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INTRODUCTION

This is the first a series of five articles providing practical information about how to make your website more successful.

If you would like to access other articles in this series please visit www.succinctideas.com.au

WHAT IS A KEYWORD ?

'Keywords' refers to the terms entered into a search engine by a potential client, with target keywords indicating the optimal terms for your business.

Online sales relies on tapping into searches for your target keywords, so understanding what they are is absolutely fundamental to your online success.

A WORD OR A PHRASE?

While the term *keyword* suggests a single word, it is more typically to be a short phrase often three or more words.

e.g. if for example you sold widgets then *buy widget* might possibly be your target keywords as these signal the searcher is looking to buy a widget.

PLAIN SPEAK

Searches are typically in common language, or as I prefer to call it *plain speak*.

Complex terminology, industry jargon and technical terms are in my experience unlikely to yield strong sales results, unless of course you are specifically targeting clients within the industry.

i.e. *buy widget* is more likely to be used than *purchase widget*

buy blue widget is more likely to be used than *buy lapis lazuli widget*

MISSPELLING

Don't assume that everybody types your target keywords perfectly as there are often common misspellings and typographical errors.

For example I've noticed around 5% of searches relating to *accommodation* are consistently misspelt as *accomodation* and 0.5% are spelt as *accomadation*.

As search engines will see these as different (albeit closely related) terms, this information can (and is !) used to your competitive advantage.

GRAMMATICALLY INCORRECT KEYWORDS

Note also that searches are not necessarily grammatically correct phrases.

Often searches are built up from a series of individual searches with additional clarifying terms appended to the previous .

Here is a series of searches that might represent how a potential client progressively conducts their research:

- Widgets -> Too many results
- widgets blue -> I really want a blue widget
- widgets blue adelaide -> I want to buy it in Adelaide

BROAD KEYWORDS

A *broad* keyword is one that while relevant; does not explicitly identify a sales prospect:

e.g. a search for *widget* does not indicate any intention.

Broad terms attract more searches and hence are often incorrectly presented as being desirable, however if conversions to sales is your principal objective (as it rightly should be!) then terms that illustrate a genuine interest in a sale such as *buy widget* signals a better opportunity for a sale than broad keywords.

INTERPRETING SEARCH TERMS

A search term can tell you a lot about the searcher and where they are in terms of making a purchase decision.

While broad searches suggest the searcher is in the early phases of their purchase research, a more targeted search tends to suggest a better understanding of requirements; the marketplace; even where and how the searcher wants to purchase and therefore a prospect who is nearly ready to purchase.



Tracking the sales process this closely provides an opportunity to tactically select where we will introduce ourselves to the client.

EARLY EXPOSURE

Positioning your exposure to a prospective client early in their purchase research enables you to assist (and possibly influence) this process; introduce your offering; begin establishing credibility and forming a sales relationship (i.e. building trust) with the prospect.

Note that a well designed website will undertake all of this with no human input at all!

This approach would be appropriate for example in attracting leads for long lead time, high value purchases where the sale is ultimately closed through contact with your sales team.

Ideally you can coax some form of organic search exposure for your targeted keywords to attract these early researchers.

Paid per click advertising is an expensive option for early purchase research exposure because there is an inherently low conversion rate (refer Broad Keywords) and you have to pay for each and every visitor.

Your site will provide contextual information to satisfy the researcher's needs, and other information to tempt the prospect to be exposed to the benefits of your offerings.

You might even provide subtle FUD (Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt) information about your competition. Fear is a powerful motivator but should be very carefully tuned to a cultural context. Americans for example seem more comfortable with competitor criticism whereas this would alienate many Australians and result in a lost sale.

PURCHASE READY EXPOSURE

Introducing your offerings to a prospect who already knows what they are looking for provides the best possible conversion to sales opportunity.

Astute competitors will also recognise this and so gaining exposure for these keywords can be more challenging which usually translates into effort and expense.

Competitors can often be diffused by differentiating your offerings and representing this strongly in your online point of contact; your Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

Commodity product sales are less likely to warrant decision support material in your site so present relevant sales values such as availability and avoid margin eroding discounts.

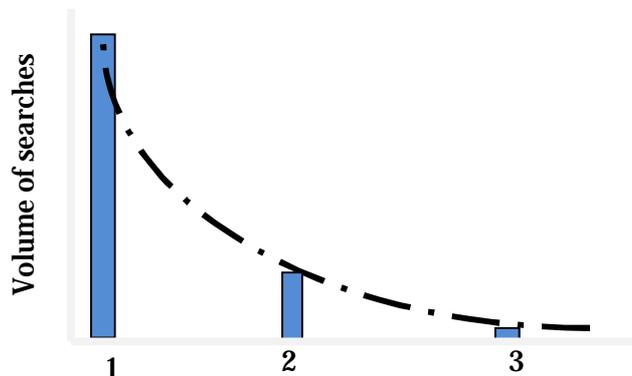
PROBLEMS AND SOLUTION KEYWORDS

Apart from the more obvious *solution* keywords i.e. terms that describe the *solution* your product or service provides, many potential prospects will conduct their research on the basis of the *problem* your products/services can solve for them.

Confirming search volumes in both areas will provide clarity about the most appropriate tactic, or indeed if you need to cover both areas.

THE LONG TAIL

This model illustrates typical keyword search volume distribution



1. *widgets* (500 per month)
2. *widgets blue* (100 per month)
3. *widgets blue Adelaide* (10)

Broad keywords like *widget* in our sample graph dominate searches with 500 per month; while more targeted keywords like *widgets blue adelaide*, occurring less frequently at only 10 per month represents but are much better conversion opportunities.

How does it help us? It visually identifies the high volume and typically more costly search terms from the low cost less frequently searched 'long tail' keywords.

WHAT ARE THE *BEST* KEYWORD(S)?

This inevitable question is answered with the *best* keywords are the ones that attract the *best* outcomes for the website and/or online business.

If generating sales leads is the website's objective then the best keywords are those that attract the best sales leads.

Similarly if the website's primary objective is to generate online sales then the best keywords are those that generate online sales.

FINDING KEYWORDS FOR FREE

Without doubt Google's Keyword tool is the best keyword research aid tool and not just because it's free!

One of an array of support tools in Google's pay click advertising system AdWords; the Keyword Tool is accessible and easily used for general keyword research.

<https://adwords.google.com.au/select/KeywordToolExternal>

Starting with broad, single word terms; investigate the relevant and more frequently searched by focussing a new search on these.

I find it useful to export all of the terms into Excel then use its filtering and sorting capabilities to slice and dice the sometimes thousands of searched terms.

Google Insights for Search is also a useful tool for graphically comparing search terms and their relative use in different locations.

<http://www.google.com/insights/search/>

APPLYING YOUR KEYWORDS

Now that you have determined your target keywords, they need to be manifested into your website, but where? Here are a few suggestions:

TITLES AND TAGS

The most effective places to add keywords is in 'title' areas on each page, and for maximum benefit they should be formatted as HTML H1 style. This signifies these are level 1 headings (i.e. very important) and warrant search engine attention.

A similarly named but separate element is the Title meta tag. This is displayed in Internet Explorers title bar but not elsewhere on the page.

To view the title tag scan through the beginning of the raw HTML code looking for the content between <TITLE> and </TITLE>

Similarly the Description meta tag warrants some keyword treatment.

Finally there is benefit in adding your target keywords to ALT tags that can be optionally added to any images.

These changes require an understanding of web page coding and/or a web editor and so may need to be added by your web developer.

It is worth noting that the Keyword meta tag has not been used by Google since 2002 and subsequently by most other search engines but some still persist in using it.

COPY

The copy or text in your website should contain your target keywords repeated several times. The number of times to repeat the keywords is quite a contentious topic in my industry but consider adding them at least three times in each page assuming about hundred words on the page.

Also bold one of the first keyword iterations, and for good measure use another keyword as link text connected to a related page within your site.

Once we have made these changes we need to wait for Google and the other principal search engines to visit and re-digest our site which may take several weeks.

WHERE KEYWORDS WON'T WORK

Search engines correlate text in websites with text in searches. If a search engine can't detect the text in your website it won't correlate your site with that search.

Text in some forms cannot be 'seen' by a search engine including:

IMAGES

Text in an image, for example a street name in a photograph cannot currently be interpreted by search engines and so will not attract searches for the street name.

Similarly text rendered into images which occurs frequently is also invisible to a search engine.

FLASH

Adobe Flash is a powerful multimedia environment used routinely in websites to create attractive movement and audio elements.

Text embedded in Flash is also invisible to search engines.

SUMMARY

We have identified our target keywords and tweaked our site accordingly so it is more likely to feature in searches that represent sales opportunities.

Now we can move on to the other important elements in creating a successful website.