

Search Engine Common Sense

In the first part of the series, I wish to ensure we discuss the importance of a solid foundation. When starting any SEO campaign it is tempting to leap straight in and start tweaking meta tags and changing text. However, like any successful marketing strategy, it is vital to ensure that you know whom your audience is and how to reach them. In the same way traditional advertising agencies survey their demographic audience, search engine marketers must ensure that their SEO campaign targets the correct keywords or search phrases. Target the wrong search phrase and you could end up with great search engine rankings for keywords that have no search requests. A few hours now spent ensuring that the correct search phrases are targeted, can save months of useless optimization.

Brainstorm When you started your company or developed your products, you no doubt sat down with your friends, relatives and business partners and discussed the needs of your target audience. You would have been foolish to stubbornly press ahead with your products without first testing the market to see if there was a demand. Likewise, when you start out on your SEO campaign it is important to brainstorm search phrases that are likely to bring qualified visitors to your website. Sit down with your co-workers and business partners and discuss which keywords are relevant to the products and services you offer. Compile an initial list of 5-10 search phrases that you feel best represent your company and which you believe people would type into a search engine when trying to find you. Consider the following factors when brainstorming:

- * Is your audience likely to search for industry standard terms or simple layman phrases?
- * Which of your products are in stock?
- * Which products have the highest profit margin?

There is no point targeting search phrases that are popular if you don't actually stock that item. If you had just a \$0.20 mark-up on a very popular product, could you sell enough online to make a profit? A product that is less searched but has a higher profit margin would be easier to obtain a search engine ranking and would yield higher revenues.

- * Identify your biggest competitors. View competitor websites and see which products they appear to target; which search phrases do they have rankings for?

Make use of any PPC data. Chances are, your decision to begin a SEO campaign is fueled by your desire to reduce costly pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns. While reliance on PPC will be reduced with a good SEO campaign, you can make use of your current PPC efforts when researching your search phrases to target. Analyze your PPC keywords and look to see which of them have brought the highest traffic levels, best click through rates and greater sales conversions. It is likely a search phrase that brought successful results through a PPC campaign will be very relevant in your quest to obtain top search engine positioning.

Expanding your Keyword list Once you have completed your brainstorming and have compiled your list of 5-10 core keywords, it's time to move on and expand that list. A list of 5-10 search phrases will not, as I am sure you will know, bring the amount of search engine traffic needed to make your website successful. However, that list will be a vital tool when determining which phrases to add to the mix. At this point, you need to turn to the search engines themselves and research which search phrases are actually being typed into Google, Yahoo, MSN et. While few search engines will openly tell you which search phrases are the most often searched, there are a couple of very useful tools you can use to expand your list. The first and most well known, is the Overture Search Suggestion Tool. This great little research tool is primarily for the use of Overture PPC users and if you have ever endeavored on a PPC campaign with Overture, you will no doubt have come across it. Take any of your main search phrases and enter them into the suggestion tool. Overture will then spit out all other popular search terms that contain that phrase. In addition, Overture will place the search phrases in order of popularity and give you an idea of the number of searches per month for each phrase across their network. While this tool can be very useful, especially as it is free to use, it does have some key drawbacks. First, it does not differentiate between singular and plural search phrases. Consequently, "desktop computer" and "desktop computers" are combined together, leaving you to use your own judgment as to which variation is the most popular. For many search phrases, you can take an educated guess as to which one is likely to be the most searched, but often you will be left without a clue as to whether to target the singular or plural. Secondly, the Overture Suggestion Tool does not handle punctuation very well, preferring to ignore it completely. Thus "kid's toys", "kid's toys", "kid-toys", "kid's toy" would all be shown as "kid toy". Again, this never used to be a big problem, but go to Google and search for each of these phrases and you will see different results for each one. If you are serious about your SEO campaign, you will consider a subscription to WordTracker to be a worthwhile investment. Starting at just \$7 a day, with discounts all the way up to one year of service, WordTracker offers a similar type of research tool as Overture but with many more bells and whistles. The biggest advantage with WordTracker is that it uses Meta-Crawlers when sourcing search phrase frequencies. This eliminates inflated search phrase frequencies from Overture users checking their own rankings and thus artificially increasing the popularity of certain phrases. In addition WordTracker offers the following advantages:

- * Offers a "thesaurus" and "lateral" search. Allowing you to view search phrases that are related to your main search term, but not necessarily containing that term.
- * Shows search frequencies for both singular and plural phrases; allowing you to determine which is the most popular.
- * Identifies which form of punctuation is the most popular.
- * Allows you to place your targeted keywords into a "shopping basket" so that you can analyze all of your phrases together.
- * Has an exclusive KEI analyzer that allows you to compare the popularity of the search phrase with the number of websites competing for that keyword.

Determining Competition Once you have identified possible additions to your search phrase list, you must research further to determine if there is a good chance you will achieve your prized top search engine ranking or if the competition for that phrase is already saturated. While it can be tempting to target only search phrases that are very popular and searched hundreds of thousands of times in a single month, you must also consider the likelihood of you being able to obtain a ranking high enough to capitalize on all of that great traffic. Many, many search terms are so saturated by competitors that it would be highly unlikely that you would achieve a high enough ranking to reward your efforts. Therefore, it is often worthwhile considering those search phrases that may not have quite the same level searches each month, but likewise do not have as many websites targeting that term. WordTracker's KEI (keyword effectiveness index) allows its users to analyze their chosen search phrases to determine the level of competition for that phrase. WordTracker has a great explanation on their website as to how to use this index, but in summary it provides a numerical scale for identifying the popularity of a keyword compared to the number of competitors targeting

that phrase. For those of you on a strict budget and opting to use Overture for keyword research, there is an alternative answer. Enter each identified search phrase at Google, using quotations around the phrase (e.g. "discount computers"). Google will then display the search results for all pages that target that phrase exactly as entered. View the top right, blue navigation bar and you will see the number of results Google matched. This number represents the total number of web pages that Google has identified as targeting that exact search phrase. This number represents your competition or your very own KEI. Make a note of this number for each of your identified search phrases and pretty soon you will be able to see which of your search phrases have the most competition and which have less competitors and therefore a better chance of obtaining top ranking. **Selecting Your Keywords** By now, you should have an expanded list of search phrases to target, taken from either Overture or WordTracker. In addition, you should also have a good idea as to the competition for each of those keywords, whether you used the KEI or Google format. Now is the time to start selecting the search phrases that will form the foundation for a successful SEO campaign. Ok, deep breath, we're almost there. When selecting the keywords to target, there are many factors you must take into consideration. You will no doubt have your own unique considerations, but you must also take into account the following: * Is the search phrase relevant to your website and the page that you are optimizing? * Is there a page within your website that would be particularly suitable for targeting the selected search phrase? * How many other websites/web pages would you be competing against? * Do you offer competitive pricing for the product or service that relates to the keyword? * Will top search engine ranking for the search phrase generate enough revenue for your company? **Arranging Keywords into Themes**

About the Author

JBrock Webmaster of [Motorcycle Parts](#) and [Columbus Massage](#)

Source: <http://www.article-zine.com>