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The Mystery of the Magical Keyword Density Formula

By Karon Thackston

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Keyword density. When it comes to SEO copywriting, this has to be one of the most talked about subjects. Why? Because keywords are the very foundation of search engine copywriting. Without keywords we wouldn't even have SEO copywriting. Because keywords (or more accurately, keyphrases) play such an important role in search engine copywriting, it might make sense that there are certain rules and regulations – certain formulas – that should be followed. It might make sense, but, I'm sorry to say, the mystery... the magic... is more like a myth.

I have a guess as to where these magic formulas come from. Someone brags to their friend that they got #1 ranking for a particular keyphrase. The friend studiously looks over the site and starts taking notes. "He used this phrase eight times in a 500-word piece of copy. He put the keywords in here and there and over here, too. That means you have to put keyphrases in these places and reach a keyword density of 1.6% in order to get a #1 ranking." Not so! Let me explain why keyword density formulas don't fly.

Copywriting Is One Piece of the Search Engine Optimization Formula

Copywriting, in my opinion and the opinions of respected search engine optimizers, is 1/3 of the puzzle; but there are other pieces to the puzzle, too. What about coding and linking? Those are two extremely important factors that also come into play.

IF copywriting were the sole factor, then maybe – just maybe – keyword density formulas might be a reality instead of a fable. But alas... it isn't.

Keyword Density Formulas Are Unproven

Go to any search engine. Type in your primary keyphrase. Look at the results that fall into the number one through five slots. Do they all have the same keyword density? No. Some have higher levels,

The Mystery of the Magical Keyword Density Formula

some have lower levels.

If keyword density formulas were carved in stone, every single site in the top 10 would have the same keyword saturation levels. But alas... they don't.

All Keyphrases Aren't Created Equal

Think about the competitiveness of the various keyphrases on the Internet. You have some like "search engine marketing" that are exceptionally competitive. Then there are others like "sushi restaurant in Charlotte, NC" that aren't. You have to account for how many other sites you'll be battling with when you write search engine copy.

Positioning of Keyphrases

In addition to the number of times a keyphrase is used, you need to pay attention to *where* your keyphrases are used. While it has not been proven to my knowledge, it is strongly suspected that keyphrases that have special formatting carry additional weight. By special formatting I mean bold, italics, in bulleted lists, in tags, etc. As I said, this has not been proven. Again, go to your favorite search engine and type in a keyphrase. If formatting and positioning were a carved-in-stone rule, all the sites in the top 10 would be using these tactics. But alas... they aren't.

Why the Myths?

I understand why people want formulas. Having hard and fast rules to follow means, if you apply the formula, you know you've done the job right and you can't fail. The problem is there isn't just one right way to create search engine copy. There are as many ways to write SEO copy as there are sites on the Web.

Am I holding back? Am I trying to protect my highly classified industry copywriting secrets? Not at all. In fact, go to my site at

. Visit the portfolio section. If I had a fiercely

protected secret that I was holding out on, all the sites with SEO copy in my portfolio would have the same keyword density. But alas... they don't.

What DOES Work?

So after I've dashed your dreams, the least I can do is give you some insight into how *I* write SEO copy. I don't do any or all of these in any particular order. I don't do them all every time I write. I am NOT saying that you should do all of these things every time you write.

1) If possible, I try to include keyphrase(s) in the headline and sub-headlines. If it doesn't make sense, if it sounds odd, I don't include them.

The Mystery of the Magical Keyword Density Formula

2) When it flows, I include keyphrases roughly once or twice per paragraph. Do I count words? Do I run keyword density ratios? Never! I just eyeball the page to see if it looks right.

3) This I do EVERY time I write... I focus on natural language. If the copy sounds forced or stiff after including keyphrases, I scrap it and start over. Read your copy out loud. If it sounds stupid or redundant to you, it will sound stupid and redundant to your site visitor. Don't compromise the flow of natural language for the sake of search engines. What good will number one rankings do if – as soon as visitors get to your home page – they click away because the copy is so awful? All the number one spots in the world won't pay your grocery bill. You ultimately have to have sales and that means winning over your human visitors.

4) If possible, I try to include keyphrase(s) in bold, italic, bulleted lists, or in other text that is specially formatted. If it doesn't make sense, if it looks funny or sounds odd, I don't include them.

So that's it. Are those feelings you had when you learned there wasn't a Santa Claus or Easter Bunny coming back? Sorry. I truly am. But it's for your own good. If you're going to be an effective search engine copywriter, you have to learn the truth. Relying on myths will only hold you back. Now pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get moving on that next number-one-ranking page.

by Karon Thackston © 2004

Copy not getting results? Learn to write SEO copy that impresses the engines and your visitors at

. Be sure to check out Karon's latest e-report "How To Increase

Keyword Saturation (Without Destroying the Flow of Your Copy)" at

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Making Money with Articles: The Importance of Keywords

By Stephen Thomas

The following paragraphs summarize the work of Keyword Density experts who are completely familiar with all the aspects of Keyword Density. Heed their advice to avoid any Keyword Density surprises.

Keyword density and placement are important parts of optimizing your articles for search engines. Search engine spiders scan a page in a way that makes it important to place your keywords where they will be detected and recognized as a keyword, so that your article will come up when someone searches for that keyword.

What is a Keyword?

The Mystery of the Magical Keyword Density Formula

A keyword is a word that is going to be placed in your article several times, not just once as that would make every word a keyword. When a spider sees that you have a word placed several times in an article, it will determine that your page may be useful to users that search for such a keyword.

Over Optimizing Your Articles

I trust that what you've read so far has been informative. The following section should go a long way toward clearing up any uncertainty that may remain.

It is important to note that there is also such a thing as over optimizing your articles for particular words, this is known as "keyword stuffing". When you stuff keywords in an article a spider will detect that you are trying to trick it into placing your article high in the search engine results for that word, and will instead penalize your site and your page for doing such. This may even affect the rankings of your other pages or get your site blacklisted from a particular search engine if you are found keyword stuffing too many times.

What is Keyword Density?

Keyword density is how many times your keyword is placed in your article. Most use a percentage to determine how many times they will put a keyword in an article. For instance, if you have a 500 word article and want to achieve a keyword density of 5%, then you will need to have the keyword in your article exactly 25 times. You can find hundreds of resources and guides recommending one keyword density over another and the reasons behind the logic, however, in the end you will have to determine which density is more profitable for your articles. Each webmaster has their own density that they like to achieve based on past results. As long as you don't over optimize and you are making sufficient profit from your rankings, then you can choose whatever keyword density you like.

The Right Density

No matter what exact density you choose, it is important to place keywords so that there are more at the beginning and end to produce an hour glass effect. Having the right keyword density in your article makes it more likely that you will make money off of that article because it will rise in the search engine results and be seen by more people.

Now you can be a confident expert on Keyword Density. OK, maybe not an expert. But you should have something to bring to the table next time you join a discussion on Keyword Density.

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