
Keywords: the Language of Search

If you've been following our newsletters, you already know that an expert keyword strategy is central to any online marketing campaign. But what exactly are keywords and how are they chosen?

Keywords, Search Strings & Verticals

A keyword is any descriptor used online to search for specific information. A combination of keywords is known as a keyword string or search string. Even the slightest variation on a keyword or search string can bring up radically different results; "clothes", for example, brings up an entirely different set of results than "clothing". When examining keywords, it is important to consider differences in pluralization and spelling; when considering a search string, you must also take into account variations in word order and whether the user will be searching for an exact phrase (i.e. entering a search string in quotes on a search engine).

As any experienced search engine user knows, the more specific the search, the narrower the results. Adding modifiers to the same keyword to specify the results creates what online marketers call a keyword vertical.

Types of Keywords

- **Primary** — These are the most important search terms in your campaign. Primary keywords should directly describe the products and services people you want to find your site will be looking for. Generally you want your primary keywords to have a high search volume, i.e. popularity. Primary keywords are deployed in high density within your site's content, metatags and titles, and inbound links.

- **Secondary** — Secondary keywords are a great tool for savvy upstarts who want to get the "edge" in a keyword market. Secondary terms usually consist of your primary keywords plus a supporting term that is more specific and narrows the focus; for example, if one of your primary search terms is "SEO Company", a secondary term might be "Expert SEO Company". A popular variation on this strategy is to localize your primary keywords to take advantage of customers who may be searching for a business in a specific area, i.e. a "New York SEO Company".

- **Lateral** — Here's where your campaign gets creative. Lateral keywords are terms that are unrelated but often associated with your

primary keyword set. Corporate PA's keyword research tools query other websites and search engines to discover these related key terms. A real estate company, for example, may want to include the search strings "open house" or "land for sale". Lateral keywords can even include competitors' names, such as "Century 21", or other services that your target market (people looking to buy a home) might be searching for, such as "title insurance".

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Longtail ‐ We discuss this theory at length in our article on Leveraging the Longtail, but suffice it to say cornering longtail or "niche" search markets can be very lucrative. Longtail keywords can include common misspellings or typos of your primary keywords, semantic queries ("What is the top SEO Company?"), or extremely specific search strings. While these niche phrases usually don't generate enough traffic to sustain an entire website, the beauty of longtail keywords is that they're uncompetitive, so you can achieve high rankings quickly and with a minimum of effort.

How To Research A Keyword Market

At Corporate PA, we employ a variety of tools to determine the optimal keyword strategy for our clients. These tools examine trends in keyword popularity, measure competition among other online marketers and suggest alternative search strings that capture the same demographic. The criteria we use to examine this data include:

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Monthly Search Volume ‐ An estimate of the number of searches performed using a given keyword or set of keywords each month. Search engines like Google usually calculate this using an average of the previous 12 months of searches, to offset seasonal discrepancies. This number can be further refined into Global or Local Monthly Search Volumes.

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Occurrences ‐ The number of times a keyword shows up in search results. A measure of the competitiveness of your keyword.

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Successful Search Score ‐ The percentage of searches of a keyword that result in a successful clickthrough of the search results. This is a valuable gauge of which keywords are generating effective results for searchers.

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Keyword Effectiveness Index (KEI) ‐ KEI is a useful metric developed to test the effectiveness of a keyword. Essentially, it measures a keyword's popularity relative to its competitiveness. Typically an SEO company uses KEI as a determining

factor in keyword

research. At CorporatePA we take KEI into consideration but also analyze the marketing strategies of leading competitors to determine whether valuable keywords are worth going after.

Return on Investment (R.O.I.)

At CorporatePA, we understand that any Search Engine Marketing plan is an investment of time and money, so before we begin any campaign, we undertake exhaustive research and discovery to ensure we precisely target the most profitable customers for your business with an effective and creative keyword strategy—ensuring the best return for your investment.