

KEYWORD RESEARCH

Trawl through web newsletters and you will find keyword research elevated to a black art. At the very least you will need paid-for analysis tools and traffic estimators to be in the game. But for most businesses this is over the top. Put simply, you merely want your keywords to rank high in SERPS and invariably, the choice of keywords appears obvious. The exception is the fiercely competitive sectors where all the black arts have to be marshalled to get the desired results.

In our view, and adopting a simplistic approach, there are four phases to this process: prepare a master list of keywords, shortlist them, theme them and then monitor and edit ruthlessly.

Prepare a master list

There are a number of good sources. Firstly, brainstorm a list in-house always remembering to use your target audiences' terminology. Secondly, if you have an analytics programme installed or are using PPC advertising you will already have a ready source of search queries that are being used. Add these to your list.

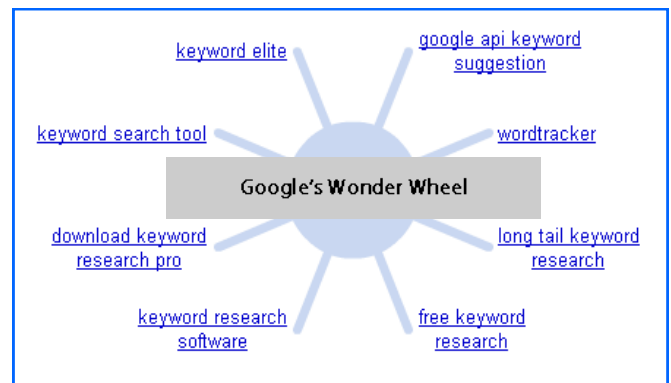
Thirdly, have a look at competitor sites and see what keywords they are using. This is low hanging fruit. See what is attracting people to your competitors' sites and you can ride on the back of their keyword research. To do so, find their web site Home Page and look for 'View/Source' (in Internet Explorer) and it will show you the keywords being used. Simple, quick and cheap. Fourthly, there are plenty of keyword suggestion tools on the web which can generate suggestions (see inset box). One which is fun to use is Keyword Eye.

Shortlist them

You probably now have a list of keywords which is far too long and need to slim it down (the recommended number of keywords is 20 but many argue that less is more as it gives focus and clarity to a site. If nothing else, establish separate landing pages for each distinct group of keywords. For example, if you are selling bulbs to gardeners there could be group of keywords for daffodils and another for tulips. This will enable you to optimise one particular page of the web site for each and keep the site focussed. Use Google's Wonder Wheel to guide your selection (do a search in Google and look for Wonder Wheel in the column on the left hand side).

Theme them

The next phase is to categorise your grouped keywords according to the likelihood of generating a sale. Long tail keywords with more than two words will not attract as much traffic as single words but would be expected to be better convertors – Keyword Eye, Google's Traffic Estimator and Adwords Keyword Tool will all give you an estimate of traffic volumes.



The logic here is that someone who searches for a 'XYZ Digital Model 3/21 camera with an f2.3 lens' is further along the buying funnel than one who just searches for 'digital camera'. The objective is to get on page 1 of the SERPS so the more precise you are with your keyword string the more likely you are to get a high ranking. A word of caution, it may take many months to get a high ranking for the more popular keywords.

Monitor and edit ruthlessly

Like everything associated with the web it is a continuous process if you are to get high rankings. Realistically, this needs to be an absolute minimum of a once-a-month job. Use the tools mentioned above to revisit your decisions over keywords and use Google Insights to check on new developments and 'trends' that you may be able to exploit.

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Useful sites:

[https://adwords/google.com/o/Targeting/Explorer](https://adwords.google.com/o/Targeting/Explorer) (combining with sktool after August 2010)
www.google.com/sets
www.google.com/insights
www.google.co.uk/trends
<http://tools.seobook.com/keyword-tools.seobook>
www.keywordeye.co.uk