Google Keyword Tool](#) is the first (but not the last) tool that you can use to find indexed terms that relate to your company operations. Simply type your keyphrases into the search box and the Google Keyword Tool will display the global and local monthly search volume for that keyphrase, as well as indicate the level of competition for that keyphrase. The tool will provide you with a large list of similar keyphrases, which is an extremely helpful resource for identifying new potential keyphrases.

B. Wordtracker

Google has recently implemented many upgrades such as Google Penguin and Google Panda that have fundamentally reorganized many of its search engine listings. This means that you need an outside keyword tool in order to provide a truly objective viewpoint on keywords to choose for Google itself - many, though not all, of the keywords on the Google Keyword tool may have been adversely affected. [Wordtracker](#) is a top keyword selection tool that can be used in tandem with the Google Keyword Tool to provide more ideas for top level terms.

If a keyword pops up on both Wordtracker and the Google Keyword Tool as a top choice, it is likely safe from the most recent upgrades implemented by Google.

Wordtracker has a free trial version and a paid version. The free version is fine for top level terms, but you may want to invest in the paid search for more accurate niche terms.

C. Keyword Discovery

Niche businesses may actually benefit more from high rankings on niche search engines rather than Google. [Keyword Discovery](#) is a great keyword suggestion tool for every other search engine.

Choosing Keywords Based on Competition

Ideally you want top level keywords that are highly sought out by users of search engines. However, you want other companies' use of those keyword terms to be low. Use the resources above to help you select the keywords that fit this profile for the best results in your campaign.

The more accurate you are in looking for keywords which accurately describe the niche of your business in the marketplace, the less competition you will likely run into. Top level keywords which accurately describe your niche will also bring you more targeted traffic [read: potential customers that are more ready to purchase from you]. Be willing to sacrifice total reach for a more targeted audience if the keyword with a smaller audience describes your company more accurately.

Brainstorming More Core Keywords

In order to flesh out your list of core keyword terms, you will rummage through the overarching themes on your website and those of your competitors.

Begin on your own website by searching through your title tags, keyword tags, description tags and words that are used repeatedly throughout the copy on your site. Cull these terms into a spreadsheet.

You can also perform this action on the websites of your competitors. Make sure that they are successful in your market before you begin going through their source code for ideas! Source code is freely available for all websites and can be accessed through most Internet browsers by simply going to the target website and hitting F12.

Perform the same action as you did for your own site: Take a look at their title tags, description tags and underlying theme phrases. Aggregate these into the spreadsheet that you have been cultivating.

You should also take a look at the backlink profile of your competitors. Backlinks are essential in creating successful search terms. Tools such as [Majestic SEO](#) or [QBL](#) can help you profile your competition. The terms with the most backlinks are usually more relevant to your campaign as they have somehow attracted another webmaster to link to it. Note the top terms in your spreadsheet.

Server Logs

If you can access your server logs, you can find the keywords by which people are already accessing your website. The temptation is to give these keywords more weight than others; however, this is simply a tool for expanding your search list. Your site may not currently be optimized to receive queries for better keywords, so do not make the mistake of assuming that people finding your page by certain terms automatically means that these are the most relevant terms that are available to you.

Step Three: Finding Related Terms

Now that you have found the core terms that accurately describe your company, have a large potential audience and have proven their worth in the profiles of your competitors, you are ready to find the terms that you will actually begin optimizing for within the major search engines and social media hubs. These related terms may be combinations of your core terms or they may have additional phrasings within them to make them more targeted to your market niche with even less competition to worry about. This process will also help you whittle down your keyword terms to a number that you can adequately promote based on the timeline that you chose at the beginning of this process.

You can use automated tools such as [Wordtracker](#) to find related keywords. There are also tools that are completely dedicated to related keyword searches such as [Lexicon](#). However, you may want to supplement this automated process with a human touch - after all, it is humans that are putting in the search terms looking for your business. No keyword tool is going to be able to completely decipher the slang terms that may be used in your industry, nor will it be able to automate the localization of your search based on geography should that be your aim.

However, you can definitely begin your keyword weeding process by analyzing your search terms for volume and the ability to relate.

The Goal for Related Keywords

Your number one priority in finding related keywords is to locate terms that will eventually form the core of search phrases. Search phrases are the actual words that will hopefully be placed into the search engines by your potential customers. Using keywords in this manner rather than directly relying on them for audience visibility will allow you to index your website according to a targeted selection of keywords that search engine/social media hub users can more easily find.

Combining Search Terms

The first technique in finding related terms is to test simply combining some of your core terms. You can combine different spellings of your keywords in the keyword tools mentioned above to see if the listings that are created give you a large enough audience that you can target. You can also combine your core phrases with descriptive adjectives. For instance:

- A. "cat food" and "chicken" becomes "chicken cat food"
- B. "cat food" and "organic food" becomes "organic cat food"
- C. "cat food" and [your location] becomes "[your location] cat food"

These new, extended search terms should provide you with a list of search phrases with an audience broad enough to market to that is also hopefully low in terms of competition. If competition is still too high for the search phrases that are listed below the terms that you input, try combining terms again.

Organizing Related Terms

The automated keyword programs mentioned above will return related values for the keywords that you input. Check to see if the reach of those terms is similar to the core terms that you have thought of. Check their reach and the competition for those terms. Keep in mind that the Google Keyword Tool may suggest terms to you based on pre-Penguin output, so check those against Wordtracker or another preferred keyword selection program.

Selecting the Terms to Promote

There are multiple criteria by which you may determine the terms that you will focus on optimizing, and the number of terms that you choose is of course limited by your timeline as well. However, below are some criteria that most companies take into consideration when narrowing down their list of keyword terms.

A. Relateability

How related to your company is the search term that you have chosen? Do you sell that exact product or can you get it if demand is high enough? If the search term is so popular that you are considering getting into the market (it happens), can you pull it off within your set time frame?

B. Profitability

If you optimize for "organic cat food" rather than "corn based cat food," will you make more money per unit sold? Different products have different profit margins and this should be deeply considered when narrowing down your list.

C. Total Reach

Your search terms must have an audience large enough to actually market to. If you are focusing on a local audience, make sure that only localized volumes are considered. In general, if everything in the sales process is done correctly, you should expect a sale from no more than 2% of the total audience that you reach. Different industries have different figures, but this is a safe metric to assume if you have no other criteria. Note: This conversion method is based on the "funnel" approach to the sales process, which is [defined here](#).

Having a measurable search volume using keyword tools is essential. No matter how relevant a term may be, if it does not have an audience that a search engine tool can measure, it will likely do very little for your business in total.

Step Four: Choosing Search Phrases that Convert

Now that you have created your list of search phrases from your core terms, you must decide which of those phrases will best benefit your bottom line within the time frame that you have chosen for your company. The metric "conversion" is the term used to describe customers that actually finish the sales action that you promote to them during your process. The "conversion rate" is the ratio of customers to total audience and is usually listed as a percentage.

As mentioned above, for most industries, a 2% conversion rate is outstanding as long as a business can be profitable under those circumstances.

Reach vs. Targeting

In general, specificity is the main goal of our three step process. Narrowing the scope of our search phrases as much as possible, instead of trying to directly market keyword phrases from Step One or Step Two, gives us a more targeted audience to market to. All else being equal, this usually results in a higher conversion rate.

Here are some of the mistakes that are made with search phrases, which you should avoid at all costs.

1. Though it can be tempting to optimize for the popular search term of a competitor in hopes of winning over a new customer, neither search engines nor customers tend to respond positively to this technique. In some cases, companies have reported malicious use of certain search terms to Google and Google has responded by punishing the offending website. In general, it is best to optimize for your own terms and stay away from the proprietary terms of your competitors. This does not negate your ability to use more general terms that your competitor also uses - just stay away from specific product names and the slogans of your competition.

2. Stay away from search phrases that do not describe your business at all. For instance, if you are selling high quality cat food, then certain words such as "cheap," "discount," or "low cost" should never be a part of your optimization process or your site text.

3. Stay away from misspellings of words. However, different spellings of words are good to use and one may actually bring more traffic than another. Make sure that you consider all spellings of a word before you finally decide on the syntax of your search phrases.

4. Use both singular and plural forms of words; however, do not use them in the same phrase unless that phrase can easily be written into text copy.
5. Do not use more than one proper synonym per search term. Proper synonyms rarely occur side by side and they can be difficult to write into text copy.

Here are some techniques that you should be sure to use.

1. Long tail keywords should be the final goal of your campaign. Individually, you should not expect your long tail keywords to bring you a large audience. However, when they are aggregated together they can account for more than half of your website's total audience.
2. Look for search phrases between two and four words. This is the usual length of the phrases that are typed into search engines and social media lists when a customer is looking for a specific product, service or business solution.
3. Balance your "volume phrases" with your "target phrases." Your longer phrases will likely bring more targeted customers that will give you a higher conversion rate. However, volume phrases will bring you customers who do not necessarily know exactly what they are looking for. If your sales process is good you will be able to convert some of these customers. You must play with your ratio of volume phrases to target phrases in order to find the best possible combination.

Organizing Your Search Phrases on Your Website

You are done with your search for phrases. The last step in optimizing your keywords for best use is to organize them on your website in the most effective format.

The different pages of your website are set up to attract customers at different points in the sales process. Some people know exactly what they want and can be directed straight to your sales page. Some people need education about your product or service and must start at the beginning or somewhere in the middle.

In general, your volume terms should skew towards the front end of your sales process. Your targeted terms should skew towards the end of your sales process.

By placing your volume terms on the start pages of your website, the major search engines and social media sites will index those pages according to those phrases. Potential customers will be more likely to find them as they are searching in general and be directed to your informational pages. Targeted phrases are for customers who know what they want - they will be grateful to be directed to your sales pages without having to deal with a bunch of text or sales techniques.

You will find that many of your search phrases form quite easily into groups. These groups of phrases should be included in the text on the same page. Search phrases that do not group as easily should not be included on the same page, but should be linked from different pages. This will help to organize your website for human visitors as well.

Each search phrase should be the main focus of a single page with related phrases around it. Some experimentation will be necessary to determine the best phrases for each page: Each company is different. The main phrase should be included in headers as well as in bold, italicized or underlined text. However, do this naturally or the major search engines will consider your pages spam.

Your search phrases should be used judiciously within your copy text at a rate of no more than 4%. You can check the ratio of your keyword search phrases vs. total text using many online tools including the one found [here](#).

Internal linking is essential to help relate the keyword search phrases of each page to each other. Search engines note these internal links; it is also easier for your human customers as well. All of your web pages should have a link to the other pages even if those links are not readily visible.

Conclusion

The most important aspect of keyword research is to always remember who you are trying to attract – people. Search engines need to be able to find and index your web pages, but ultimately you should develop your keyword list to attract and convert potential customers.

Ready to learn more? Check out:

“Search Engine Marketing: Keyword Research and Development”

Live Audio Conference - June 19, 2013

[Learn More](#)

If you are using social media, organic or paid search, this live audio conference will take you beyond just picking keywords for short term marketing efforts to strategically selecting your keyword universe to increase your business' profitability and even change your business' direction. During this session, we will show examples of how companies are integrating and balancing their keyword strategy across social media, paid and organic search. You will also learn the tools available and how to measure your success.

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