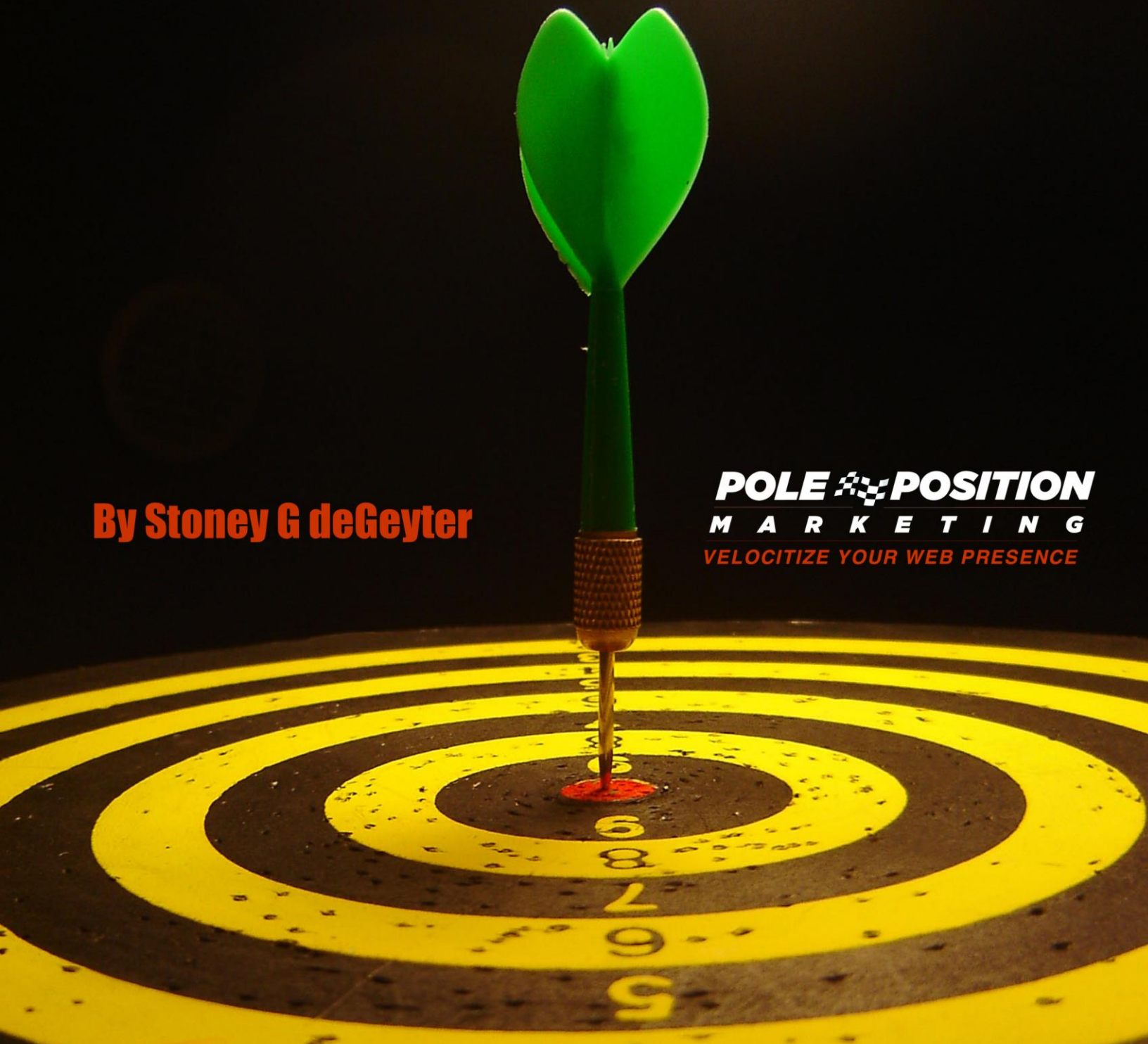


# Keyword Research and Selection

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

By Stoney G deGeyter

**POLE  POSITION**  
**M A R K E T I N G**  
VELOCITIZE YOUR WEB PRESENCE



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## INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF KEYWORD RESEARCH

Keyword research is one of the most crucial aspects of a successful search engine optimization and marketing campaign. Many people look at keyword research as just being another step--albeit an important step--in the marketing process. But it's more than just another "activity" to be performed before implementing SEO. In fact, it's an ongoing process.

Keyword research goes way beyond firing up a few tools that help you uncover the "right" keywords for your target audience. It's more than selecting keywords that help you improve your ROI. It's also about finding, analyzing, prioritizing and organizing your keywords together in a way so they can be implemented into your site to create the most effective marketing campaigns possible.



When done properly, keyword research helps you establish an effective foundation for just about all 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 researched and selected the core terms your site will be built upon, learned which search phrases will fuel your online marketing efforts most effectively, and determined how those keywords should be

organized and optimized into the site in order to give you the strongest advantage.

After Google released their Hummingbird algorithm in 2013, many declared keyword research dead because Google cared more about topics than keywords. Even though the processes provided here were developed at least five years before Hummingbird, this document outlines a post-Hummingbird keyword research strategy. What you will find here is a keyword research process that will help you focus your online marketing on topics rather than the keywords themselves!

First, let's look at some of the benefits of thorough and comprehensive keyword research.

### TWO BENEFITS OF KEYWORD RESEARCH

#### 1. Know *where* your audience is

Many make assumptions as to which keywords they think people are using to find their products or services. They tend to see things through their own tinted sunglasses, never realizing that not all people think the same way. Just to use a quick example, the auto-industry sells "pre-owned cars," while the consumer searches for "used cars." If you want to target your audience effectively, you need to understand the difference between industry jargon and average-joe-searcher jargon.

As you dig down into your keyword research, you'll discover three important insights:

1. What words visitors use to describe your products or services.
2. Specific things they search for related to your products or services.
3. The intent behind the search—what kind of information they want to find.

Some people search using complete sentences, some use basic words, and some search using differing word order, qualifiers or different words all together. This information can help you develop the content and direction of your site. It allows you to speak your customers' language rather than forcing them to listen to your industry jargon.

You can also learn to understand the intent of certain queries. Sometimes the same words used in a search can be rearranged giving the search an entirely different meaning. For example, a searcher looking for KFC's "original recipe chicken" has a different intent than if they were looking for "original chicken recipe."



## 2. Know *who* your audience is

Sometimes knowing who your audience is is just as important as knowing what keywords they use. You may find that different keywords speak to different segments of society. An easy example of this is how language changes in different parts of the country and the world. When looking for a refreshing soft drink, some may ask for a "soda," another will ask for a "pop," still another will request a "fizz," and yet another will just refer to it as a "coke." It's the same language, but different words are used to mean the same thing.

You may have the right keyword to describe what you do or sell, but that particular keyword may be targeting the wrong audience, or at least not speak the audience's native slang. If you focus on only certain words, you're very likely missing out on a significant portion of your target audience.

Proper keyword research ensures that you not only know all potential variations of your important keyword phrases, but that you are able to implement them in a way that speaks directly to each segment of your target audience. A MAC machine and an ATM might be the same thing, and your customers might even know that, but using the right language in the right way for the right audience helps close the "out of touch" gap that might otherwise be perceived.

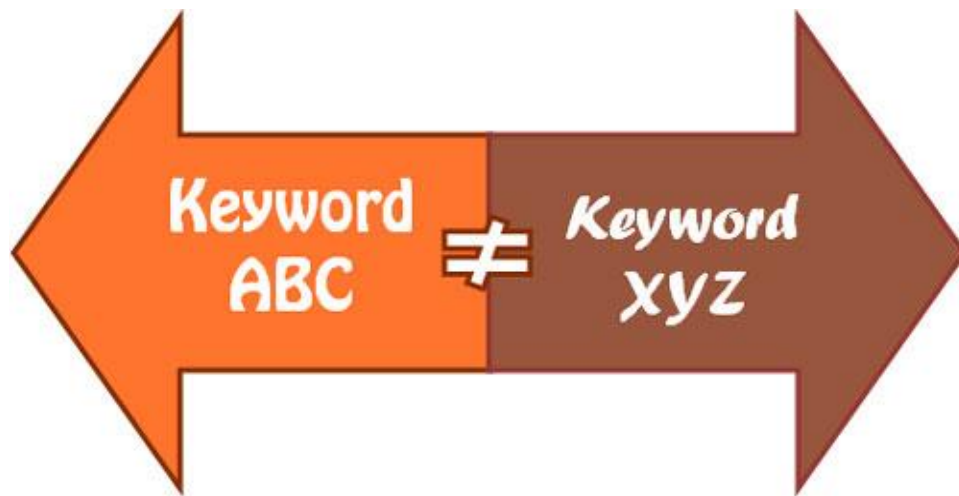
## USING KEYWORDS TO DEVELOP A SUCCESSFUL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

While there are a lot of very important aspects to successfully marketing a website (website architecture, content, etc.), I would say keyword research is probably one of the most important parts of the process. And while there is no single "right" way to perform keyword research, there are many key things that you must do in order to ensure that your research is performed thoroughly and effectively.

Many site owners get caught up believing that if they can achieve a #1 keyword ranking on Google, visitors will begin flocking to their site. This may be true for some keywords, but if you haven't done your research and selection properly, you're never going to know which keywords will provide you the best overall benefit and strongest return on investment.



When it comes to achieving and maintaining top listings, 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 is important, time consuming and sometimes 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.

### **It ain't easy doing it right**

While many keywords may be extremely difficult to achieve top rankings with in a short amount of time, I don't believe that *any* keyword is out of bounds or unattainable. The only caveat to that is in making sure you have the budget, time, skill and desire to put forth the amount of effort required to get any particular keyword to succeed.

While you should always consider the risk (how much investment will be required) versus reward (how many new sales it will bring in), a well-structured campaign can return near immediate results. As you focus on the more easily attainable keywords in the beginning, you are building the foundation for success down the road with what others might consider to be those unattainable keywords.

The importance of keyword research in helping set your overall marketing strategy can't be understated. It can sometimes be a long, arduous process, but it's an essential one. Before you set about your research, just be prepared for the process. Set time aside so you're not rushed and can research as thoroughly as possible. When it comes to analyzing, do so carefully, performing more research as needed. And as you organize, be thoughtful about what makes the most sense and will help you achieve your marketing goals.

## PHASE I: FINDING CORE TERMS

When most people start with the task of researching keywords, they often start by looking for keywords they are familiar with. They'll use their familiarity with their products or services to find new word variations, maybe a few new relevant words, or even learn some new ways of phrasing what it is people are looking for. While this approach provides valuable information to the researcher, it's somewhat disorganized.

Because keyword research is so crucial, a more organized approach is essential. Instead of starting the research process looking for search volumes for words you essentially already know, it's better to start the process by looking for what you don't know. In order to find those unknown phrases, you have to start with a foundation that will guide you from where you are to what it is that you're trying to find: a list of keywords that can be optimized into your site.

The keyword research process starts not by looking for search phrases, but rather looking for *core terms* (or topics) that are the foundation of what your site, or specific pages of your site, covers. Let's start by defining what a core term is.

### WHAT'S A CORE TERM AND WHY DO YOU CARE?

A core term is a unique word or phrase from which dozens of others search phrases can be created using variations and varying word combinations.

The idea of the core term is to be the sole representation of a particular topic. While conventional wisdom used to be that you should optimize a page for "no more than three keywords," by rooting out the core term first, it's possible to optimize a page for dozens of keywords at a time, provided they all fit within a tightly-focused topic. Essentially, the core term will act as the sole topic of a page while the rest of the keywords being optimized will be variations on that theme.

Typically, a core term will be a two-word phrase that accurately sums up the topic. However, they can be one or even three words when necessary. Looking at the example on the right, the word "bag" is too broad to be useful as a core term because it doesn't tell us what kind of bag the searcher is looking for. If the core term does not sufficiently define the page's topic or is unable to draw targeted traffic, then it's not a core term that needs to be considered. "Bag," therefore, can be tossed out, and we can find more specific core terms such as "sports bag," "golf bag," and "travel bag," provided they are all relevant for the site.

On the other side of that, you see "kids ski clothing." For a site that sells ski clothing, "kids" makes the term too focused. However, if the site only sold clothing for kids, then "kids ski clothing" makes a good core term.



Bag  
Sports bag  
Baby bedding  
Garage plans  
School supplies  
Kids ski clothing  
Cost segmentation  
Battery  
Motorcycle battery  
Battery chargers  
Flowmeters  
Snowmobile clothing  
Plastic key cards

Clearly, core terms have to play a balancing act. They can't be so broad that they won't get targeted traffic, nor so specific that it captures too few searchers.

Something worth noting here is that achieving rankings for overly broad terms is near impossible. And even if you were to somehow get top rankings for such a phrase, the percentage of the traffic produced that was actually interested in what you offer would be incredibly low. A top ranking for such keywords might produce sales, but it would also produce a significant drain on the businesses resources creating a very low and possibly negative return on investment (ROI).

Sticking to the “bag” theme, let’s say you sell a variety of bags that aren’t sleeping bags or sandwich bags. In the course of your research you find yourself a good list:

- Sports bags
- Travel bags
- Duffel bags
- Carryon bags
- Medical bags
- Equipment bags

All of those can be considered a core term as they will allow you to create a page focused on that particular topic and highlight all relevant products. However, you also might find additional words such as:

- Sports travel bag
- Leather sports bag
- Large sports bag
- Sports equipment bag

These should not be considered core terms as they are just variations on one or more of the core terms you already found. They may be relevant keywords for optimization, but this isn’t the right stage to include them. Good core terms generally lack descriptive qualifiers.

### More core term disqualifies & organization tips

As you begin your research for core terms, remember what a core term is and isn't. You're looking for two- or three-word combinations that have limited qualifiers. If “sports bag” covers your topic sufficiently, don't bother keeping “wholesale sports bag,” “rolling sports bag,” “large sports bag,” etc., as core terms.

Also, you don't need to worry about stemmed variations, either. For instance, if you sell “teaching supplies,” stick to the root word “teach” and don't worry about “teacher,” “teaches” or “teaching”. At least not at this time. I strongly recommend creating a spreadsheet to document all your findings. This will help keep you organized, the benefit of which will become apparent as we continue to outline the research and selection process.



It's very important that during this core term discovery phase that you don't give up too early. There is never a point where you have too many core terms or "enough" to work with. To stop researching before you have uncovered just about every possible core term can leave you handicapped in not only the rest of your research, but also in the success of your optimization efforts.

I should also point out that keyword research isn't a one-time process. No matter how hard you try to be as thorough as possible, you simply won't uncover everything right now. That's OK. As time goes on and new core terms come to mind, or search patterns change, continue to add these new core term ideas to your lists to be researched and optimized in the proper time.

## HOW TO FIND CORE TERMS

### Step 1: Pour Through Your Website

The first step in finding core terms related to what you do is to dig through your own website. Regardless of how well you think you already know the content of your site, it's important that you take your time to review each page looking for anything that may be useful as a core term.

As you read through the content looking for unique terminology, certain words will jump out at you that likely would not have come to mind just by brainstorming.

There are several key areas that you want to pay attention to:



- Title tags
- Meta keyword tags
- Meta description tags
- Page content
- Navigation words
- Product names
- Product descriptions

All of these can provide excellent intelligence while helping you find and identify the theme or themes of each page. It is beneficial to make a note as to which page any particular core term or terms was found as this may be helpful later in the keyword research process.

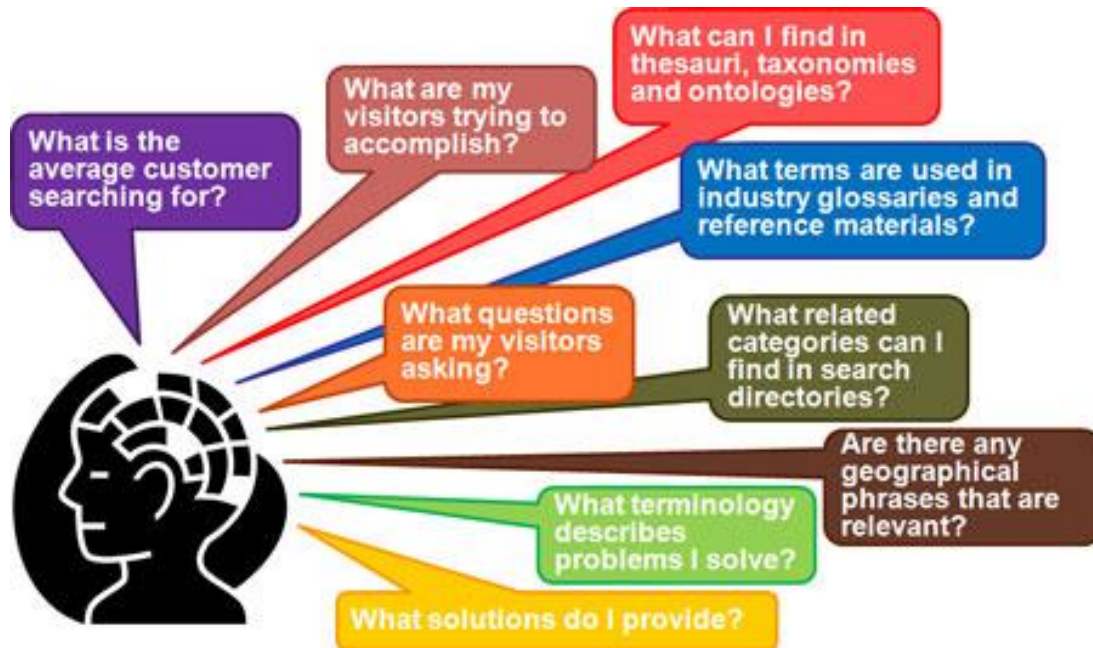
You'll want to go page by page, scanning each of the areas noted above, but if you have an exceptionally large site, hitting every page may be unnecessary. You'll find most of what you need simply by looking at category and informational pages. But don't ignore product pages. As long as you continue to find valuable core terms, keep digging through the site.

### Step 2: Brainstorm

Once you've dug through your site, it's time to do a little brainstorming of your own. The reason why the brainstorming comes second in the process is because 1) we don't want to exhaust our time brainstorming what we can easily find on the site, and 2) we want to be able to answer some very specific questions that the site has not been able to answer for us. Familiarity of your website is crucial for the brainstorming process.



There are a number of questions that can be used to get the brainstorming gears in motion. This list doesn't cover every website in every industry, so be sure to develop a list of your own questions as well. But here are a few to get you started:



### ***What is the average customer looking for?***

Are your customers looking for something specific or requesting it in a specific way? For example, are they looking for walking shoes, running shoes or tennis shoes? Now it's likely most users would know the difference in this example, but you'll need to try to get into the mind of the customer. Looking through email communications and tracking key words used in phone calls can be a great help.

### ***What are my visitors trying to accomplish?***

What is the goal your customers are trying to achieve? Is it to purchase shoes that don't hurt their feet, endure rugged use or give them a sense of style? Are they looking to compare products or just purchase their favorite brand? Understanding the goals can help you find additional terms that could be relevant to your customers.

### ***What can I find in Thesauri, taxonomies and ontology?***

Go outside your site and start looking at additional resources. This can help you find words that have similar meanings and are relevant to how your customers might search for what you offer.

### ***What terms are used in industry glossaries and reference materials?***

Look at other industry-related materials to see how the same ideas are expressed. Industry glossaries and outside reference materials can provide a goldmine of information.

***What questions are my visitors asking?***

This takes us back to analyzing emails and phone calls right along with any other communications that come through the website. The words customers use can be key to identifying how they describe or think about your product or service. This is the clearest indication of how they might actually be searching.

***What related categories can I find in search directories?***

Looking at industry-specific web directories can provide additional insights. The directory categories and sub-categories can often bring up new words that you hadn't already thought of.

***Are there any geographical phrases that are relevant?***

If your business is local or serves a very local audience, you need to take geographical references into consideration. These references can be zip codes, city names, county and state names, even city and county districts. Make a list of all the different geographical references that may come into play.

***What terminology describes problems I solve?***

Every product solves some kind of problem. The words you use in explaining how you solve any such problems can be crucial in identifying core terms that speak to a very specific, yet highly converting audience.

***What solutions do I provide?***

The terminology used in the solution is often different than the terminology that describes the problem. If the problem is "uncomfortable shoes," the solution may be "extra arch support." Look for the terms that describe the specific solutions you provide.

**Step 3: Comb through competitor's websites**

After you have looked extensively through your own site and began brainstorming through a series of questions, you're ready to start digging through your competitors' sites as well. You can use this opportunity to see how well your competitors answer those very same questions. The answers may be worded differently using core terms that so far you have not uncovered.



Keep in mind that many of the core terms you find will be specific only to the particular sites you are reviewing, assuming some offer slightly different products or services than you. Keep a record of these unique terms. Perhaps you can provide answers to some of the questions that would be asked of your competitor using core terms that are relevant for you.

It might be tempting to try to capture traffic from searchers looking for a competitor's product which you don't offer. For legal reasons, going after trademarked competitor terms needs to be done with great care. While researching, it will be a good idea to document these

questionable terms separate from the terms that are relevant to your site, and only pursue them if and when you've talked with a lawyer.

#### Step 4: Use keyword research tools

Site owners often begin the research process by first going to the available tools. But you can't really use these tools effectively--or to their fullest potential--until you have some information in which to actually research out, which we've covered in the first three steps of core term research. In this step, we want to take core terms that we've already discovered and plug those into the tools to help us find additional core terms that have eluded you thus far.



When you're crunched for time, it's tempting to skip the first three steps and jump right to the tools, but that's a mistake. While the tools will undoubtedly produce many of the same core terms you've already documented, it's unlikely you would be able to produce the same list having used the tools alone. In this case, the tools are used as confirmation for what you've already found and serve to fill in the gaps of what you were unable to uncover in the first three steps.

There are numerous keyword research tools available, and it really doesn't matter which tool or tools you use, so long as you're getting the results you need. Since every tool is slightly different, it's a good idea to use multiple tools to ensure you're getting a wide range of data.

Using keyword research tools is pretty straightforward. Select a core term from your list and plug it into the tool's search box. Scan the results and look for core terms that you don't already have on your list. If you've performed the first three steps sufficiently, you might have to scan quite a bit to find something new, but don't be afraid of the scroll bar!

Besides looking for completely new core term *phrases*, you also want to look for individual *words* that can be used to create new core terms. For example, you might find "waterproof wheeled bag." Let's say that "wheeled bag" is already on your core-term list, but "waterproof bag" or even "water proof bag" isn't. This gives you one or two new core terms to add to your core term list.

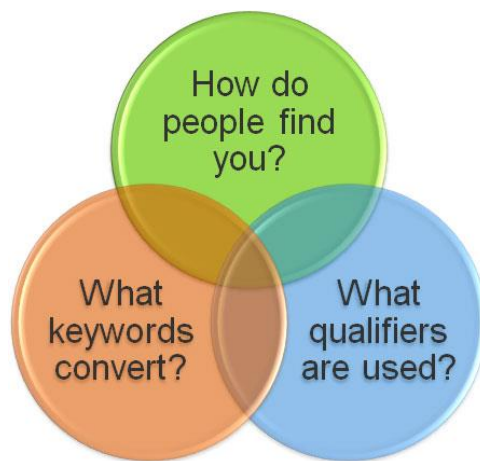
Continue this process with different core terms from your master list. You won't have to research every single core term you've documented in the first three steps, but you do want to search enough of them to be confident that you have pretty much exhausted the possibility of finding something new. It helps if you randomize your core terms by searching those that are different enough from each other that you have a better chance of getting something new.

## Step 5: Dig into analytics

Analytics data can provide a wealth of keyword information that you can't get anywhere else. Here you will find keywords *already* being used to drive people to your site, and therefore have a high likelihood of being important. But be cautioned; the data from your analytics is incomplete!

Analytics data only tell you how people are finding you today. Too many times I've had people tell me, "I don't get any traffic from those terms, so let's not optimize for them." Okay, but the reason you're not getting any traffic from them is *because* you have not optimized for them! What the data won't show you is the dozens, or even hundreds, of other keywords that people are searching for but in which they don't find your site. You're not being found because you are positioned poorly on the search engines for those terms.

Even still, analytics data can provide some information that you won't get with any other tool, and this is what makes it extremely valuable:



**How people find you:** Not only do you get to see what keywords are being searched, but you get to see how often any particular keyword leads someone to your site. You can see what engine they came from and what pages the searcher ultimately visited before leaving your site. For keywords that you know are ranked similarly, you can determine which is more effective at driving traffic. Or, having search volume numbers, you can again determine if more often searched keywords are actually better for your bottom line.

**What keywords convert:** Some keywords convert better than others. Analytics provides you with excellent information on conversion data. By analyzing the data, you can separate out poor performing core

terms from those that are more likely to lead to a sale. But as with any such data, don't just rely on the surface info. Some keywords may not convert all that well because your site isn't built to convert for them. Often, some minor adjustments are all you need to change that.

**What qualifiers are used:** Analytics data will also let you see dozens, hundreds and sometimes even thousands of additional qualifiers. Many of these qualifiers can be used to create entirely new core terms as we noted above. There is a good bet that a little optimization for these additional qualifiers can boost your traffic numbers significantly.

### *How many core terms should you have?*

The core term research process in itself can be very time consuming. The question arises, at what point do you stop researching and move on to the next phase? Is there a minimum or maximum number of core terms you should have documented before determining you have enough?

The goal in completing your core term research isn't so much to walk away with a pre-determined number of keywords, but to be confident that you have exhausted all research avenues sufficiently that you're unlikely to find



anything new.

You could walk away with a dozen core terms or several hundred. You might find more or less than this number depending on your industry and how many different ways there are to search for the same thing. But you can never find *too many* core terms.

Just as a quick example, we performed core term research for the term “duffel bag”. From that term alone we came up with 36 more potential core terms:

- duffelbag
- dufflebag
- duffle bag
- back pack
- brief case
- briefcase
- volume bag
- emergency bag
- conference bag
- luggage bag
- cargo bag
- gear bag
- duffel bag
- fannypack
- fanny pack
- waterproof bag
- water proof bag
- wheeled bag
- promotional bag
- first aid bag
- custom bag
- imprinted bag
- gym bag
- athletic bag
- sports bag
- travel bags
- wholesale bags
- messenger bag
- roll bag
- garment bag
- logo bag
- printed bag
- embroidered bag
- athlete bag
- backpack
- leather bag

One thing to keep in mind is that while you want to perform comprehensive and exhaustive core term research up front, you will likely be discovering new core terms well beyond this initial core term research. Just keep adding any new core terms you find to your core term spreadsheet as you find them.

Also note, not every core term you find will end up producing good results. One of the keys to the research is to be able to quickly determine whether a core terms is going to be valuable or not. This will become more and more intuitive over time as you learn how to drop a qualifier to create a core term, or to grab another qualifier to create a new core term altogether. But you'll also need to spend some time prioritizing core terms to determine which ones are more likely to produce the return on investment you need.

## FOUR FACTORS OF CORE TERM PRIORITIZATION

By now, you should have several dozen or more core terms documented on your spreadsheet. The question is what to do with all of these keywords. Before moving on to Phase II, you'll first need to prioritize your core terms a bit. In the next phase, you'll start digging deeper into each core term to find the relevant search phrases it produces. Instead of taking the shotgun approach, you can go at it deliberately.

Start with the core terms that provide you with the best opportunities and will have a more immediate impact on your optimization campaign. Here are four different factors that you need to analyze in determining the relative importance of each core term:

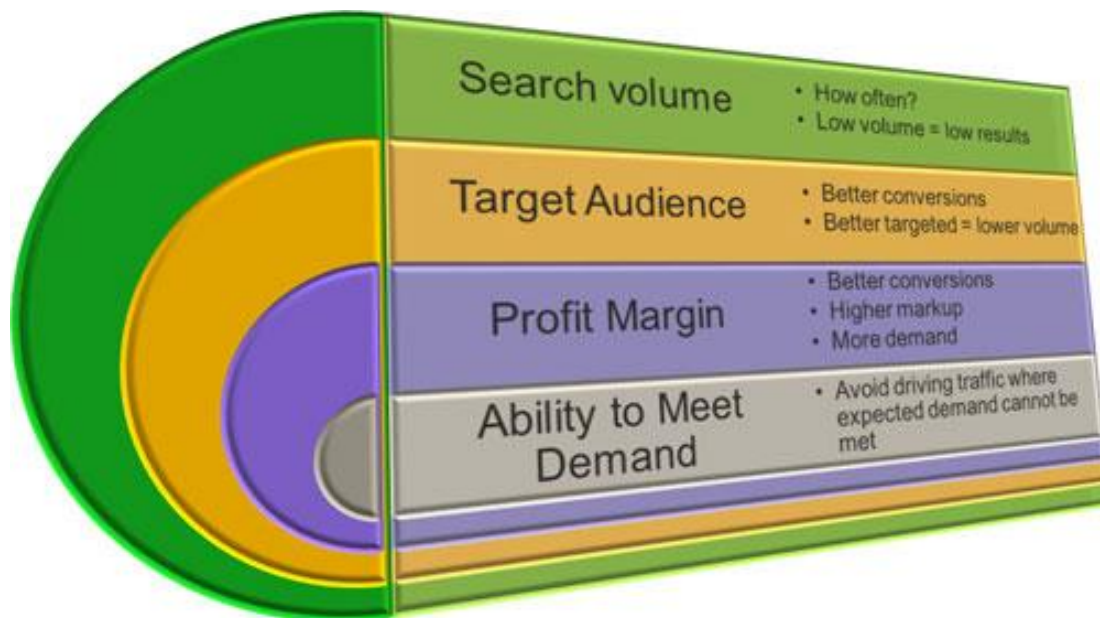
**1. Search volume:** Search volume is the number of times that each core term is searched on a daily, monthly or yearly basis. Most keyword tools will provide estimated search volume numbers, but keep in mind that these numbers are only estimates. Any search volume number provided—even those by the search engines themselves—should be taken with a grain of salt.



Different keyword tools will produce different volume numbers for the same phrases. Sometimes the numbers are skewed due to the season, tracking delays or low volume, which makes them hard to measure. But don't get caught up in the actual numbers. It's best to use them as a comparison metric between keyword data sources. If two or more sources show low volume relative to other keywords, you can make a good assumption that it is a low searched phrase. Similarly, if two or more sources show high relative volume, then that's probably a highly searched phrase.

Not all highly searched core terms will be more valuable than low searched terms, and not all low searched terms will lack for value. There are other factors to consider, which we'll explore below. But before we get there, you have to consider that often the search volume for each core term is for that phrase alone, not for all relevant phrases that fit with that core term. You might find a core term with a low search volume, but when you add up the volume of the related phrases that could increase the overall value of the term exponentially.

But all things being equal, the higher the search volume, the more opportunity there is to drive traffic to your site. You just have to make sure it's quality traffic.



**2. Target audience:** High volume search terms are often far less targeted than some of the lower or mid-volume (by comparison) terms. Many people think simply in terms of driving traffic to the site, so they think the high search volume phrases are the best bet. But quite often these are also the most difficult phrases for which to get ranked. You can frequently deliver more traffic more quickly by going after the lower volume, higher targeted phrases.

A top ranked low-volume phrase won't produce as much traffic as a top-ranked high-volume phrase, but it takes a lot more time, energy and effort to rank that high-volume phrase. Plus, you will often find yourself expending additional resources on traffic that doesn't convert. That's more calls and more emails, replying to this broad traffic that won't become

a customer. In the end, going after lower volumes of targeted traffic very often beats going after higher volumes of less targeted traffic.

**3. Profit margin:** This is something that you won't be able to find in any keyword research tool, yet it's just as important as any other factor. Take a look at your offerings and determine where your greatest profit margin comes from. It may not come from high volume phrases that drive a lot of traffic, and it may not even come from your best converting phrases. You can often significantly improve your return on investment simply by going after the phrases that focus on your most profitable products or services.

These core terms may not provide you as much traffic as the others, but they are likely to match or exceed the return on investment from several other areas combined.

**4. Ability to meet demand:** Finally, you must also be concerned about your ability to meet the demand of any particular core term. This means several things. First, you need to make sure your web server can handle the load. Don't go after phrases that will produce such high volumes of traffic that it crashes your web server. Typically, this won't be much of a problem as terms that will produce such traffic volumes are inherently difficult to achieve and take significant time.

Second is your business' ability to meet the incoming demand for the products or services you are targeting with any particular keyword. If certain products are difficult to get or are routinely out of stock, then there is almost no point in targeting those keywords if they'll simply lead to customer frustration. Similarly, if you are targeting a service that easily gets overbooked, then don't go after such keywords until a time you are able to consistently meet the demand.

Any core terms that will produce traffic for products or services for which you are unable to keep up with demand should be put aside, at least temporarily. Hold onto those for a day when you are better equipped.

### LOOKING BEYOND "RIGHT NOW"



One of the mistakes people often make in keyword research, especially when researching and prioritizing core terms, is that they don't look beyond what's happening today. Things change, especially in the digital world. While we always look through the prism of the present, we have to be able to analyze potential beyond today.

One of the things that I often see is business owners ignoring keyword research and avoiding optimizing for terms for products or services because they "don't sell a lot" of it. While this can certainly be an issue, it must also be determined if that product isn't selling simply because those terms have yet to be optimized. Typically, you won't sell a

laptop bag to someone who searched for a duffel bag. So unless you optimize for the term "laptop bag" you won't drive visitors to your site who are looking for it.

On the other hand if you are driving plenty of traffic for such terms, but your conversion rate is significantly low, then it makes sense not to target that term until you figure out the conversion issue. But you have to know that it's a conversion issue, not a traffic issue. Looking beyond "right now" can help you target areas where you're simply weak and have room to gain some strength.

Also, keep in mind that today's high-volume phrases can be tomorrow's low-volume terms. And today's low-volume terms can be tomorrow's high-volume phrases. You should regularly review your core terms to see if search patterns have changed significantly and then adjust your optimization strategy accordingly.

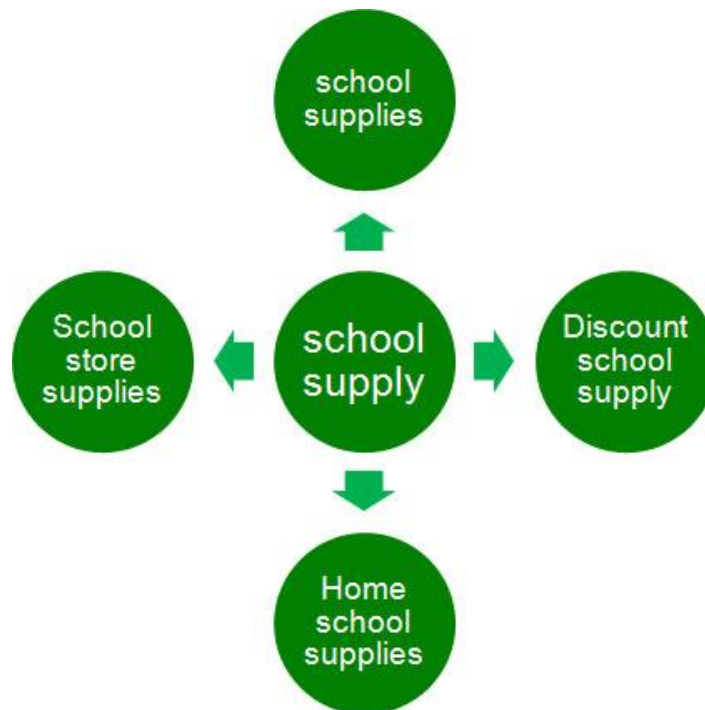
Researching core terms isn't just about gathering data, but making smart decisions based on knowledge and well-thought out judgment. Once you have a good idea which core terms are most viable and will produce the best return for your efforts, we can move into the next phase of the research process. In Phase II, we'll learn how to dig deeper into each core term and uncover many more specific phrases that can bring in even more quality, targeted traffic.

## PHASE II: DISCOVERING SEARCH PHRASES

### WHAT IS A SEARCH PHRASE?

Before we go any further, let's discuss the difference between a *core term* and a *search phrase*. For the purpose of this document, a core term and a search phrase are similar in that both will be searched and both can provide potential traffic to your site. Core terms represent a broader topic while a search phrase is simply the core term with an added qualifie. It's a more narrowly focused core term.

Both core terms and search phrases will be optimized into your website to drive traffic and hopefully, be instrumental in generating strong conversion rates. Yet in the search phrase research process, each core term will be used to uncover dozens, if not hundreds of these more narrowly defined phrases which collectively will bring in the bulk of your targeted traffic.



There are four main types of search phrases. You'll see that each of these is related, in some way, to the core term itself. We'll use the illustration above as an example, with "school supply" as our core term.

**Stemmed variation:** Take any core term and vary it a bit by adding a different stemmed ending, such as 's,' 'ed,' 'ing,' 'tion,' 'ies,' etc. In the example above, we come out with "school supplies." Each core term will give you different options, allowing you to create new phrases from multiple stems being added to either or both words.

**Attached modifiers:** You can also modify your core term by adding one or more modifiers. This gives you potential for hundreds of new search phrases all comprising of the core term

itself. With the "school supplies" example we can attach "discount," "home," "budget," "elementary," "first grade," etc. to create a pretty long list of phrases.

**Stems with modifiers:** Of course, any combination of the two above work just as well. Alter your core term with stems and then add your qualifiers and you can create several more dozen search phrases such as "home school supplies," "discount school supplies," "elementary school supplies", etc.

**Any phrase containing the core words:** You can also build search phrases by creating a string of words that uses all the words from the core phrase while not maintaining the core phrase itself. For example "school store supplies," and "school store supply" are both solid phrases created by inserting "store" between the two words that make up the core term and it's stemmed modifier. In addition, you can also add any localization qualifiers that are relevant to you.

Be sure not to throw just any words at the core and call it a search phrase. When you add qualifiers or rearrange word order, you can often change the meaning of the phrase itself. It's not the words that make a search phrase, it's the meaning of the words, and if the meaning changes, it won't be much use to you at all.

## HOW TO FIND SEARCH PHRASES

Above, we showed you what a search phrase is, and by doing so, showed you how you can make up viable search phrases on your own. While that's always an option—and sometimes necessary—that's typically not the best way to find all possible relevant phrases. You'll want to get your keyword tools involved here, just as you did with the core terms. But this time, you're narrowing your focus to phrases that contain each individual core term.

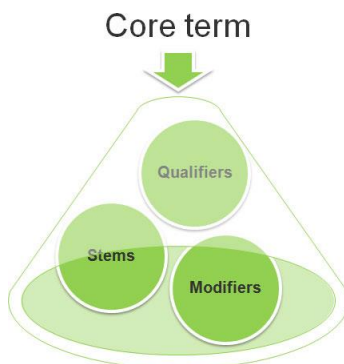
Searching out your core terms for related search phrases is a relatively simple process, especially with all the keyword tools available to you. Let's look at some quick steps to get all your search phrases downloaded into your spreadsheet.

### Give yourself time

Preparing yourself time-wise is important. While finding search phrases is easy, it can also be very time consuming. When things are easy, we tend to want to rush them. It'll be a mistake to do that here. By rushing, you'll end up missing or removing some very important terms, or missing some other crucial steps in the process.



### Uncover phrases through research



Finding search phrases is what keyword research tools help you do best, but you shouldn't rely on those tools alone. Other sources will produce data that you can't get anywhere else, and it's important for these terms to be included as well.

Different tools have different search options, so you'll want to look for the option that allows you to search for phrases that contain all the words in your core term. This will reduce the number of search results, allowing you to focus on one core term at a time.

Once you've done your search, you should have a solid list of



phrases that contain your core term, plus qualifiers, stems and modifiers. Be sure to search using both plurals and singulars ("sports bag" and "sports bags") to ensure you get the most complete results, if your keyword tool doesn't include that automatically.

### Remove illegitimate phrases

Once you've exhausted your research for any specific core term, you'll find that you'll have hundreds—if not thousands—of irrelevant phrases. Be prepared to spend long periods of time sorting through your list of phrases. The goal is to remove any phrase that is irrelevant while keeping only those that provide value to your website.

What makes a phrase irrelevant? Any word that changes the core term to a degree that makes it no longer relevant for your website.

**Phrases with bogus words:** For many businesses, any inclusion of the word "free," is not relevant in a keyword, so that can easily be eliminated. Any geographical reference that you don't serve can also be nixed.



These are just a couple of examples, but a quick scan of your keyword list will probably highlight a number of such "negative" words. Some keyword research tools will let you add negative words into the search, allowing you to remove any such phrases during the research process rather than later. Personally, I try not to use the tools for this kind of elimination as you can accidentally eliminate some valuable terms. Instead, I use a [keyword research spreadsheet](#) that allows me to tag negative words as such while giving me the option to go through them later looking for any lost gems. You can find an article explaining how to use the spreadsheet [here](#).

It's also valuable to keep a list of your negative words (rather than just filtering them during your research) as this can be a handy list to have when you optimize your PPC campaigns.

Don't worry about eliminating every phrase with a junk word. Right now you're just going for the bulk, obvious stuff. Getting rid of the phrases with the most frequently used negative words will make it easier to sort through your keyword lists for the other issues later.

**Changes intent of the search:** You also want to see if there is any particular word or word order that changes the intent of the search. For example "defensive measure capabilities" has a different meaning than "measure defensive capabilities." Both come from the same core term, "defense measure," but the change in word order makes for an entirely different meaning.

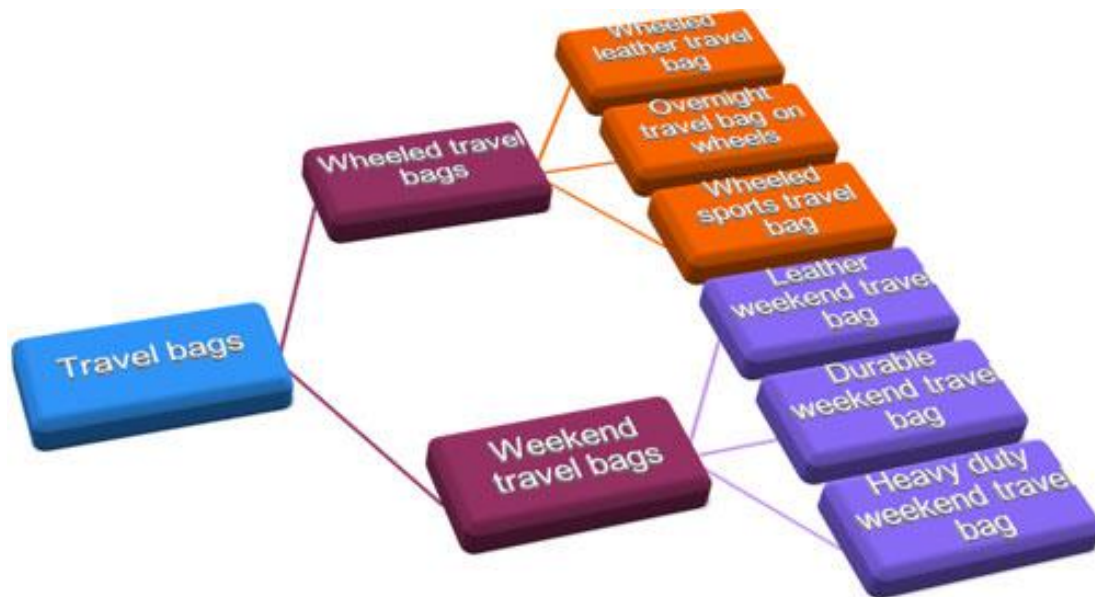
Often the addition of a single word will change the subject of the phrase. For example, when researching "sports bags," the phrase "sports bag locker" changes the subject from the bag to the locker. Unless you sell lockers for sports bags, this is a term that can be eliminated.

**Unrelated terms:** In your search, you'll find a fair number of qualifiers that are completely unrelated. Maybe it's brand names that you don't offer, or specific features that are being searched that you don't provide. Look for these terms and remove the unfitting qualifiers. But don't be too hasty to remove the entire phrase. Many times by simply removing the

non-relevant qualifier, you can leave yourself a phrase that is relevant but otherwise didn't appear in the results.

There will be more elimination in Phase III of the keyword research process, so don't worry about getting it all perfect here. The idea in this stage is to eliminate the most obvious words and phrases that don't fit. If you're unsure about any particular phrase, keep it. You can always eliminate it later. Right now it's better to err on the side of caution.

### Create phrase groups and sub-groups



Depending on the core term being researched out, you may end up with a list of hundreds or even thousands of phrases. Obviously, if your search produces no qualified terms, you'll need to re-evaluate that core term, or at the very least, set it aside so you can focus on phrases with more value. Perhaps that core term just isn't part of the popular terminology... yet. It may be some day!

After you do your initial round of eliminations above, you'll often find yourself with a list of a dozen to several hundred remaining phrases. Maybe more, but at this point it doesn't really matter. It's what we do next that does.

The ultimate goal of this keyword research process is to end up with very tightly focused groups of keywords that you can use to optimize your website most effectively. To do this, you now have to start taking a bigger-picture view of the core terms and phrases. You'll find that some core terms can be re-grouped together while other core terms can produce groups and sub-groups of their own. The goal is to know what's what so you're creating the strongest list of optimizable keyword groups possible.

### *Combine similar core terms*

Quite often, one or more of your core terms can be grouped together to form a single core topic. You'll often find many core terms that are already very similar and related with each other so grouping them together will feel natural. But that's not always the best reason to combine core terms together.

**When to combine core terms:** There are two good rules of thumb when it comes to deciding if two or more core terms should be combined with another.

The first is if the research simply didn't produce many phrases associated with that core term. If you use enough research tools, you'll no doubt be able to produce a decent size list in almost any circumstance, but we have to weigh here the number of viable, traffic-producing phrases that will be valuable to you. If there are fewer than, say 10 phrases, you could throw this core term keyword group in with another related core term group to optimize together.



There are always exceptions of course, most notably if you are in a very niche industry. If the number of core terms you have is limited and the phrases produced for each term is also limited, then you may not need to worry about combining, and it could be to your advantage not to.

The second rule for when to combine is if most of the search phrases produced have very low search volume. Optimization for each keyword group requires a certain amount of effort. No sense wasting all that effort on one or two good-volume phrases and a bunch of low-volume phrases when you might be able to combine them with another core term with similar results. By doing this, you can double the benefit for the same amount of effort.

Keep in mind that combining core groups together is highly dependent on the relevancy of those groups to each other. If by grouping them together you're splitting the focus of the content, then it's probably a bad idea to combine core term groups regardless of the two reasons above.

**How to combine:** When combining different core terms, there are a few things to keep in mind in order to get the best results:

*Group most similar.* Some core terms will be very similar in meaning and searcher intent. These make a great pair. For example "school supplies" and "student supplies" are likely used by two people looking for the same thing: supplies their child needs in the classroom. Look for core terms that would be a great natural fit in terms of what the searcher expects to find.

*Avoid inconsistent spellings.* Despite the rule above, don't combine different spellings of what is essentially the same core term. If you're dealing with words that can be spelled differently and still mean the same thing such as "duffelbag" and "dufflebag," it's generally not a good idea to try and target both spellings on the same page. If you mix the spellings, the inconsistency can look unprofessional to your users and dilute the focus of the page being optimized.

In fact, in the best case scenario, you can leave out misspelled words altogether. Don't try to optimize for those. In cases such as this, you might want to do some searches on Google to look for any "did you mean" option. This will tell you the spelling that Google considers to be correct. For example, searching for "duffelbag" in Google produces "did you mean: duffel bag." This tells us that you should optimize for "duffel bag" rather than "duffelbag".

But you'll also note that Google allows for "duffel" to be spelled as "duffle" as well, without giving an alternate suggestion. The search results are very similar, and you'll see them spelled both ways in the results. In this case, just pick a version you like and stick with it and let Google do the rest. If you really want to target the other version, use your blog rather than trying to spell it both ways on the same site.

*Verify on-page unity.* The next thing you have to be sure of is that all the terms will work together on one page. This is simply a matter of determining if the page content will be able to support both core terms and their phrases seamlessly without splitting the page's focus. You want to ensure that your content stays very focused on a single topic and that by merging the two you don't disrupt the sales process or the value of the content.

### *Create core-term sub groups*

Just as there are times to combine two or more core terms into a single group, you will want to look for opportunities to split a single core term into separate sub-groups, with each group focusing on a different aspect of the core topic.

The number of keywords you want to optimize on a single page of content is relatively small. There is no magic number, but it's just a matter of making sure all keyword phrases in a group are very focused. Using the core term "travel bags" as an example, we found that over 50 of the results contained the word "golf." This knowledge can tell us that "golf travel bag" can be a core term in and of itself, and therefore deserving its own page of content. Assuming, of course, that golf travel bags are an available item for you to sell.



You could have determined this was a core term earlier in the core term research process, but we really didn't know until now that it was a viable phrase. Seeing over 50 results tells us that it is!

When looking through the phrases that came up in the research, if you see any qualifier appear over and over again, that's a candidate for being its own core term group. Ultimately, it depends on the quality of the phrases with that qualifier. If they add value to your site, then designate a page of content for that topic. If not, then don't worry about it.

You may find that a sub-core term split out can be split again. For example, let's say that the new core term we created, "golf travel bags," produced 15 phrases with the word "leather." If that happen, "leather golf travel bags" can be a new sub-sub-core term, giving you an even more tightly focused group of keywords.

By splitting and combining core terms, you're able to develop a pretty strong understanding of the landscape before you. These groups can be used to influence the content, products and services you offer and how you lay out your website. Ultimately, the more focused each group of keywords is the better targeted your content will be, giving you better opportunities to drive interested traffic to your site.

## PHASE III: ANALYZING AND ELIMINATING KEYWORDS

After having researched your relevant core terms and search phrases, it's time to start the process of looking more closely at each phrase. What you want to do is separate the good keywords from the not-so-good. You need to find the search phrases that will ultimately provide you with the greatest benefit in your marketing campaigns and eliminate or sideline the rest.

### ANALYZING PHRASES FOR QUALITY

One of the most important aspects of researching and choosing keywords for optimization is to ensure every keyword you optimize is valuable. That means we have to assess each phrase in order to understand its purpose and to make sure it aligns with your needs.



#### What is the customer looking for?

The most important aspect of analyzing and eliminating keywords is to fully understand what the customer is looking for. We often see keywords through our own lens of understanding. You think about things a certain way because you are educated and trained that way. But the customer may not be educated in the same way, or at all, in terms of industry-related jargon. So you have to step outside of your own thought processes and learn to look through the lens of searchers who think differently from the way you do.

One question you have to ask is "What does the searcher really mean when they type in this query?" Often times the query itself isn't clear at all, and what you are thinking they mean may not be what the searcher is thinking. Ranking for these types of unclear terms is pretty valueless. Few searchers will even click on the site if they scan the results and don't see what they are looking for.

The searcher's intent can also be different from the results produced. In these cases, the search engines are determining the intent of the search and produce the results by their best algorithmic estimation. Again, in these cases when the searcher sees something different in the SERPs from what they wanted, they'll go back and perform a new search.

How do you get into the mind of the searcher? You can't always, but what you can do is scan through the search results for any given query. If the results are a match for what you offer, great, you've got yourself a worthwhile phrase. On the other hand, if the results are all for something completely different, then the searcher isn't likely looking for what you thought they were looking for.

Other times, you just might have to think through logically. If the searcher is looking for "wet t-shirts" you can be pretty sure they are not looking to buy a t-shirt that's waterproof. That's an extreme example, but you get the point.

#### Future and seasonal trends

Trends can play a significant factor in determining the value any particular keyword. Several years ago, I was doing keyword research for a client in the wedding planning business. This



was just as the movie "The Wedding Planner" was hitting theaters, which caused search volume estimates for "wedding planner" to be skewed much higher than normal.

Understanding current trends such as this can ensure you don't make an error in your keyword targeting. For this client "wedding planner" was still relevant despite the higher-than-normal search volume, but if the trends were not considered the client might assume this was the absolute best keyword to target over others such as "wedding planning".

As the above case proves, search volumes can often be over inflated, or even under inflated at different times. This is especially true with seasonal products and services. Performing your keyword research at the right time of year is important, but it's also important that you understand the ebb and flow in overall search volume.

It's also a good idea to keep an eye on potential future trends. Some valuable queries may not be searched at all today but can become extremely relevant and highly trafficked at some point in the near future. Getting a jump on any such terms can be a great investment in future returns. Also, keep in mind that today's popular terms can fade and will be searched less and less over time. There is nothing you can do to avoid that when it happens, other than just be ready for that possibility.

### **What's missing in SERPs**

Another way to determine what keywords might be good to target for optimization are areas in the search results that there is little or no competition. Search for your keywords looking for any gaps that are not being filled. Search volume for such phrases may be low, but if competition is low, then you increase your chances of getting clicked. And if that term does become hot, you've laid claim to the top spot, and it'll be much harder to push you out.

When performing these searches, you can also get a good feel for the competition. Sometimes a good keyword will show that there is a lot of competition, but a deeper look may prove that those competitors can easily be displaced. Size up the competition to see where you might be able to overcome them in the results.

### **Return on investment**

The most critical thing to look at regarding keywords and phrases is whether or not the keyword will produce a return on investment for you. And this is where all of the elements noted here must be weighed together, adding in the factor of time. Determining how much time and effort it will take to get any particular keyword ranked will give you a good idea whether the ROI is truly there or not.

In the long-term, even the most competitive phrases can be worth the effort. However, you can frequently get a better and quicker payoff by targeting less competitive, lower traffic phrases. At least until you build up enough site authority to go after the more highly competitive phrases.



**Don't rely on your own analysis**

When analyzing keywords, another big help can be seeking out the opinions and thoughts of others. Again, this goes back to not looking solely through our own eyes but allowing ourselves to look through the lens of others. And there is no better way to do that than to actually get the input from others.

When seeking outside opinion, here are a few people that you can seek out:

- Colleagues
- Assistants
- Managers
- Outside experts
- Clients

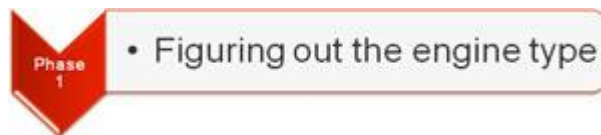
If you perform SEO for someone other than yourself, your client can be one of your best resources. Go to them at all stages of the keyword research process to get their insights and opinions. Otherwise, seek out other qualified and even unqualified individuals as they all have a unique perspective to share that can be valuable in learning more about your audience.

## PHASE IV: ORGANIZING KEYWORDS FOR SUCCESS

### MAKING SEO SUCCESSFUL

Organizing your keywords into an effective marketing strategy is the most important phase of the of your keyword research process. While most often SEOs and keyword researchers focus on the research phases—finding all relevant keywords—organizing your keyword properly can truly help you create a vastly more successful optimization and marketing campaign.

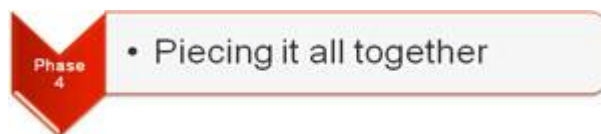
Let's use the analogy of building an engine to help us understand the value in this final step in the process.



Phase I of the process is all about understanding what type of engine you're working with. You're analyzing the various aspects of the engine to get a better idea of what exactly you're working with. By identifying the right core terms, you have a better understanding of how to proceed in building a successful optimization campaign.



The next two phases are about learning which parts you'll need to give your engine the proper tune up. You're figuring out what are the best phrases to use and discarding those that obviously won't produce the best performance.



This last phase is all about putting your engine together, or at least laying out the parts so that you CAN put the engine together properly. The goal is to create a way to optimize every possible relevant keyword into your site, so as to deliver more traffic without negating the site's message.

Such organization also provides you with a framework for continued optimization. You can focus on the keywords that are most important first while optimizing for the pages that are the most effective at getting your sales. And in the process, you will develop a successful, long-term optimization strategy.

*The three things that you need to analyze when organizing for success are:*



**Achievable:** Don't start with keywords that simply are not achievable. Again, consider your budget and your time. Improving rankings for certain keywords will simply not be possible in a short amount of time or with limited budgets. How much you're investing (money and/or time) will influence how aggressive you will be able to be at the whole of the web marketing campaign. Less money and time makes difficult keywords less achievable.

**Quickest results:** Starting with the low hanging fruit will often provide you with the quickest gains overall. It'll be slow growth, but slow (yet quicker) growth is better than no growth for a while.

**Most profitable:** You can rarely go wrong by starting with keywords that will bring in the greatest profits, provided that they don't fall in the unachievable category. After all, it's not just rankings that you're looking for. You want business growth. And what better way to grow your business than to bring in a surge of new business from high profit items?



Overall, the keyword organization process isn't all that difficult, but it does take a good deal of thoughtful analysis. The first step is to analyze all your information and category pages. Look at each page individually to determine its core objective. What is this page about?

For instance, you might have a page for "mens wedding rings" or "wheeled duffel bags." Create a spreadsheet of each existing page of your site and a list of any topic(s) each page focuses on. This will help you better understand which keywords will be the most natural fit for any keyword.

Once you have this list, you can go back to your original core term list and start "assigning" keywords to pages. Many of the page topics will be pretty obvious. However, you'll often find that more than one core topic is a good fit for a single page or, reversely, you have several pages that could be optimized for the same core topic. In cases like these, you need to determine the best option for each page, ensuring that

each page is given a unique topic. You don't want to target the exact core term across multiple pages.

In some cases, you'll find that you have far more keyword groups than existing pages on your site that can be optimized for those keywords. This provides you with a great opportunity to build new relevant pages (or blog posts) that will provide visitors with the information they seek, covering any remaining keywords.

The great thing about this approach is that it creates more entry points into your site. Just be careful that you're not creating new pages for the sake of new pages. Each page must address something that is not specifically addressed in other areas of the site and should give your visitors a compelling reason to continue through to the other areas of your site. Remember, every page must have a distinct purpose!

There are several ways to go about creating these additional content pages and entry points:

- Answer questions
- Provide expert advice
- Review products
- Expand on product benefits
- Write information articles



All of these are great fodder for content that your visitors will find relevant and helpful in making purchase decisions.

## SEGMENTING KEYWORDS



Segmenting your keyword phrases into groups based on searcher intent can help determine which keyword phrases are the best fit for any particular page. There are three main searcher intent groups for shopping: Research, Shop, Buy. A fourth category, Info, covers just about everything else. For most sites, it's the Research, Shop and Buy keywords that will bring in business, and the info keywords that will work towards social branding. Depending on the intent of the searcher, the core terms will be utilized differently. This is reflected in the search phrases.



## Research Phase

Searchers in the research phase are really just looking for some general information about a product or service. This category, more than any other, has crossover into the info category, but remember, the goal is to use keywords to bring in customers! Think of these searchers as window shoppers. They don't know what they really want or perhaps are not even convinced they want anything at all. They are just looking to see what's out there and to see if anything strikes their fancy.

These keywords should be targeted in the higher-level categories of the shopping process. Remember, the goal is to give the visitor what they are looking for. If someone is looking for "wedding rings," it does no good to drop them on a page that only shows diamond cut wedding rings. You want to show them everything you have. Otherwise, they may leave without exploring further realizing you provide other cuts as well.

Once you get these researchers to the site and have provided them the information they want, you have started a branding process. They may bookmark your site to come back later or even get enough information to move them right into the next phase. At worst, they'll go back and perform a new search at a later date, but hopefully you'll appear in those search results, too!

Targeting keywords for this phase will produce the best traffic, but it is the least important phase as it produces the lowest conversion rates. However, it can be a very strong branding opportunity.



## Shop Phase

Searchers in the shop phase have moved into the realm of having intent. They have an idea of what they want; they just don't know the specific details of it. In this phase, they are starting to compare features between various products, looking into the pros and cons of each, and narrowing down their preferences as they continue to research.

These keywords should be targeted on narrower product category pages as well as product comparison pages. The goal is to provide as many of the details needed for your customers to see that your products are superior. You also want to help them narrow down between different versions

of the products that you carry. The more you can do that here, the less likely shoppers will look for that information on another site.

Ideally, you'll be able to push the visitors from the Shop phase to the Buy phase while they are still on your site. They are more likely to make that move here, and these keywords provide better conversion rates than those in the research phase. All told, these are

probably the best keywords to target initially. With less competition and higher conversion rates, these phrases can be an opportunity gold mine.

## Buy Phase

Searchers in this phase have finally narrowed down to precisely what they want. Now they are simply looking for the best place to buy from. Reasons to buy can be any number of things, or combination of things, and will be different from one person to the next. One may be looking for lowest price. Another may be looking for better customer service. Others may be looking at warranties, return policies, a personal touch, elements of trust or how helpful the site has been overall.

Most likely, it's not any one of these things but a various combination of them all plus other things not mentioned here. And the reasons are likely to be unconscious, highly influenced by signals of branding and trust.



Buy phrases should be targeted on specific product pages. There is no better place to drop a visitor than on the product that they were very specifically looking for. Make sure these product pages provide information on all of the specific features and benefits and any other information visitors will need to make that final purchase decision.

Though these keywords have the highest conversion rates, they also tend to have the lowest search volume per keywords. However, they are also easiest to optimize since the queries are so specific. Bringing someone to your site at this phase of the cycle is more likely to lead to a purchase than any other.

## Information Phrases

The last group of keyword phrases, which is outside of the buying cycle, are those looking for some type of education. These are the phrases with a question or that help the searcher learn how to do something on their own.

Priority wise, these are typically the lowest priority keywords to go after. However, they make great blog fodder for bringing in an audience that can later be converted into customers.

It's helpful to use a spreadsheet to help you separate your keywords into these groups. With keywords separated out by intent, you'll have an easier time working through the next stage of the process.

## CREATING OPTIMIZABLE KEYWORD GROUPS

The end goal of this phase is to have multiple short lists of keyword phrases all focused by (specific) topic and intent. So far, we've spend a lot of time learning how to analyze and assess the keywords, but now we are moving into the final stage of creating those lists that we've been working toward from the beginning. The key is to make sure you're grouping

these properly so, when optimizing, you're able to create a solid topical article or page of content.

### **Grouping phrases together for on-page targeting**

The process of organizing your keywords is similar to the process of splitting a single core term into multiple cores, only it's done on a much more fine-tuned scale. With core terms, you were dealing with multiple themes or different ways to search for the same product. In this phase, we are working with only a single core term and deciding how to segment literally hundreds of phrases into manageable groups that are similar in nature.

The work we did segmenting keywords by searcher intent comes in handy here. You only want to group keywords that have the same intent behind them. No matter how similar two phrases are, if it is determined that the intent is different, they need to stay separated. This ensures that the page they will be targeted on will maintain a strict purpose and will be able to effectively meet the searcher's needs.

I typically like to organize phrases into groups of no more than fifteen keywords per page, but less or more is perfectly okay. Other times, you may have two or three small groups that can be grouped together, depending on their focus and the content of any given web page. The goal is to make sure you end up with lists of keywords that you're comfortable optimizing together into the page that best reflects those keywords.

### **Group qualifiers with similar meaning**

As you look for phrases that can be grouped together, it's easy, initially, to start with phrases that have modifiers that are similar in meaning. An example of this may be "discount," "cheap," "inexpensive" or "on sale." Qualifiers that fit with "elegant" may include "exotic," "designer" or "classy." Again, we are understanding more about the intent of the searcher. Grouping similarly defined terms is a great help to both you and the visitor.

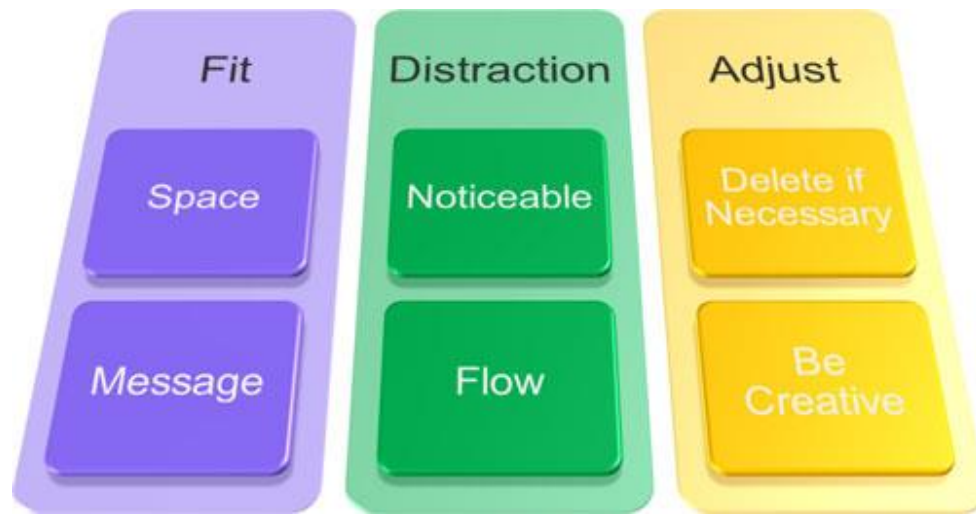


Along the same lines, you want to avoid putting phrases together where the modifiers don't work together or have opposing meanings. For example, you don't want to talk about your "elegant wedding rings" on the same page that you describe them as "cheap wedding rings."

### **Use content to inform your keyword grouping**

One of the most important elements in organizing phrases together is to make sure that you group phrases that can "correctly" be implemented together into the site. Don't try to force keyword phrases together that simply are not a good fit on a single page. It's important 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.

Here are some guidelines for ensuring your keyword groups will be effective in implementation.



### *Fit*

The more keywords you are optimizing, the more text is usually required for you to hit on all aspects of the topic. Long content may be great—and necessary—to provide enough information to be relevant for the searcher, but that's not always the case. And many times, your content space is limited, which means you may need to target fewer keywords than you originally intended. That's okay. More than anything, you want to make sure you strike a balance between keywords and how/where they are being optimized.

**Space:** Look at each page and determine how much text room you have. Product category pages generally have room for no more than a paragraph or two of text, while blog posts have virtually unlimited amount of space available. When dealing with limited space, you may need to cut out some keywords and target them elsewhere.

**Message:** Aside from the length of the text, you also have to consider the message of the content itself. Even if you have room, don't allow the message to get diluted simply to target more keywords. The message by far is more important than the keywords. Ensure that all your keywords work with the message of the page and enhance rather than detract from that message.

### *Distraction*

When we think of keyword distraction, we usually think of how keywords are used on the page. In the past, SEOs have been willing to bend the rules of good grammar just to get another instance of a keyword in the text. But today, actual keyword usage is less important than overall topical understanding. Don't allow keyword integration to distract from the message. If a keyword fits the topic, then it fits. However, if you're trying to *make* it fit the topic, it might end up hurting more than helping. To prevent your keywords from being a distraction, there are a couple things to look for:

**Noticeable:** Once your content is written using the keywords, read through to see how noticeable they are. If you can read and pick out the keywords, it's likely that your visitor

will too. This is a noticeable distraction that gets in the way of the visitors' conversion process.

**Flow:** You also want to keep an eye on the flow of the content. This isn't just about sentence structure but about how the information is put together. When trying to get multiple instances of keywords on the page, a lot of SEOs resort to repetition. While repetition can be good in certain circumstances, in others it's just an annoyance. Make sure paragraphs flow in a logical order. Don't let your keywords dictate your content.

### *Adjust*

Keyword research, selection and organization is not a "set it and forget it" strategy. It's fluid. Even when you get to this last stage, you have to be willing to go back and adjust things from earlier stages as necessary. When it comes to implementing keywords into the page, the same holds true. Certain keywords that you felt would work nicely together may not when it comes to looking at the actual content of the page. You must be willing to make changes and adjust the plan as needed.

**Delete if necessary:** There are many times that we complete our keyword research and then realize while creating content that certain keywords just don't work. Be willing to delete these phrases or move them to another, more relevant, keyword group. No sense holding onto something that just won't work.

**Be creative:** Sometimes optimizing keywords is just a matter of creativity. Don't be afraid to find creative, compelling ways to focus your topic so you can get in a wider range of keyword options. Again, you absolutely should not force something that won't work, but don't give up so easily when a little creativity may give you a better result.



## Don't rush

We conclude this guide on Keyword research with a simple message: Don't rush.

The keyword research process is a strategic part of your optimization campaign's success. This isn't just something you can burn through so you can get to the actual optimization. Rushing leads to mistakes, and mistakes in keyword research result in poor SEO performance.

Keyword research provides the foundation for a solid SEO strategy. When performed properly, you'll have a greater chance for achieving successful search engine rankings, and your pages will be less cluttered and more highly focused. What's more, you'll have a site that does a far better job at targeting its audience and converting them into customers.

In SEO, every little bit counts, and the more you can do to improve the performance of the site, the more successful you'll be. And since SEO is all about good keyword targeting, it makes sense to get your keywords in order. The phases and steps outlined in this guide will help you do that. Not only will you find just about every possible, relevant keyword for your industry, you'll be able to implement an SEO strategy that is built for success from the ground up. And that will give you an edge over your most ardent competition. So take your time to do it right!



## Don't want to do it on your own?

With a wide variety of web marketing and consulting services, we can help. Tell us what you need on our Contact Us page!

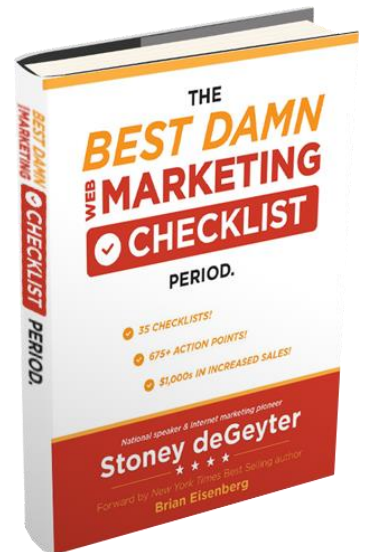
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