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Selecting and Evaluating Keyphrases for Search Engine Marketing

By Scott Buresh

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Many businesses recognize that search engines can bring volumes of highly targeted prospects to their website, typically at a fraction of the cost of traditional marketing. Unfortunately, these same companies often overlook the most important part of their search engine marketing campaigns, which is keyphrase selection and evaluation. Keyphrases (those phrases that potential customers are using to find products or services on search engines) are the building block of any search engine marketing strategy. It is essential that they are chosen carefully, or else the remainder of the campaign, no matter how effective the implementation, will likely be in vain. What follows is a three-step process that goes over the process of compiling, selecting, and evaluating the ongoing performance of keyphrases for search engines.

1. Compiling a keyphrase list:

Usually, companies are sure that they already know their ideal keyphrases. Often, they are wrong. This is typically because it is very hard to separate oneself from a business and look at it from the perspective of a potential customer (rather than an insider). Compiling a keyphrase list should not be, despite common practice, a strictly internal process. Rather, it is best to ask everyone outside of your company for their input, especially your customers. People are often very surprised at the keyphrase suggestions they get— and sometimes dismayed to realize that an average customer doesn't speak the same language that they do. Only after you have put together a list of likely phrases from external sources do you add your own. As a last step, try to add variations, plurals, and derivatives of the phrases on your list.

2. Evaluating keyphrases:

Once you have compiled a master keyphrase list, it is time to evaluate each phrase to hone your list down to those most likely to bring you the highest amount of quality traffic. Although many individuals will base their assessment of keyphrase value based only on popularity figures, there are really three vitally important aspects of each phrase to consider.

Popularity

By far the easiest of the three to judge is popularity, since it is not subjective. Software like

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WordTracker gives popularity figures of search phrases based upon actual search engine activity (it also gives additional keyphrase suggestions and variations). Such software allows you to assign a concrete popularity number to each phrase to use when comparing them. Obviously, the higher the number, the more traffic that can be expected (assuming you are able to obtain good search engine positions). However, this number alone is not good enough reason to pursue any particular keyphrase, although too often keyphrase analysis stops here.

Specificity

This is more abstract than the sheer popularity number, but equally important. For example, let's assume that you were able to obtain great rankings for the keyphrase "insurance companies" (a daunting prospect). Let's also assume that you only deal with auto insurance. Although "insurance companies" might have a much higher popularity figure than "auto insurance companies", the first

keyphrase would also be comprised of people looking for life insurance, health insurance, and home insurance. It is very likely that someone searching for a particular type of insurance will refine their search after seeing the disparate results returned from the phrase "insurance companies". In the second, longer keyphrase, you can be reasonably sure that a much higher percentage of visitors will be looking for what you offer— and the addition of the word "auto" will make it much easier to attain higher rankings, since the longer term will be less competitive.

Motivation of User

This factor, even more abstract than specificity, calls for an attempt to understand the motivation of a search engine user by simply analyzing his or her search phrase. Assume, for example, that you were a real estate agent in Atlanta. Two of the keyphrases you are evaluating are "Atlanta real estate listings" and "Atlanta real estate agents". Both phrases have very similar popularity numbers. They are also each fairly specific, and your services are very relevant to each. So which phrase is better? If you look into the likely motivation of the user, you will probably conclude that the second is superior. While both phrases target people looking for real estate in Atlanta, you can infer from the second phrase that the searcher has moved beyond the point where they are browsing local homes or checking out prices in their neighborhood— they are looking for an agent, which implies that they are ready to act. Often, subtle distinctions between terms can make a large difference on the quality of the traffic they attract.

3. Evaluating Keyphrase Performance:

Until recently, judging the performance of individual keyphrases was a dicey proposition. Although it is possible to tell from your log traffic analysis how many visitors are getting to your site from each keyphrase (valuable information, but unfortunately not enough to do much with), it was very hard to decipher which phrases were bringing you the most quality traffic. Recently, however, some sophisticated but affordable tools have been developed that allow you to judge the performance of each individual keyphrase based upon visitor behavior. This new software makes it possible to periodically analyze which keyphrases are bringing your site the most valuable visitors— those who buy your products, fill out your contact form, download your demo, etc. This type of data, rather than the sheer number of visitors from each search phrase alone, is invaluable when you are refining your search engine marketing campaigns, since you can discard and replace non-performing keyphrases and put increased effort toward the phrases that are delivering visitors that become customers. This kind of ongoing analysis is the final piece of the keyphrase puzzle, and allows you to continually target

the most important phrases for your industry, even if they change over time.

Conclusion:

Keyphrase compilation, evaluation, and performance are all vitally important to any search engine marketing campaign. While high rankings in search engines are an admirable goal, high rankings for poor keyphrases will consistently deliver poor results. Integration of this keyphrase process into your overall search engine marketing strategy can dramatically improve your website performance (and thus your bottom line).

META Tags Explained and How To Use Them For Ranking

By Frank Kilkelly

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The META tags are used to provide extra information about a web page. There was once a time where a good search engine ranking could be achieved by simply changing the value of the META tags. However these days are long gone. Nowadays the META Tags are decreasing in importance in the eyes of the search engines who are using more sophisticated methods of ranking pages (namely link popularity, optimized anchor text).

There are many different types of META tags but the one that can affect ranking are the Keywords META tag and the Description META tag.

Keywords META tag:

This tag contains keywords relevant to a page. In the past search engines referenced this to determine how to rank a particular page. However many people started to abuse this and stuffed the tag with keywords that were not relevant to the content of the page. This confused search engines and subsequently returned weaker search results. To combat this less and less emphasis has been placed on the Keywords META tag. However this does not mean that it is entirely useless. Here are some reasons to still include it:

* Some search engines still use it

Although most search engines do not use the tag there are undoubtedly still some that do. For this reason place around 15–20 keywords relevant to your site or page into the tag. Do not attempt to cheat the search engines by repeating keywords as this is considered spamming and they may look unfavourably on this.

* Account for misspellings of keyphrases

People can misspell certain keyphrases that you may be optimizing for so it is common to place these misspellings into the Keywords META tag. This allows you to rank in search engine results for misspellings without having to represent them on the actual content of your page.

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Description META tag:

In the past this tag was used to specify the text that would appear in search engine results alongside the link to your site. Keywords could be placed into this text to influence ranking. However it was abused similar to the Keywords META tag and has befallen the same fate, meaning it is not as useful as it once was. Some search engines do not display it in their results (most notably Google, which retrieves the text from content on your page) and do not use it to rank a site. Having said that some search engines do still use it so again it is a mistake to ignore it completely.

Descriptions placed into this tag should, strangely enough, be very descriptive of the page or site they

reside in. Include a few relevant keywords/keyphrases that you are optimizing for in the description and try to limit its length to 25–30 words. Also try to use no more than two sentences.

Summary:

Although not as important as they once were, the META tags can still influence a search engine when it comes to deciding whether your web page is relevant or not.

Keywords META tag:

15–20 keywords, include misspellings of keywords/keyphrases

Description META tag:

Include keywords/keyphrases, 25–30 words, no more than two sentences.

Frank Kilkelly is a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Expert and Webmaster at

, a complete search engine optimization resource. The highlight of the site

is an

for discussion of the latest techniques and tips to improve the ranking of your web

site.



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