BlogSuccess

Deep Insight Paper

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Practical Keyword Research for Ecommerce and Blog Sites

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Practical Keyword Research for Ecommerce and Blog Sites

Key findings:

- Although the entire search industry is keyword-based, the concept is still quite vague. People often don't know where to start or how much information is adequate.
- Keyword research requires patience (usually in short supply), a strategic approach (absent in most cases) and a methodical framework (often unavailable).
- Most people focus on "high commercial potential" keywords, not knowing that it is extremely difficult to rank highly for these terms.
- Keyword research not only shows you your competition, but it can also lead you to potential synergistic partners.
- When done effectively, a keyword-based approach to attracting visitors has the potential to substantially increase traffic to your website.

We recommend:

- Maintain and monitor up to 50 strategic and relevant keywords for your site, of which a select few are "core" keywords.
- Target not just the number one spot, but the top 3 search positions for each of your core keywords.
- Use keyword research to uncover both competitors and synergistic partners for your business.
- Follow a consistent, systematic framework for strategically identifying a small set of relevant keywords.

Business Impact: Increased flow of high-potential traffic to your site.

If you methodically create and execute a strategic plan for keyword research, your site should see an increase in traffic. This is high-potential traffic because there is a good chance that these visitors can be converted into subscribers. After all, they have been directed to your site by means of highly relevant keywords.

More than 19 billion searches are conducted each month, meaning that there are almost 2 trillion during the course of a year. People are looking for information online all

the time. (Source: http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Press-Releases/2013/8/comScore-Releases-July-2013-US-Search-Engine-Rankings)

The primary method of conducting a search is, quite simply, typing a keyword into a search engine. The whole search business is centered around keywords:

- Users begin their search using keywords.
- Advertisers bid for spots associated with high-paying keywords.
- Websites and blogs optimize their information for relevant keywords.
- Search engine bots scour the web looking for sites with good information, and then, using keywords, index them within their databases.
- Search engines display results and advertisements based on ranking for keywords.

INSIGHT: Your digital strategy to grow traffic and revenue must be focused on keywords. An approach that ignores keywords would be random, suboptimal and would prevent your site from reaching its full potential – not what you want at all.

Much has been written about keywords and there are a ton of tools out there to help you analyze and use them effectively. Google Analytics, Google Keyword Planner Tool and Google Webmaster Tools all provide extensive information related to keywords in general and to those on your site in particular.

Overall, there is a lot of noise and a seemingly infinite amount of information about keywords available. You need a practical, effective and fairly comprehensive approach to keyword research if you want your site or business to be successful.

This Deep Insight Paper makes the infinite finite for you by highlighting the important information that will help your site succeed.

We will cover the following topics related to this critical ecommerce component:

1. What are the objectives of keyword research?
2. What is a keyword and why should you target long-tail keywords?
3. How can you leverage keyword research to grow revenues and market your products?
4. A structured framework for keyword management
5. Keyword-related metrics that you must monitor

What are the Objectives of Keyword Research?

A systematic and strategic keyword research effort should have the following results:

a. Identify a small but effective set of keywords (up to 50) relevant to your site.
b. Identify your online business' major competition.
c. Identify potential synergistic partners for your online business.
d. Identify new potential customer segments and confirm already-existing ones.

The first goal of keyword research should be to identify about 50 keywords relevant to your site. Once chosen, your keywords should be blended into your content. This includes marketing, blog posting, webpage building, and customer emails. Your primary objective is to capture the top spot in Google search results for your top 4 or 5 keywords.

As you perform keyword research, you will discover other websites that rank highly for the keywords you wish to target. List the top 5 sites that Google returns for these words. Then, find out if they are your competitors or potential partners.

For example, if your online business sells travel insurance, you may discover other banks, insurance companies, brokerage firms, etc. offering insurance similar to yours. These are your competitors.

Analyzing the top 4 or 5 competitors' sites will give you key information such as:

- What their flagship products are
- Which keywords they rank highly for
- Whether their site is well-optimized for keywords
- What kind of content they have
- Whether you may be able to displace them, or whether you would need to purchase advertisements to achieve results

As you can see, you can gather a lot of intelligence from keyword research.

In addition to competitors, you may also find potential partners. Searching for keywords for a travel insurance site, for example, you may also discover universities, travel agencies, non-profit government bodies or even church groups with websites that rank highly for those keywords.

These websites can be your partners. They may be willing to send your insurance product to their own customers (students, government workers, church members, etc.).

Their customer wins because they do not have to shop elsewhere. An institution they trust has vetted your product and clearly feels confident about sending it along with their own offerings. As a result, this customer automatically trusts your product.

This type of relationship is described in detail in DI-2014-05 – Strategically Listing your Info-Product for Maximizing Revenue.

In conclusion, the main objectives of keyword research are:

1. Increase traffic to the most important (high conversion) landing pages.
2. Increase high-potential customer traffic to the site.
3. Convert this increased traffic into paying customers and increased revenue.
4. Increase the amount of time people spend on your sale pages.
5. Identify competition based on your target keywords.
6. Identify synergistic partners based on your target keywords.

Together, these objectives will lead to higher revenue.

What is a Keyword and Why should you Target Long-tail Keywords?

A keyword is a word, a phrase or even a question that people input when searching for information online.

(Note: For the purpose of this paper, **keyword**, **focus keyword** and **search term** all mean the same thing.)

Information on the internet is organized around keywords. Traffic for webpages, blog posts, product descriptions, social media, etc. is all driven by keywords. Google, Bing and Yahoo! store websites and pages on their databases in entries indexed using keywords.

Documentum (a document database and workflow tool), Outlook (Microsoft's email tool), SAP Solution Manager (SAP's project management tool), Google search, most corporate websites -- all of these contain search capabilities based on keywords.

FACT √ **FACT: The importance of strategic keyword research cannot be exaggerated!**

In this paper, we focus on keywords as they apply to Google search. After all, 67% of online searches are performed on Google. (Source: http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Press-Releases/2013/8/comScore-Releases-July-2013-US-Search-Engine-Rankings)

Long-tail keywords

The term "long-tail" comes from statistics. Where there are extreme values, there are fewer data points. The distribution of most data, displayed on a chart, creates the appearance of tapering off at the end; a "tail."

For each additional keyword added to a keyword phrase, there is a smaller number of people searching for that specific combination of words.

Check out http://www.wordtracker.com/blog/introduction-to-long-tail-keywords for a good description on long-tail keywords.

The presence of a long tail for a particular keyword indicates that there is a group of people who are looking for very specific information. This is your target group. These are not casual surfers, but high-potential customers.

Targeting long-tail keywords has the following benefits:

- Those searching for the long-tail keyword are more likely to be your potential customer.
- Search engines can display results more accurately for long-tail keywords. Consequently, you can expect users to engage more with the sites returned from these searches.
- There is less competition for long-tail keywords.
- Your site will stay high in the rankings for a longer time, relative to shorter keywords.

Let's look at an example:

Of the following two people, who would be more likely to purchase a car?

1. The person who searches for "lease return sportback Audi A3"
2. Or the person who searches for "Audi A3"?

The person in scenario (1) above, who has chosen a long-tail keyword, is clearly is on a mission. He or she is looking for information on a specific make, model and type of car. They are seriously looking to buy such a car or they have some other strong interest in it.

Far fewer people will search for the keyword in (1) than in (2). But the long-tail keyword searchers will be high-potential customers; they are taking the trouble to seek out very specific information in order to take an action and resolve some problem they have.

Therefore, if you have a webpage or blog post designed for that exact keyword – bingo, you have a high-potential customer. Target this audience by providing solid content, valuable information and well-designed products and services.

INSIGHT: The average number of words per query is 4!

(Source: https://www.beussery.com/blog/index.php/2008/02/google-average-number-of-words-per-query-have-increased/)

How can you Leverage Keyword Research to Grow Revenue and Market your Products?

As previously discussed, the primary goal of solid keyword research is the identification of a set of highly potent keywords for which your site ranks at the top of page 1 of Google search results.

In addition, strategically targeting keywords over time will yield the following benefits:

1. You can find out which keywords yield the most traffic.
2. You can develop a profile of the customers who spend the most time on your cornerstone blog posts and then make their way to your sales page.
3. Google Analytics will tell you which pages perform well, and which do not, for specific keywords.
4. Depending on the difficulty in ranking for a specific keyword, you can gauge the intensity of competition for that keyword. Higher intensity = greater revenue potential.
5. By obtaining a high rank in Google for a keyword, you can help a partner website increase their sales. When their sales increase, yours will too.

Let's look at each of the five benefits in more detail:

1. Google Analytics allows you to determine which keyword phrase yields the most traffic. Once you set the specific period for analysis (under Behavior), you can find out whether social media, website, advertisements, or other avenues are bringing the most traffic to your site.

   As a result of this information, you can choose to either improve content on the traffic-bringing pages or work on strengthening the content on the weaker traffic sources. You may want to do both. You can also add new sources, such as offline or pay-per-click advertisements.
2. Under Customer Behavior in Google Analytics, you can get information related to the following:

   - Operating system
   - Device used to access your site
   - Country
   - Age group
   - Male/Female

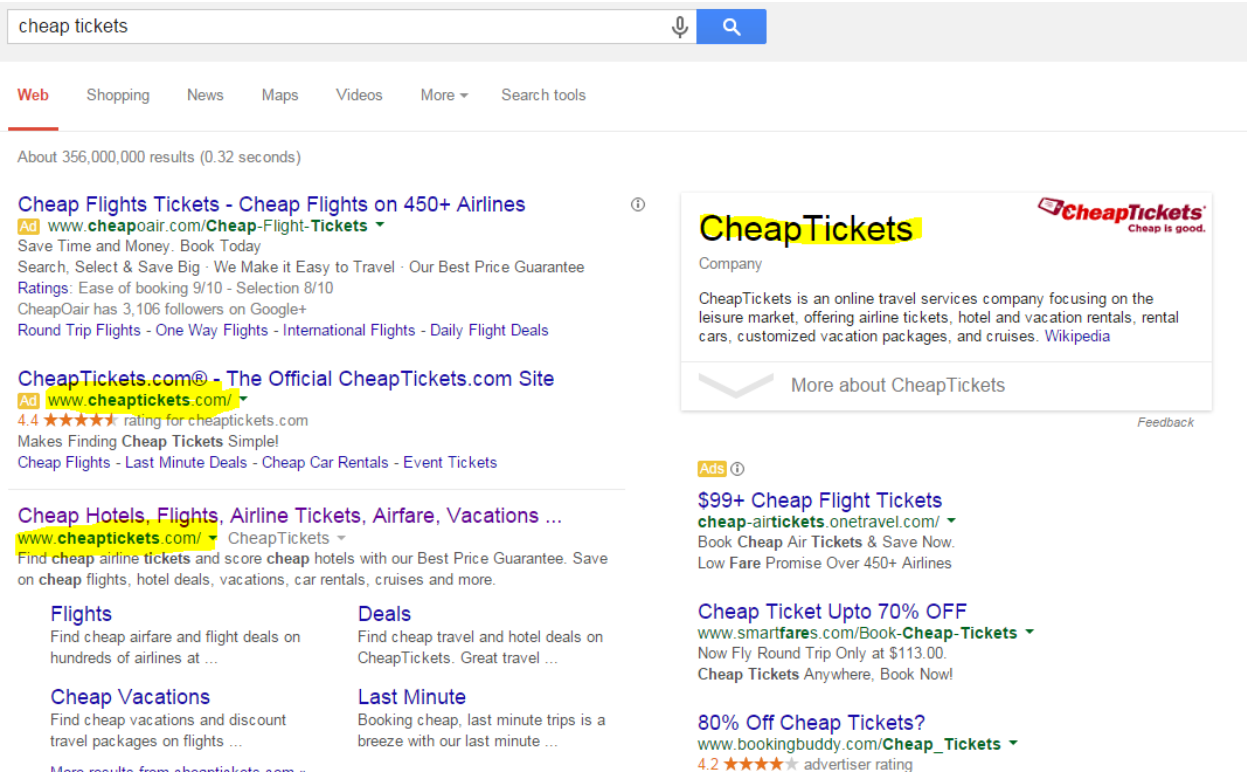
3. Google Analytics will tell you which pages perform well, and which do not, for specific keywords.

   Once you identify a keyword for which you want to improve your page or post rankings and increase traffic, take a closer look at the data related to that keyword. Identify the posts and pages written with this keyword in mind. Perform A/B testing on those. Get very specific details on each part of the page (such as header words, sidebar content, positioning of advertisements, call-to-action buttons, etc.) and improve it.

   Google in-page analytics will review each area of the page and the percentage of clicks. This will help you take more targeted actions and lead to higher response to your calls-to-action, ultimately increasing revenue.
4. Sometimes you will find it very difficult to capture top-ranking spots for certain keywords. Weight loss, dating, jobs, and hotel booking are a few examples of extremely popular keywords. It is difficult to rank highly for these terms, simply because the competition is very intense.

   In some cases, you will also find that your keyword is embedded in the domain of your competitor. This is usually very difficult to beat, but a good way around it is to include the keyword in the URL for your sales page or blog post. You can also purchase pay-per-click (ppc) advertisement for that keyword.

   Check out the following image. Cheap Tickets has captured the top “area” on Google’s Page 1 for the keyword “cheap tickets.” Also note how cheapoair.com has used the ppc advertisement route to one-up Cheap Tickets for this keyword.



5. If you team up with a partner site that can market your product, then in many ways you actually double your opportunity to attract search engine traffic. A high rank in Google will obviously yield the traffic that your site deserves. Your partner's high-ranking site will get its own share of traffic. As that traffic is converted into paid customers for the partner site, your product will sell as well.

   Consider the example of travel insurance. Let's assume your site ranks number 3 on page 1 in Google search results. You will get your share of traffic, and at the right conversion rate, proportional revenues will accrue. Let's call your revenue *x*.

   Now assume that you have a tie up with a university that draws overseas visitors. You are offering discounted student insurance, which is packaged with admission to the university.

When the university starts ranking highly in Google search (especially during admissions season), their traffic will result in sales for your site. If the revenue of these sales is *y*, then a synergistic partnership will yield *x* + *y* sales.

A Structured Framework for Keyword Management

The following is a four-step framework for effective keyword management:

1. Collect appropriate and relevant keywords.
2. Analyze keywords for competitiveness, search volume and revenue potential.
3. Shortlist about 50 keywords (for a small site) and add notations for each.
4. Monitor your ranking for each keyword on a monthly basis and adjust your strategy accordingly.

To identify and gather keywords relevant to your site you must go beyond the obvious:

a. Identify 3-5 main keywords based on your ecommerce or blog site topic. One of these must be embedded in your domain name, as in Cheaptickets.com.

b. Use Google suggest (a.k.a. auto complete) and review the keywords indicated by "Searches related to." You can also use Google Keyword Planner tool or other software in order to add to your list in this manner. Note: Access the Google Keyword Planner tool through your Google Adwords account. A list of free and paid keyword tools is available here: http://searchenginewatch.com/sew/how-to/2183899/paid-subscriptionbased-keyword-research-tools

c. Put pen to paper and brainstorm. Come up with other related keywords that people would realistically be looking for. It is important to keep your target customer segment in mind. If you have multiple segments that your product or site caters to, then you need separate lists.

d. Think like the customer. What did they do before they came to your site and where do they want to go after they visit it? Another way to find keywords is to observe yourself as you look for information online. What are the alternatives you think of? How do you re-word your search until you get what you are looking for?

   A few weeks ago I was looking for a panic or alarm device that would trigger text messages or phone calls to a previously specified number. I started off with "personal alarm", then tried a variety of synonyms and finally found what I was looking for with "emergency medical alert system." The long-tail keyword yielded very close matches to what I was looking for. Had I been a casual surfer, I would

not have made the effort to go up to four words, but instead given up after the first few tries with one or two words.

INSIGHT: Online surfers who are more likely to purchase will deploy long-tail keywords.

e. Visit some of your favorite blog posts and check out the advertisements. You can also visit competitor sites and check out theirs. These advertisements are automatically inserted by Google based on a number of factors including keywords, site topic, and visitor behavior.

   Google, Amazon, and other major online companies have massive amounts of intelligence about what visitors did (e.g., visited a site, made a purchase, etc.) before they visited a particular site. This is "backward-looking" information. Now they are building algorithms to predict what they will do next, or "forward-looking" predictive analytics.

   As a result, advertisements are becoming increasingly "predictive" in nature. You can utilize this information to identify high-potential keywords for your site or products.

At the end of this first phase of your framework, you should come up with about 30 related keywords for each of the 3-5 top keywords, meaning that you should have between roughly 90 and 150 related keywords overall. The next phases will help you whittle these down to about 50 target keywords for your site or product.

Now, for each of the 150 or so keywords, you need to find 3 key attributes:

a. **Search volume**. Google Adwords and the Keyword Planner Tool can help provide this information. There are also other tools in the market that help with this analysis. I have purchased a few such tools, but have settled on Market Samurai, which effectively does everything all in one place.
b. **Search trend**. Obviously, the trend should be upwards. Otherwise, you risk optimizing your site for a shrinking market.
c. **Revenue potential**. The higher the cost per click or cost per impression, the higher the revenue potential. While "free downloads" give you lots of searches

and high trends, you should not even consider the keyword unless there is revenue potential.

The following activities will help you come up with an effective list of 50 or so keywords, sufficient for a small site (< $100,000 annual revenue):

a. After compiling your list of ~150 keywords, rank the list in descending order of revenue potential and extract the top 5 keywords. Add notes to each of the 50 or so keywords. These should indicate competition level, partnership possibilities, site rankings, and the strategy for capturing each keyword.
b. Find out where your site ranks in Google for these keywords. Mark this as a baseline.
c. For the top 5 core keywords, build killer blog posts, add catchy images, create video blogs, wikipages and a landing page on your site. Completely capture the top 3 positions in Google search.

   The free Deep Insight Paper 2014-DI-01 covers this in detail. It explains how to utilize search engine optimization to make your pages rank higher in Google search results.
d. For the core keywords, you must also build a strategy for building external links from highly reputed sites, such as .edu, .gov and .org sites.

Monitor keyword ranking and performance, at least monthly:

a. Download keyword performance from Google Webmaster Tools for your final 50 list and monitor this list on a monthly basis.
b. Check the traffic on your site using Google Analytics and keep track of monthly changes.
c. Monitor the first 2-3 pages of Google search for each of your core keywords and scrutinize the nature of sites that are ranking there. Pay attention to other businesses that you may want to partner with.
d. Once a month, audit your site in Google Webmaster Tools to ensure that there are no new sites sending spam links.

INSIGHT: Your objective should be to have your key pages (landing, product sales and cornerstone blog post) show up within the first ten results whenever someone searches for your target keywords.

Strategically targeted keywords should satisfy the following conditions:

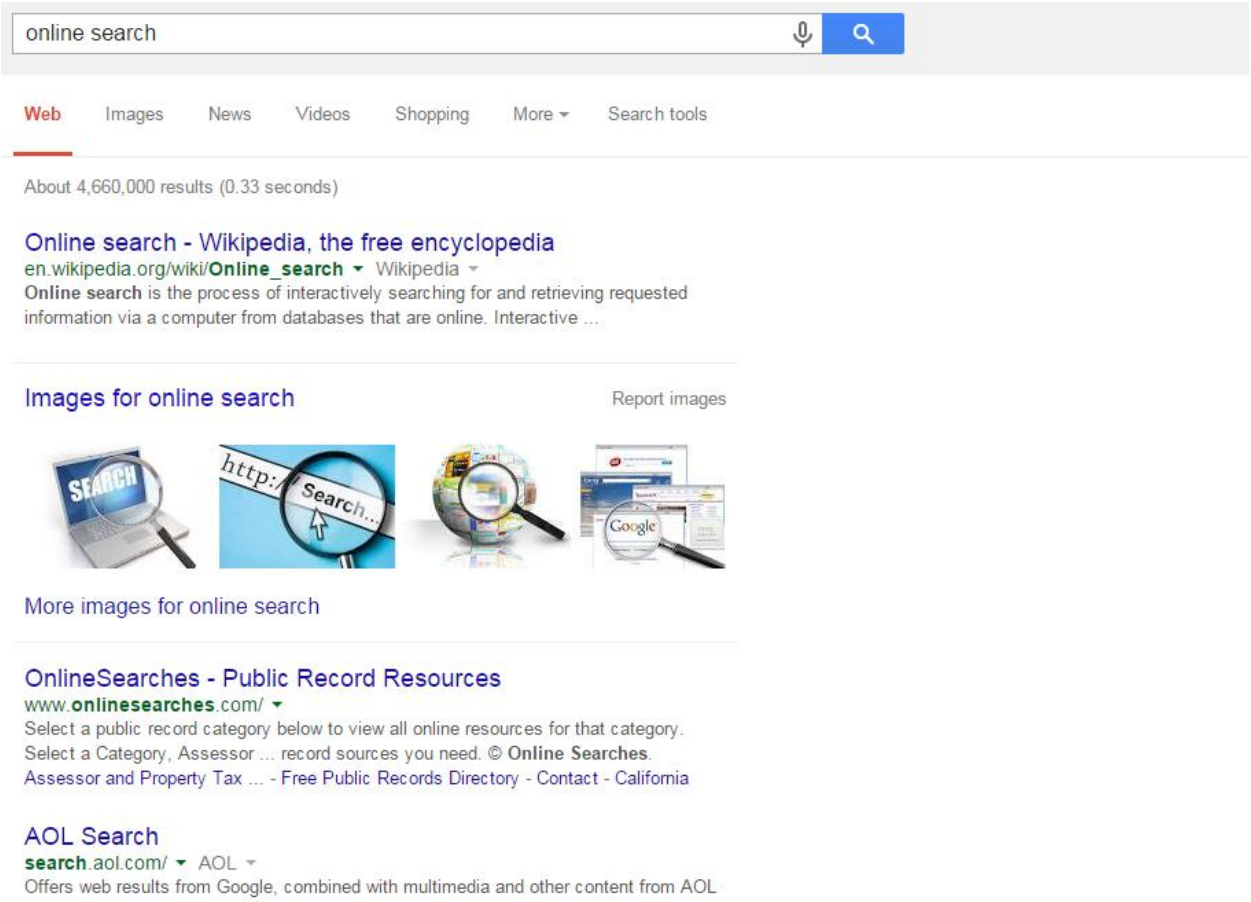
1. Have a large number of monthly searches – both global and local.
2. Be something that the online visitor is looking for pay for, e.g. student medical insurance in the UK or online search training.

For these keywords take the following approach:

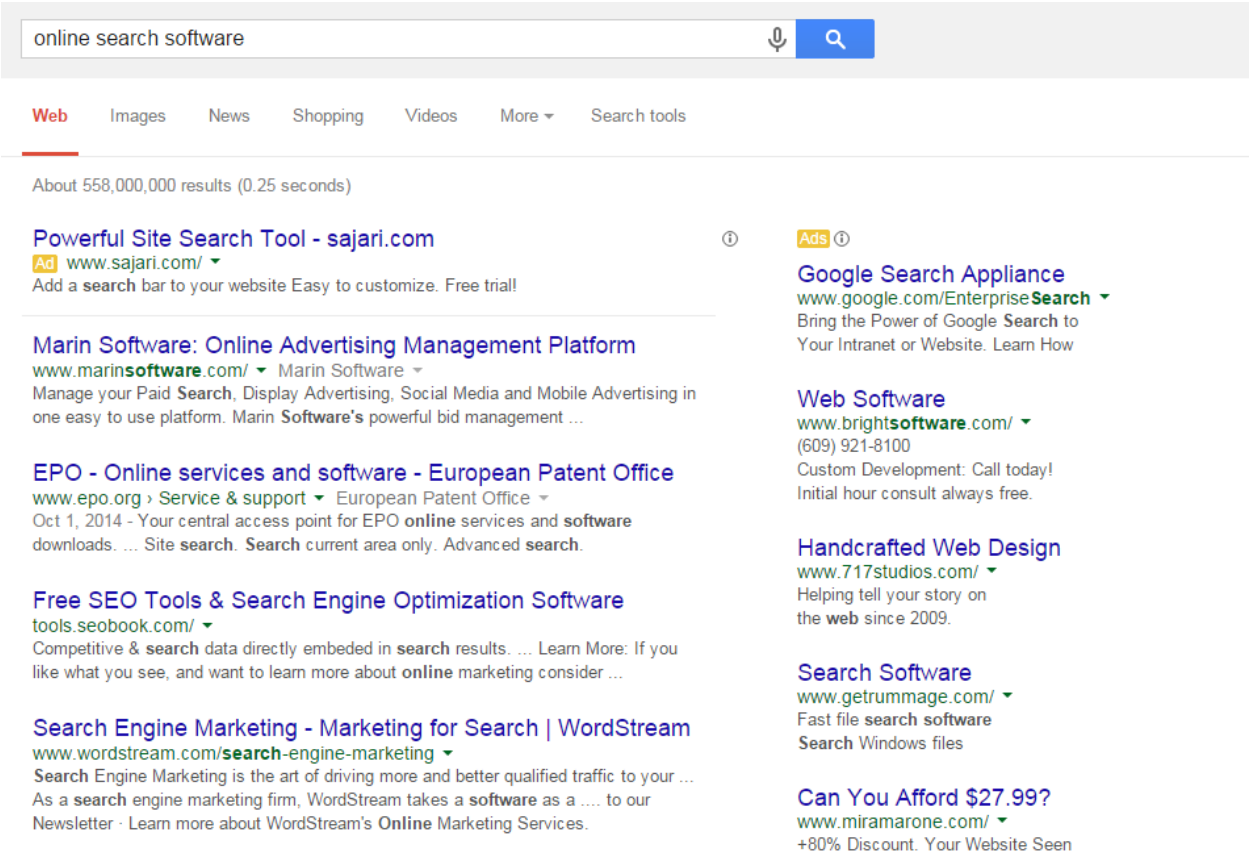
a. Create a keyword-specific blog post targeting each keyword. This blog post should draw a large number of online visitors, retain their interest and proceed to send them to other valuable pages, either within your site or outside of it.
b. Build multiple landing pages targeting specific keywords associated with different customer segments. These pages should contain specific, targeted messages tailored to those respective segments. For example, if you have a travel insurance site, for students you want to focus on covering a cash emergency, for the business traveler you want to focus on ease of completing formalities and for seniors, you will want to address a possible emergency medical situation.
c. If your budget allows, insert a Google advertisement for a selected keyword. Only do this for the most important keywords, i.e., for keywords where nothing less than the first three positions in Google search results is targeted. Reserve advertisements for keywords for which your competitors have unquestionably captured the top spot.
d. Direct a burst of traffic to a specific landing page on your site during a specific time of the year. For example, just before an academic season starts, you would expect students to complete their admission formalities and plan travel to the country where they are going to study. Perhaps this is the time when they will check out student travel insurance. That's when you increase the buzz on social media and your student landing page, using your shortlisted keywords.

Let's take another example using the term "online search".

For this term, Google returns about 4.7 million sites in about 0.33 seconds. Examine the image on the following page and notice that there are no advertisements on this page. This tells us that the keyword does not have "commercial" potential.



Now let's try "online search software."

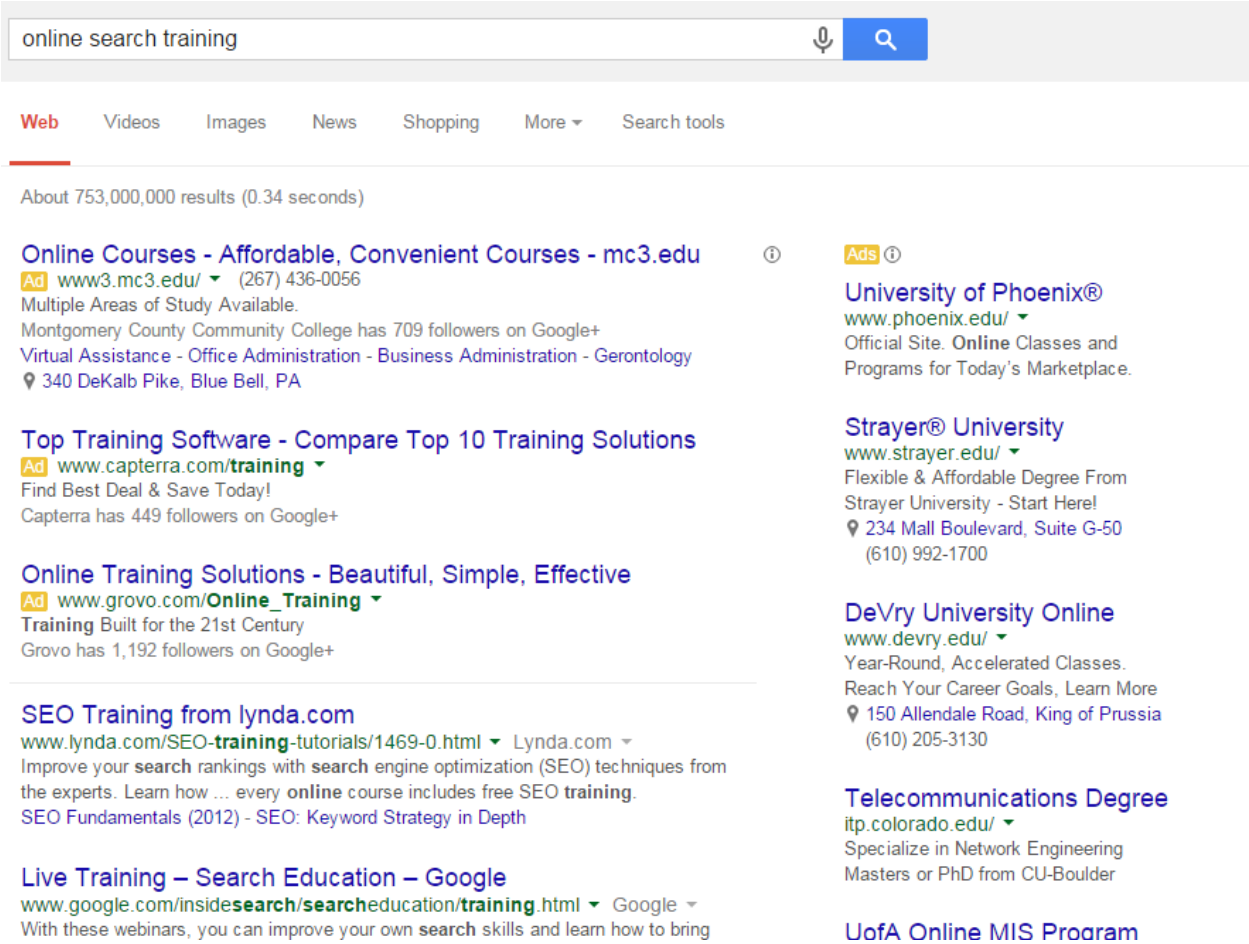


We get 558 million sites for the keyword “online search software” compared to only 4.6 million sites for “online search”.

Note that 558 million is not the number of occurrences of the keyword in the various sites, but the actual number of webpages indexed in Google for this keyword. As you can see, an exponentially larger number of sites chose to spend time, money, and effort to be indexed and ranked highly for the keyword “online search software” rather than simply for “online search.”

This keyword has attracted advertisements as well, indicating its high commercial potential.

Next, let's check out "online search training."



Even page 2 of the search results contains advertisements both above the search results and on the side as well! And with 753 million sites competing for "online search training", compared to 558 million for "online search software", the term "training" seems to have more commercial potential than "software."

If your business is focused on online search training, then you must target "online search training" rather than simply "online search."

Keyword-related Metrics that you must Monitor

What can a Google keyword search tell you?

1. The number of sites indexed for that keyword in the Google database. This can also be interpreted as the competition -- how many sites are catering to the keyword (minus duplicates).
2. The time taken by Google to return the results. The less time, the more results.
3. The nature of high-ranking sites. This will not only give you an idea of the competition for your keyword, but also the intensity.
4. As previously discussed, you may also find partners for your product or service based on the search results for your keyword.
5. The commercial value of the keyword, based on advertisements.
6. Synonyms of the keyword. What other “flavors” of the keyword can help you capture the keyword unquestionably?

Google Analytics provides more information than you will know what to do with. The Google Keyword Planner Tool also provides tons of information related to keywords. Google Webmaster Tools provides a list of the keywords on your site along with the clicks and the average search result rank for each keyword.

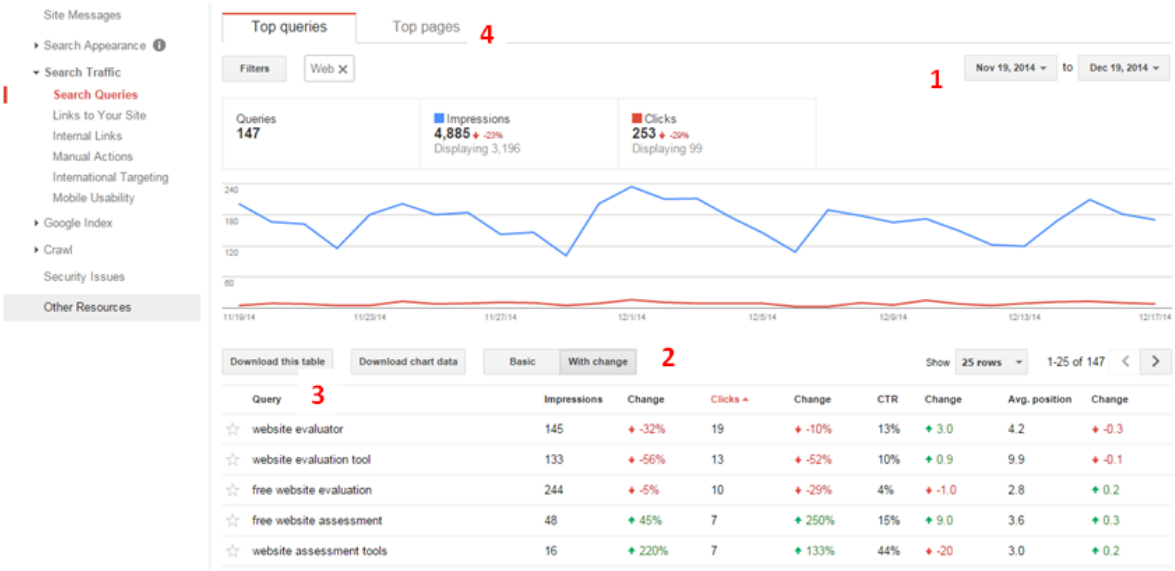
The questions of how to get to higher traffic through SEO, how to get more targeted traffic, and how to get higher revenues (better converting sales pages) are covered in other Deep Insight Papers.

As we have briefly covered, the following metrics must be put in place for each keyword and monitored periodically:

1. Search results position for each keyword and upward/downward movement from the previous month.
2. Position of site pages and posts (page rankings) for each of the target keywords.
3. Number of clicks, trends for each keyword and each page (particularly your cornerstone posts and key landing pages).

Google Webmaster Tools provides this information. Once you log into Google Webmaster Tools, navigate to Search Traffic and then click on Search Queries.

You will get a page with information as shown in the image below:



The first thing to do is to set the correct period for analysis. You may want to take a look at the month that just passed.

Second, click the box that says “with change.” This will give you the change, i.e. upward or downward movement, for each keyword.

You can download this table to Excel or save it as a Google doc. This will allow you to perform your analysis, filtering, sorting, and other functions offline.

You can also come back to Google Webmaster Tools and do the same for each of your pages (indicated in the image above with a “4”).

As you look at the information downloaded from Google, you can do a few things with it:

a. Find out which keywords have been unquestionably captured – i.e., the top spot stays the same, with no downward change over time.
b. Find out which keywords you seem to be slipping on. Once you have identified them, create a strategy to improve rankings for the page in question or for the keyword overall. Strategies may include better SEO, additional images, a ppc campaign, additional social media presence, adding a Wikipedia page, etc.

c. You must examine the impressions and clicks for each keyword. Impressions are good, as they indicate visitor flow, but clicks must increase along with impressions. Upward movement in impressions, but downward movement in clicks for the same keyword will indicate that people are visiting that page or post for that keyword, but are not doing anything else on the site.
d. Look into your mailing list manager and payment gateway (such as PayPal) in order to discover the number of clicks that resulted in a purchase. This topic will be discussed further in a future Deep Insight Paper.

Conclusion:

A solid keyword strategy is the key to systematically capturing a larger share of your online market and increasing your revenues. Keyword strategy supported by good SEO not only helps increase revenue, but also allows you to identify both synergistic partners and your competition.

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If there is a topic that you would like to see addressed in a Deep Insight Paper, please send it to deepinsight@blogsuccess.com.