Keyword Research and Selection

The Definitive Guide to Gathering, Sorting and Organizing Your Keywords into a High-Performance SEO Campaign

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Introduction: Why Keyword Research is Important

Keyword research is one of the most crucial aspects of a successful search engine optimization and marketing campaign. Proper keyword research and selection helps establish an effective foundation for most of your online marketing efforts. The keywords you choose will power your search engine optimization, sponsored ad campaigns, link building campaigns, press releases and more. Before you begin any of these marketing efforts you must have already determined what core terms your site will be built upon and what keywords will fuel your online marketing efforts.

Keyword research should be the first step in any process that involves optimizing and marketing your website through the search engines. I would say keyword research is the most important part of the process, yet often one that is glossed over as either largely unimportant, or not important enough to spend enough time doing effectively.

Many site owners get caught up in the belief that if they just achieve any #1 ranking then visitors will begin flocking to their site. This may be true if your #1 ranked search term is actively searched and is relevant to your site or page which it leads to. If not—if you don’t research your keywords properly—all the top rankings in the world won’t drive or keep the best visitors to your site. In regards to getting and maintaining top listings, keep this in mind: all search terms are not created equal.

You’ll want to note that there is a big difference between a marketing campaign that delivers a lot of traffic to your site and one that delivers relevant traffic to your site. More often than not, sites that generate smaller amounts of targeted traffic see a better return on investment than sites that generate larger amounts of untargeted traffic.

Identifying and selecting the correct keyword phrases to optimize and promote your site with is important, time consuming and sometimes it’s even difficult. Many people often get hung up on the wrong keywords based on incomplete data or not thinking through each keyword carefully. If keyword research is not performed with the correct focus in the correct areas you may find you have a whole mess of phrases to target but no clear picture on the value of those phrases or their ability to drive targeted traffic.

What to Expect from this Document

There are many articles on keyword research freely available on the web. Many of these articles focus on uncovering keyword competition in order to determine if certain keywords are worth the time and investment. While these measures are useful and have their place, this document will provide a different perspective on keyword research and selection.
While some keywords are simply too far out of reach for top rankings in a relatively short period of time, I don’t believe *any* keyword is out of bounds or unattainable provided the right amount of effort to achieve a top ranking for that keyword is feasible.

While you should always consider investment (how much it’ll cost in time and money to overtake the competition) versus reward (how much targeted traffic and new sales it will bring in) a well structured campaign, built upon solid keyword research and organization, will return immediate results with the attainable keyword phrases while also building the foundation for success with what others might consider to be unattainable keywords. By balancing the two an investment in time is not necessarily going to cost an unreturned monetary investment, even in the short-term. The results achieved on the “lesser” keywords pave the way for the “greater” keywords.

I don’t want to leave you with the implication that other keyword research methods and statistics are not relevant or useful. They are. Many of the articles written on the topic of keyword research is excellent information and should be taken into consideration right along with the information provided here as well. What I want to provide is a more complete picture of the processes involved in finding and selecting good keywords while looking at what matters most for a successful campaign. The more information you have the better decisions you’ll make. Keyword selection is one of those decisions that will affect your optimization campaign forever.

This document will be broken down into three sections:

**Gathering Keywords:** I plan to avoid a lot of the technical details in the gathering process but will mention several tools available. This paper assumes that you already have a strong knowledge of where to go to research your keywords and are ready to go in-depth into the strategy behind the gathering process.

**Sorting & Selecting Keywords:** Pouring through and selecting keywords may seem like a no-brainer for anybody who has in-depth knowledge of their industry, but this process requires much more than simply taking an inventory of what you know. It is important to put yourself in the mind of the searcher in order to truly discover which keywords are relevant *and* most important.

**Organizing Keywords:** How you organize your keywords can make or break or optimization campaign before it really begins. We’ll analyze this process and study how best to achieve great search engine rankings.

One final note, this document is largely new material but does contain information and articles pulled directly from other articles I have written on this subject. Parts of this “old” information has been edited and updated, while other parts remain intact as being pretty much timeless. If some of this sounds familiar, this would be why.
Part I: Gathering Keywords

Finding Core Terms

When most people perform keyword research they often start by looking for keywords people would use when searching on one of the search engines. It makes sense, right? There is not necessarily anything wrong with this approach, however I prefer to take a more organized path through the keyword research process.

When I start the gathering process, instead of looking for keywords or keyword phrases, I look for keyword themes or core terms. What you call them doesn’t matter as much as what they are. Core terms are unique one-, two- or three-word phrases from which many other keywords will stem from.

Here are some examples of core terms for a site that sells duffel bags:

- Duffel bag
- Sports bag
- Wholesale bag
- Wheeled bag
- Travel bag

In actuality, the word ‘bag’ would be the true core term, but it’s so broad that there is no legitimate reason to optimize for it. Not only would it be near impossible, but if rankings were achieved the percentage of the targeted traffic it produced (i.e. searchers actually interested in their products) would be incredibly low. A top ranking for this keyword still might produce a lot of sales, but at the same time produce enough drain on the resources to bring in a very low, and possibly negative, return on investment (ROI).

Of the terms above, any and all of these can actually refer to the same product, and many of these core terms could be combined to produce valid keyword phrases. For example, someone might be looking for a ‘wheeled sports bag,’ or a ‘wholesale travel bag,’ or even a ‘wheeled sports travel bag at wholesale prices!’ But none of this matters at this stage because we simply want to work with the basic core terms and not full keyword/search phrases.

Example: Discovering Core Themes

1) Write down the purpose(s) of the website as well as a detailed description of the scope of the website in relation to its industry/subject/service, etc.
2) Determine an umbrella phrase that covers the entire scope of the site; the technique is to strive for the greatest specificity without excluding any topics that are covered by the site. This umbrella phrase is the website Theme.

Consider a website that offers detailed information on 1965-1975 Ford Mustangs, 1965-1975 Chevy Camaros and 1968-1975 Dodge Chargers. This website has a couple of reasonable options. At the broader end of the spectrum “American Cars” or “Classic Cars” could be used. Better still would be “Classic American Cars”. Even better than that would be “Classic American Muscle Cars”.

However if in addition to the cars above the website also specialized in information on Dodge Neons, then the theme of the website is diluted in such a way that now only “American Cars” applies as a theme.

**Researching Core Terms**

The first step in finding all your core terms is to go to the site itself. Even if you’re dealing with your own site you need to review it intently. It’s common use unique terminology in the copy that won’t pop into your mind if you’re just simply brainstorming. Rummaging through your title, keyword tags, description tags, text, navigation links and products helps you find and identify all of the site’s main themes. Go page by page scanning each of these areas. Looking through your pages thoroughly should produce a gold mine of core terms.

Anytime you find a core term, jot it down. We use a spreadsheet to document all of these which is provided [here as an additional download](#) to this document. Remember that core terms should be unique two- or three-word phrases. Don’t jot down ‘wholesale sports bag’ as a core term because all three of those words are covered with the two core terms ‘wholesale bag’ and ‘sports bag’. Also, don’t worry about word order or plurals, singulars or other stemmed variations either, as those will all be dug up once we get past the core terms research phase.

After you have exhausted your site, do the same thing with your competitor’s site(s). Many core terms will be specific to certain sites, depending on what they offer, so only keep record of those that relate to you and your products or services. Some of the terms you find may be ambiguous as to what the searcher is looking for. When in doubt add it to your list, you can
always go back and eliminate it later. On the other hand, any keyword that obviously doesn’t relate specifically for your site should be discarded.

Note: You might want to try and capture traffic from searchers looking for a specific product of a competitor which you don’t offer. For legal reasons this needs to be done with great care. If you wish to capture these keywords record them separately from the core terms relevant to your site.

Before concluding your core term research be sure to exhaust the following resources:

- Words you feel people would type in to find the website, its product/service, etc.
- What questions your visitors will be asking
- What visitors are trying to accomplish
- Audience needs: phrases that describe problems which are addressed by website
- Industry glossaries and reference materials
- Thesauri, taxonomies and ontologies
- Websites listed in related categories of the Yahoo! Directory
- Geography dependent search phrases

The next step is to start digging through your preferred keyword research software. Both Wordtracker and Keyword Discovery have features that allow you to search for these core terms.

In WordTracker it is Step 1 when you start a new project. The left side of the screen lets you search for “related keywords”. Type in a keyword here and the results below give words that appear to be closely related to what you were looking for.

If you use Keyword Discovery, go to advanced search and select Related or Fuzzy. Both of these should give you additional lists of core terms.

When using either of these programs, plug in some of the core terms you already found and scan through those results for additional terms that you hadn’t thought of or added to your list. Many of the core terms will end up producing the same, or similar, results, but you’ll often find one or two (or perhaps more) new core terms with each search. Don’t neglect these nuggets of gold. You’ll discover many times that the results will provide phrases which contain a new core term. For example, you might find ‘waterproof wheeled bag’. ‘Wheeled bag’ is already on our list, but ‘waterproof bag’ or even ‘water proof bag’ isn’t. This gives us a new core term (or two, depending if you want to keep ‘water proof’ and ‘waterproof’ separate) to add to our list.

Server logs also provide a wealth of keyword information. Here you will find keywords already being used to drive people to your site. Server logs often show keywords that you won’t find from other sources, but largely low volume/high converting phrases. It is the temptation of many to consider keywords found in server logs to be more valuable than

Research Tip
When researching your competition for a given keyword make sure you take a look at your top competitor’s back-link profile. This can give you an idea of the time investment and link building effort that may be required to be successful.
others. This isn’t necessarily true. Keywords used by searchers and captured in these logs only show how people are currently finding your site but don’t show you many dozens or hundreds of other keywords that people are not finding you with because of poor positioning on the search engines. In this stage we are simply gathering keywords and not rating them in anyway.

You can also use the keyword research tools provided by both Google and Yahoo to find good core terms.

Hint: Try Google Suggest, Google Sets and Google Web Search using the tilde operator.

Another great research tool is www.l3xicon.com. Running a core term search through L3xicon provides results showing related words, definitions and even related web pages. It’s the related words we are most concerned about, and these results come in two sections, both can provide useful information.

Punch in core terms already on your list just like you did with WordTracker or Keyword Discovery to see what comes up. Look for any new unique core terms that can be added to your list.

**Sorting Core Terms**

With any of the research methods mentioned above you will often get a lot of junk. Other times you’ll find some excellent core terms you can use. But most of the time you’ll find something in between. For instance searching L3xicon for ‘travel bag’ gives us ‘weekender travel bag’ and ‘leather travel bag’, among other things. From this we could consider ‘weekender bag’ and ‘leather bag’ as new core terms. Later we’ll probably find out that there are not many searches for ‘weekender bag’, if any at all, but we don’t need to worry abut that now.

Pulling core terms like this works with whatever research method or tool you are using. You quickly learn to see through the search phrases and find the unique two- or three- word core terms that you add to your growing list. Just keep punching in core terms that you found from your website, your competitor’s websites and then do the same with the core terms you’ve found with your keyword research tool. This will help you find all possibly relevant core terms.

Actually, you will probably find yourself finding new core terms throughout the research process and even well into the optimization of your site. That’s good. Keep your mind working and with every new core term discovered, just keep adding it to your core term spreadsheet. But don’t move forward to the next phase too soon! The last thing you want is to move forward with optimization having neglected some absolutely essential core terms.

In our research for ‘duffel bag’ keywords we found over 36 core terms.

- duffelbag
- dufflebag
- duffel bag
- fannypack
- sports bag
- travel bags
You might find more or even less than this depending on your industry and how many different ways there are to search for the same thing. Don’t worry about the size of your core term list, for some clients we find well over 100 core terms! You can never find too many keywords. Of the terms above not all of them will actually end up giving us good search phrases and others may end up being combined. These determinations will be made later in the process.

Once you are comfortable with your list you want to look through and select a handful of core terms which you feel are the most important to your business success. A few things you want to consider before determining what your most important core terms are:

**Search Volume:** Use Wordtracker or Keyword discovery to find the search volume of your core terms. (Search volume is how often the phrase is searched daily, monthly or yearly). Those with the highest search volume should probably be given more importance over those with low search volume, provided they are also relevant.

**Target Audience:** Sometimes a core term may get fewer searches but, if ranked well, would produce a higher number of targeted visitors, resulting in more sales. Any core term that you feel targets your audience better than others should be considered important.

**Profit:** Some core terms may be able to bring you a higher profit margin than others. For example, if you get more from the sale of a first aid bag than a garment bag, then you might want to consider ‘first aid bag’ to be a more important core term.

**Meet Demand:** Your ability to meet demand should also play into your decision in choosing which core terms are most important. If you currently can’t sufficiently fulfill a large number of orders for a particular product or service then it’s probably best to choose other terms until you are better equipped.

Don’t make your decision based on the fact that you don’t sell a lot of something right now. There very well might be a high demand (and high profits) on particular searches but you simply are not selling any because you’re not positioned on the search engines for those terms.
**Finding Search Phrases**

Searching for your keyword phrases is probably one of the easiest, but possibly most time consuming part of the keyword research process. But getting too hasty here may ultimately lead to more problems later on. During this phase you may end up combining, splitting or even removing core terms. You’ll want to pay attention as you go along to avoid additional and unnecessary work later.

Search phrases differ from core terms in that every search phrase is a variation on the core term itself. For example, if your core term is ‘sports bag’ your research will produce a number of search phrases such as ‘personalized sports bag,’ ‘sports duffel bag,’ ‘sports golf bag’ and ‘sports bag supplies,’ etc.

Finding your search phrases is what WordTracker and Keyword Discovery help you do best. Simply search for any core term and they give you all the various search phrases that contain the words in that term. Make sure you’re searching for both plurals and singualars here (‘sports bag’ and ‘sports bags’) in order to get the most comprehensive list.

Don’t spend too much time analyzing each phrase here because we’ll do that in later phases and we don’t want to get bogged down in that aspect here. Highly popular core terms with lots of related search phrases can take a good deal of time to go through. If you try and stop and consider each term individually it’s only going to add more time to an already lengthy process. You’re better off adding any term that, at a quick glance, appears relevant and then remove it later in the sorting process. You’ll learn to quickly scan the list of search terms to be able to remove obvious junk such as ‘sports bed in a bag’, or ‘buffalo bills sports bag’ if you don’t offer that type of bag specifically.

Depending on your keywords, a search for a core term may produce results rating from 0 to 1000 keyword phrases. Obviously if it produces zero then that core term can be ditched, or maybe set aside for a day if/when that becomes a popular search phrase. If you’ve broken down your core terms correctly you will usually get a list between 10-300 keyword phrases returned, but again, this varies by industry and term. Here are some guidelines on when to split and when to combine your core terms.

*When to Combine:* If you get less than 10 good keyword phrases from a core term search then you might want to look at combining this with another. If you do, you should try to combine it only with another closely related core term that also gets few results. On our duffel bag research we had both ‘duffelbag’ and ‘dufflebag’ as core terms (notice the swapping of the e and l.) Neither of these produced many results so we felt it best to combine them together.

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**Concepts:**

A raw set of terms or phrases that accurately describe the subject of the website is compiled.

This set must contain **broad terms** which communicate general ideas as well as **narrow terms** which describe very granular details of specific topics within the website.
Even still, the number of results was less than 25 but we didn’t want to combine these into the ‘duffel bag’ core terms for a couple of reasons:

1. I don’t like to mix spellings on a page. We’d make an exception for the spellings of ‘duffelbag’ and ‘dufflebag” because of the low search volume each one produces, but ‘duffel bag’ produces enough results that we felt it best not to try and mix them in.

2. It is usually difficult to write good, user-friendly copy if you keep changing your spellings. This inconsistency can look unprofessional to your users. Again, an exception was made for the two low-volume keyword phrases, but ultimately these two produce such few searches that they are pretty far down the list of important terms to optimize for. We’ll be better off spending our time going after more important and higher traffic phrases.

When to Split: If you get more than 150 phrases from a core term search then you should consider splitting this into two (or more) core terms and re-do your search. As we searched for ‘travel bags’ over 50 of the 250+ results contained the word ‘golf’, quite a few with a good deal of search volume. This gives us a reason to split out ‘golf travel bag’ as a new core term. We can then re-perform our ‘travel bag’ core term search, but this time exclude any with the word ‘golf’ in order to narrow the results, and then perform the search for ‘golf travel bag’ later.

If you get several hundred results you may be able to split out more than just one new core term. Again, paying attention to this early in the process can save you a lot of work sorting through results later. There really is no limit to how far you can split core terms out so long as you continue to find five or more phrases that all contain the same words that will make up the new core term being created. In fact, the more core terms you have, the more tightly focused you’ll be able to keep each page, which will result in a higher performing optimization campaign.

☑ Selecting High ROI Search Phrases

Avoid Single-Word Keywords

Single-word queries generally produce the highest volume of searches, but also the lowest amount of targeted traffic. Many people start their searches with single word-keywords only to find that the results are not targeted for their specific need. They then go back to refine their search, often multiple times.

Let’s say you’re looking for a doll for your daughter so you go to Google and type in “doll.” Are you looking for a large doll, small doll, a cartoon doll, an action figure doll, a Raggedy Ann doll, a Barbie doll, a celebrity doll? The possibilities at this point are limitless and you realize that the search results for “doll” are not giving you enough options so you go back
and refine the search.

Many will use single phrases as a means of learning how best to refine their search. While this may prove valuable to the searcher it is essentially of no value to the sites listed in the search results. The better place to be is in the refined search results where the user is more likely to click through and buy.

**Target Multi-Word Phrases**

When looking at search volumes for particular keyword queries, the raw numbers will show that single word terms often get more queries than multiple word phrases. Studies have shown, however, that more people search using two- and three-word search queries in greater numbers than single words. Most searches for single-words end up being re-performed as multiple word queries as searchers find ways to target their searches more effectively.

These highly-targeted, multiple-word queries tend to produce more qualified traffic than the single-word queries. Because of this, it is in your best interest to target variations of these multiple word queries. Proper selection and targeting of these phrases will result not only in greater traffic volume to your site, but a higher conversion rate as well.

**Target Phrases with Measurable Search Volume**

While making sure your phrases are as targeted as possible for your audience, it is important to go after phrases that register at least a measurable amount of search volume each month. Keyword phrases that have no search volume, no matter how targeted, generally won’t do anything to increase business or sales.

Using search volume and additional competitive matrix information, you can then determine which keywords will be your primary phrases (those that produce largest amount of targeted traffic) and which keywords will act as supporting phrases (less competitive, yet extremely targeted.) Both kinds of phrases play an important role in creating strong, well-rounded websites that is able to achieve complete market dominance for related phrases.

For newer sites the primary phrases are often out of reach—at least early in the optimization campaign, if not for months. Selecting a combination of primary and supporting phrases for each page can help you achieve
results that begin delivering traffic earlier, while building the foundation upon which you’ll be able to begin displacing your competitors on the primary phrases down the road.

**Target Multiple Phrase Variations**

Every keyword phrase will have multiple variations that should accompany it in the page. Such variations are plurals, singulars and stemmed variations such as “ing,” “ed,” etc. In many cases you can also swap word order. “pontiac used cars” can become “used pontiac cars.”

Don’t get locked into using the keyword phrase precisely as it’s most often searched, even if the stemmed variations show little search volume. When writing, use all variations as they would naturally be used within the context of what you have to say.

**Localize Phrases When Necessary**

If you are targeting an audience specific to your geographic location, be sure to localize your phrases accordingly. To do this you can place city, county, state or other local references such as city districts or zip codes before or after each phrase.

Localizing your phrases will ensure that you get targeted traffic to your site and eliminate the need to deal with emails and phone calls from searchers who are not in your geographical location, and therefore not your target audience.
Part II: Sorting & Selecting Keywords

As an SEO provider we proceed through the sorting phases with the understanding that our clients will always be more intimately knowledgeable about what they do and offer than we could ever be. For this reason we rely on them to help us through the sorting process. Even if you are performing keyword research for your own site it’s often best not to rely only on your own opinions. Get other knowledgeable people involved to provide their input as well.

As we went through the gathering process, we sought out core terms and search phrases that were relevant to the site but we didn’t spend too much time analyzing each phrase individually. As we go through the list of results produced from a core term search in WordTracker or Keyword Discovery we take out the obvious nonsense, but leave in anything that is even remotely questionable. Now is the time we take a more careful look at those search phrases.

After having researched your industry related core terms, it’s time to begin the process of sorting through those keywords, finding those that will most benefit you in your marketing campaign and eliminating the rest. The gathering process is simply a matter of knowing where to compile your list of keywords; the selection process requires some skill, knowledge and bit of foresight.

Once we place all of our search phrases in a spreadsheet organized by core term, we can begin to sort through what’s there and more carefully consider the appropriateness of each keyword phrase. I’ve broken this process down into two phases, but they needn’t be done separately if you can just as easily do them together at the same time. Sometimes, though, it’s better to separate these phrases so you’re dealing with a more singular task within a more manageable chunk of time.

Keywords that Convert

As you, or have your client, sort through your keywords make sure to eliminate any keywords that won’t deliver conversions. Put another way; you are looking for keywords that are likely to draw visitors that are most likely to buy your product or services. There are many search terms out there that, if ranked high, will generate tons of traffic for you. However if that term does not directly apply to your site or what you offer, then the searchers will be quick to hit the browser’s Back button. You received the hit but not the sale.
Your job here is to make sure that whatever keyword phrase is searched that the searcher will find precisely what they are looking for on your site. Non-converting terms can either be those that are overly broad or just not specifically relevant for what you offer.

When broad searches are performed, what most often happens is that the searcher is unable to find the specific information they were looking for in the search results. At this point, it doesn’t matter that you rank well because after clicking through a couple of sites (perhaps even yours) and not finding what they wanted the searcher returns to the engine to perform a more refined search.

Also, keep in mind that broad, single-word terms, while attractive by the sheer number of hits they potentially produce, are often time virtually impossible to promote. Why waste the time and effort in promoting a term that is less likely to generate the sales you are ultimately seeking? Don't promote terms on the basis of generating hits, instead promote terms on the basis of generating sales.

If the searcher performs a more specific search, but one in which your site cannot satisfy the searcher will quickly leave your site in favor of another more ‘relevant’ site in the search results. Keywords such as these should be deleted or benched until you can satisfy that particular query.

While these specific terms are not searched as often as the general one-word search terms, they are the terms more likely to achieve top listings and also much more likely to produce sales. Why? Because when a searcher types in exactly what they are looking for, they are more likely to find exactly what they want. And if your site is at the top, you just made a sale.

It’s often tempting, especially for clients, to try and optimize for keyword phrases that are not necessarily represented on your site but will bring traffic that they feel will speak to their target audience. An example of this would be if Adidas tried to optimize their site for ‘Air Jordan’ under the belief that anyone searching for Nike might be able to be sold an Adidas instead. This is a mistake and borders on deception. At the very least the searcher will come to your site see that you don’t offer what you suggested you did and then leave. This will creates a negative branding experience to the user.

There are some situations when you can get away with doing this but you have to proceed carefully as companies like to sue over such things. The most legitimate way to take this approach is to provide information on the product comparing that with your own. You could then try to sell your product as the superior one. While doing this still won’t bring in the most qualified traffic to your site you would at least have a chance at converting visitors this way than by not providing any such information. In any case, always check with a lawyer before optimizing for some else's trademarked terms.

Here is another quick example: Let’s say you sell high-end ski clothing. The terms ‘wholesale’ or ‘cheap’ or ‘discount’ don’t apply. For this reason you don’t want to target keyword phrases with the words ‘wholesale’, ‘cheap’ or ‘discount’ in them. Again, doing so would be misrepresenting yourself and leaving a sour taste in the mouth of the searcher as they leave your site for another.
Sorting for conversions simply means eliminating keywords that won’t drive targeted traffic (as defined by your ability to convert them to a sale) to your site.

Informational queries provide another kind of term that you can go after, but only after you have optimized for all of your more specific queries. An example of an informational query would be someone searching for a ‘how to’ phrase such as ‘how to create a gift basket’. If you sell gift baskets you may not want this kind of traffic at all since these are not buyers, just information seekers.

Some informational searches are good in that it provides ways to capture traffic from those who are very early in the buying process. Those searching with keywords such as ‘best digital camera’ are generally comparison shoppers, or someone gathering product information for a later purchase. Bringing in this kind of traffic will produce an extremely low conversion rate but you can often get some visitor loyalty out of it. A fraction of those searchers may bookmark your site and come back to you when they are ready to purchase.

When it does come time to go after these phrases you want to be sure to have a library of helpful information on your website. You could have a section of your site dedicated to product reviews, comparisons, how-to articles, etc. You could smartly use these pages as a means of up-selling your visitors to your own products or services. Again, these are not ideal first pass keywords to optimize because of the low conversion rate and should only be applied once you have optimized for other higher converting phrases.

Keyword Research Notes:

- Never use misspellings.
- If appropriate include plural word forms, but do **not** group plural and singular forms of the same phrase into a single page unless they can naturally be worked into the writing.
- When researching competition it is good to type 2 or 3 keywords at a time into the search field as this will furnish a list of competitors that are specifically targeting a similar audience.
- Use overlapping keywords with similar conceptual strengths.

~ Precision = Authority ~
**Volume Keywords**

When finalizing your keyword list you want to make sure all your search terms are actively being searched. A top ranking for a term that nobody types in the search engine will ultimately be useless in driving traffic to your site. Time after time I’ve seen people be adamant about their search terms because, as the above section mentioned, the terms were very specific what their site offers. The problem was that the terms were too specific and virtually nobody was performing a search for them. The top listings were easily achieved but the end result was disappointing. You need to balance out choosing specific with actively searched terms. They are both equally important.

You have probably heard about going after the “long tail” keywords. This is a good strategy but just be sure that your long tail keywords are still words that are actively searched. Depending on your industry long-tail keywords can produce 50% or more of your traffic. While each long-tail keyword produces very little traffic overall, combined they all add up. But in order for those keywords to deliver a good portion of your total traffic volume you need to be sure that you are optimizing for keywords that people search for. There is nothing wrong with covering your bases on sporadically searched phrases such as ‘kids winter boots’ but stay away from never-searched phrases such as ‘kids sheepskin winter and snow boots’.

In general, terms with two to four words are the best. With two to four words, each search term can be both descriptive and specific. If a specific term is typed into the search engine and your site appears, the searcher knows you have precisely what they are looking for.

Here is an image we have developed that shows how keywords relevancy and volume:
Part III: Organizing Keywords

Keyword / Page Organization

Organizing your keywords into an effective marketing strategy is the most important of the three main phases of keyword research outlined in this document. This is also the phase that most people simply don’t do, largely from a lack of understanding on how the organization process can truly help you create a vastly more successful optimization and marketing campaign.

The previous two phases of research are simply about identifying the right core terms and phrases that should be a part of your site. Regardless of the processes involved in determining which keywords are the best ones to target, going one step beyond that can make a significant difference in your ability to succeed.

Organizing your keywords properly will help you develop a successful strategy for getting every possible relevant keyword optimized into your site in a way that will help you achieve both short- and long-term success. It will also provide you a framework for ongoing optimization focusing on the most important keywords and phrases first and foremost hitting the pages which are most important.

Identifying Pages: Before you begin organizing your keywords you need to be actively aware of all of your site’s existing pages and what each page currently focuses on. Don’t be concerned about specific product pages here, but you do want to be aware of category pages that lead to specific products. For instance you might have a page for ‘mens wedding rings’ or ‘wheeled duffel bags’. It’s a good idea to make a list of each page and what it focuses on. This will help you with the organizing process and determining which keywords should be implemented where.

In some cases you’ll find that you don’t have enough pages for all of your keyword core terms groups or sub-groups. Don’t worry about this as you can always build new pages into your site to provide your users with the information they need covering any of these topics.

Grouping Similar Qualifiers: The process of organizing your keywords is similar to the process of splitting a single core term into multiple cores—only in a much more fine-tuned scale. You want to perform the organization process for each core term and its corresponding group of search phrases separately. In most cases the keywords at the top of your list will be the core term itself. Start with that. We’ll usually find it’s singular / plural counterpart to go
with it. Copy these keywords and paste them to another section of your keyword research spreadsheet.

We like to organize our phrases in groups of five targeting no more than fifteen keywords per page. This isn’t necessarily the “right” way of doing things, just our way. You may have more or less keywords per page and you may not want to organize them in phrases like us. Do whatever you’re most comfortable with.

Once we have our core term and its counterpart moved over we begin looking for other keywords to go with it. The thing you always have to keep in mind in this process is that whatever keywords you group together must be able to work together on the page.

Usually all other keywords are simply modifiers, but you have to make sure the modifiers work together. For example, you may not want ‘elegant wedding rings’ on the same page as ‘cheap wedding rings.’ In this case you’ll want to group keywords that provide a compliment to each of those qualifiers. ‘Discount,’ ‘inexpensive’ and ‘cheap’ would all go together, while ‘exotic,’ ‘designer’ and ‘elegant’ would be a good fit. You also might want to group together certain qualifiers such as ‘gold,’ ‘white gold’ and ‘18 kt gold’ together in one group and ‘antique’ and ‘vintage’ in another.

When you’re done grouping your keywords you’ll then want to look for groupings that can fit together without being too distracting or diluting the focus. Qualifiers such as ‘platinum,’ ‘diamond’ and ‘titanium’ might fit just fine with the gold keyword grouping, depending on how your site is currently laid out. Don’t try to force groups together that won’t be a good fit on a single page. It’s important here that when constructing the page’s content that a natural flow in writing will be achieved. Grouping words together that don’t fit will only make your content awkward and cause you to lose your visitor’s attention.

Regardless of how many terms you think you can get on a single page, don’t try to force them all in when it comes to the writing of the page’s content. Look for creative ways to work them in naturally but if a keyword doesn’t fit then try it again on another page.

☑️ **Determining Similarity between Targeted Keywords**

You can calculate similarity between the keywords in each grouping to ensure strong semantic connectivity. If a low similarity is identified within a page grouping you may be able to improve the similitude by changing search phrase group membership. To calculate similarity we will be using Jaccard’s Coefficient.

**Jaccard’s Coefficient Formula:**

\[
co(AB) = \frac{|A \cap B|}{|A \cup B|}
\]
**co(AB)** = The semantic/contextual similarity between terms.

**A** = The number of documents returned for an exact mode search query K1

**B** = The number of documents returned for an exact mode search query K2

**A ∩ B** = The number of documents returned for an exact mode search query K12 (“keyword1” + “keyword2”)

**A ∪ B** = The Union of A and B

Therefore the similarity between terms is calculated by simply dividing the intersect of AB by the Union of AB.

Or

\[
\frac{K_{12}}{K_1 + K_2}
\]

In this example, Jaccard’s Coefficient is a measurement of asymmetry between non-binary variables.
Conclusion

Before you jump right into your optimization campaign, STOP! You may know what keywords you want to target, or more appropriately, think you know. But brushing past the in-depth processes outlined here in order to “get to the work that matters” is a mistake. Optimization is a process that can only be done once the keyword foundation has been carefully considered and the roadmap for implementation has been developed. Anything less than that you’ll be building your SEO campaign on a false-foundation.

If your keyword research is well considered and well organized from the very beginning you’ll be giving yourself a much greater chance for success. You’ll be presenting less clutter and a more streamlined page designed to achieve the results you expect from the marketing campaign you are investing your time and money into in the first place. By going through the processes properly you’ll have created a campaign that succeeds not just in achieving top search engine rankings, but in attracting customers to the pages that best match their search and provide the best avenue to a conversion.

Advanced Keyword Research Tools

- For existing websites use a program such as WebLog Expert Lite to gather data on current searches that are being used to find the website.
- Use a tool such as http://www.givemebackmygoogle.com/ that cleans SERPS of affiliate pages and low quality results. This information can help you determine the type of competitive arena that each keyword exists in.
- http://adlab.msn.com/searchfunnel/ Discover search phrases that surround targeted keywords in regards to the actual search cycle.
<table>
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<th>Keyword Research &amp; Selection</th>
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<td><strong><a href="http://adlab.msn.com/DPUI/DPUI.aspx">http://adlab.msn.com/DPUI/DPUI.aspx</a></strong></td>
<td>Collect demographic information related to a particular search phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong><a href="http://www.cs.ualberta.ca/~lindek/demos/depsim.htm">http://www.cs.ualberta.ca/~lindek/demos/depsim.htm</a></strong></td>
<td>Allows you to find dependency based word relatedness. Very useful for determining the appropriateness of contextual synonymy.</td>
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