



THAT Keyword Research: Choosing the Right Keywords



Keyword research is one of the most important parts of building an effective SEO campaign. It is also usually given the least amount of attention. Proportional to the many other activities that go into an organic search campaign, keyword research usually has a very small time investment.

It's critical to select the right keyword phrases for your organic search efforts to ensure that you not only generate traffic to your website, but also that the traffic is relevant and gives the conversion response you need. By selecting relevant and targeted keywords, you'll have a much better shot at reaching your conversion and business goals.

There are several tools available to help you generate your initial keyword list. Each has pros and cons but all are helpful in getting the job done.

- Google (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>) – Free keyword research tool which gives keyword search volume estimates along with keyword suggestions.
- WordTracker (<http://www.wordtracker.com>) – Paid keyword research tool which gives keyword search volume estimates, competition estimates and keyword suggestions.
- Keyword Discovery (<http://www.keyworddiscovery.com/>) – Another paid tool similar to WordTracker.

No matter which tool you use, there are three things you need to know to identify the right keyword phrases.

1. **Search Terms: Don't guess, KNOW what searchers are looking for.**

The first step in identifying good keywords is to create a list of search terms **related to your website**. There's no sense in optimizing for broad keyword phrases or keyword phrases that don't quite match your topic. This is the brainstorming stage of keyword research. Try to come up with as many different targeted phrases as you can. Since keywords logical to you may not be the ones your potential customers use, it's important to use tools that help you think outside of the box. You can use:

- Thesaurus – An online thesaurus can help you identify several different terms with similar meanings. When searching for synonyms of the term *car*, here's what I found:

Synonym Collection v1.1

Main Entry: car

Part of Speech: noun

Synonyms: armored, auto, automobile, basket, buggy, cable, caboose, cage, cart, chariot, coach, convertible, coupe, dragster, fullsize, hardtop, hatchback, heap, hotrod, jalopy, jeep, limousine, midsize, motor, nash, race, railroad, roadster, sedan, station wagon, subcompact, tender, trailer, train, tram, trolley, truck, vehicle, wheels

- Your competitor’s website – Visit your competitors’ websites and take a look at the keyword phrases they are using. This may give you ideas of other ways that users may search for your product. To analyze your competitors’ keyword phrases, visit their website and look for keywords in the title tag or meta keywords. CAUTION: Just because your competitor is using a certain keyword phrase doesn’t mean that it’s a good term to use. In the example below, I went to my competitor’s website and viewed the homepage source code. Here’s what the keyword tag looked like:

```
<meta name="Keywords" content="cars, used cars, car dealers, auto dealers, buy a car, used trucks, used auto, buy new car, buy car online, sell car, sell my car, sell used car, auto sale, sell used cars, selling a car, auto loan calculator, used car prices, car reviews, car loan calculator, used car pricing">
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- Keyword research tools – Any of the above tools will also provide a list of keyword suggestions. Here are some suggestions I got from Google’s free tool:

How would you like to generate keyword ideas?

Descriptive words or phrases
(e.g. green tea)

Website content
(e.g. www.example.com/product?id=74893)

Enter one keyword or phrase per line:

Use synonyms

[Filter my results](#)

Keywords	Advertiser Competition	Approx Search Volume: August	Approx Avg Search Volume
Keywords related to term(s) entered - sorted by relevance			
cars	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	101,000,000	83,100,000
used cars	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	11,100,000	9,140,000
classic cars	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	450,000	368,000
sports cars	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	165,000	165,000
old cars	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	201,000	201,000
cars for sale	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	3,350,000	3,350,000
used car	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	2,240,000	2,240,000
cheap cars	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	368,000	368,000
new cars	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	37,200,000	37,200,000

Don't be afraid to build a fairly long list in this stage. We'll shorten the list in the next couple of steps.

2. Search Volume: How often do searchers use each keyword?

The search volume on a particular keyword phrase will determine how much traffic you can potentially generate by optimizing your website for that keyword phrase. Take your preliminary list of keyword ideas and use one of the keyword research tools above to estimate the search volume of each term in your list. Since these tools will most likely provide different estimates, consider the number of daily searches to be a relative number used to

compare keywords in terms of which is searched the most and which the least. Eliminate any phrases without any search volume. Since no one searches these terms, ranking high for them won't likely generate any traffic for you.

- 3. Search Competition: How much competition is there for each term?**
Keyword competition is the measure of how many other websites use and/or optimize for the same phrase. This number usually indicates the probability that you'll be able to eventually achieve a high ranking for a given keyword phrase. For example, a keyword phrase that is used on millions of websites will be much harder to rank for than a more-unique phrase that is rarely used. In general, the longer a keyword phrase is, the less competition there will be for it. So, the term *sports car* will likely be much more competitive than the term *1982 sports car*.

Most paid search tools will provide you with a competition estimate. If you're not using a paid tool, you can figure out competition on your own by searching for the given keyword phrase with quotation marks. For example, if I wanted to compare the competition level of the term *sports car* with the term *1982 sports car*, I would perform the following searches:

For *sports car*:

The screenshot shows a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "sports car" and a "Search" button. To the right of the search bar are links for "Advanced Search" and "Preferences". Below the search bar, the results are displayed as "Results 1 - 10 of about 13,600,000 for 'sports car'". The number "13,600,000" is circled in red. Below the search bar, there are tabs for "Web", "Images", and "News". Under the "Web" tab, there are related searches: "sports car magazine", "bmw", "corvette", and "sports cars for sale". Below the related searches, there is a section for "Image results for 'sports car'" with a "Report images" link. This section contains three image thumbnails: a red sports car, a blue and red sports car, and a silver sports car. Below the image results, there is a link to "Sports car - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia" and a snippet of text: "A sports car is a term used to describe a class of automobile. The exact definition varies, [1] but generally it is used to refer to a low to ground, ...". Below this snippet are links for "en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sports_car - 48k", "Cached", and "Similar pages". On the right side of the search results, there is a "Sponsored Links" section. The first sponsored link is for "Dodge® Viper" with the text "Official Site of the Dodge® Viper. Find a Dealer Near You Today! www.DodgeDealer.com Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, FL". The second sponsored link is for "Sports Car" with the text "Get Quotes, View Inventory & More Online - Visit Chrysler.com Today! www.Chrysler.com". The third sponsored link is for "Sports Car" with the text "Equip & Price a New Dodge Today! Find Local Dealers at Dodge.com. www.Dodge.com".



For *1982 sports car*:

A screenshot of a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "1982 sports car". To the right of the search bar is a "Search" button and links for "Advanced Search" and "Preferences". Below the search bar, the text "Web Results 1 - 10 of about 1,200 for '1982 sports car'." is displayed. Two search results are visible, both from Amazon.com. The first result is for the book "Corvette, 1968-1982 (Sports Car Color History)" by Mike Mueller, with a link to the product page. The second result is for the same book, showing customer reviews. The number "1,200" in the search results summary is circled in red.

From the example above, *sports car* has about 13,600,000 competing websites and *1982 sports car* has about 1,200.

It's important to note that competition is a relative measurement. Just because a competition search shows that given term has 13,600,000 results doesn't mean that there are 13,600,000 other websites that are optimizing for the term. It only means that 13,600,000 websites in the Google index use the term. From the example above, I can assume that ranking high for *sports car* would be much more difficult than ranking high for *1982 sports car*. This is not a surprise since targeted terms are not only better for your conversion rates but are also usually less-competitive.

Finding balance.

Finding the right keyword phrase is done by finding a balance between the search volume and competition for the phrase. Let's face it; we all want to rank on top for keyword phrases with the highest search volume so we can get the most traffic. On the other hand, we all can't rank high for these high-volume phrases because there's only so much room at the top.

Well established websites have more clout and, with good optimization, can compete for the highly-competitive terms. Smaller websites and websites new to SEO should consider keywords with lower competition.

Why keyword selection is like trading stocks.

Selecting the right keyword phrase is like managing your portfolio. The risk of going after the most competitive phrase is that you may never rank high enough to see any traffic from it. On the other hand, if you get a top ranking, the reward is greatest. Less competitive terms are less risky and, as expected, the reward is usually less as well. As with portfolio management, good SEO is knowing when you can go after the big prize and when you should settle for a smaller reward.

Test before you implement.

For the most part, the keywords you target shouldn't frequently change. As it can take several months to get a website to rank for a given set of terms, there's a heavy time investment into getting high rankings. Before optimizing your website for a given set of keyword phrases, test the keywords you're considering on the pay per



click network. The goal of this type of test is to replicate the same search experience that searchers would have if you ranked organically for the same search terms.

Use the following guidelines when setting up your pay per click campaigns:

- Exact match your keyword phrases to make sure that your ad only appears when searchers type the exact phrase you will optimize for.
- Use the same landing pages that you will optimize for organic search.
- Make your ad title and description match as closely as you can to what you'd use for your website title tag and meta description. Keep in mind there are space limitations that apply to pay per click campaigns.

Once you've created a similar search and user experience to what you'd have if you ranked organically, run the test and watch the results. Do searchers who click-through your pay per click ads convert the way you'd like them to? Do they buy something, sign up for your newsletter, or complete any other goal you'd like? Or, do they bounce right off your website? If the former is true, then you've probably identified some relevant keyword phrases and created a good search experience. If the latter is true, you may want to try a different set of keywords.

Keep in mind that other factors like your landing page may affect this test so keep your landing page the same when testing different keyword phrases against each other. Keep testing until you find something that meets your needs.

Summary

Investing a little extra time into keyword research at the beginning of an organic search campaign can not only improve your results, but can also save you time in the long run. The last thing you want is to spend months optimizing your website and building links only to find out that the traffic you're generating doesn't convert anyways.



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