

Finding Keywords to Attract Qualified Traffic

By Paul J. Bruemmer

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Search engine optimization always begins with researching and selecting your most strategic keyword phrases. This is a critical step in your search engine marketing campaign because the multitude of users looking for specific information and products will use keywords in search engines to find you.

There is growing evidence that visitors find Web sites through search engines. Recent Jupiter-MediaMetrix statistics show that search engine traffic increased rapidly over the past six months -- up 11 percent with 92.3 million visitors. Major search portals increased even more: Yahoo! was up 20 percent with 38.4 million visitors, MSN increased 16 percent (42.3 million visitors), and Google shot up 54 percent (34.2 million visitors).

Tips for Generating Keywords

Careful selection and placement of your strategic keywords in Web page copy and HTML tags goes a long way toward attracting traffic that converts to sales. Following are some tips for generating the keywords and phrases most likely to drive qualified buyers to your Web site.

1. **Determine How Customers Find You.** Brainstorm to identify the words potential customers would use when searching for your site or product. Get feedback from your customers, suppliers, and employees.
2. **Develop Your Key Phrases.** Put these terms into a Web-based tool like WordTracker to get ideas expanding your keyword list. Such tools will tell you how popular your keywords are on other Web sites and how many people currently search for these keywords in major search engines. Select terms that aren't overused but remain fairly popular.
3. **Create Different Permutations.** Vary the word order in your phrases creating multiple and unusual combinations. Include metaphors, synonyms, word substitutes, and common misspellings. Include brand names and product models. Try creating phrases that ask a question.
4. **Use of Company Name.** If you are branded, it pays to include your company name in your keyword phrases. IBM might use keywords like: IBM computers, IBM electronic components, IBM hardware solutions, etc. But if your name is Amanda Blair Realty, very few people will type that name in a search query unless they know you, so it doesn't pay to use your company name in a keyword phrase.

5. Geographic Location. Include this in your keywords if location is key. Palm Springs real estate just might be a useful keyword for Amanda Blair Realty in Palm Springs, California.

6. Competitor Keywords. Find out what keywords your competitors are using to get ideas on what terms you possibly missed. Don't copy someone else, but merely look for clues to supplement your own list.

7. Avoid Broad Terms. Use modifiers to make generic keywords more specific. (A site offering insurance-related services might use health insurance quotes, auto insurance quotes, life insurance quotes, etc.) Prequalify visitors by identifying your niche. This attracts a smaller, targeted audience more likely to convert. (An entertainment site might use entertainment news, movie trailers, celebrity stories, entertainment center, etc.)

8. Avoid Single Words. These are too general, and multi-word phrases work better. Single-word searches result in too many returns, and users won't wade through more than two or three result pages. They learn quickly to be very specific. A user looking for an e-commerce software solution for an auction site won't be searching for software.

9. Avoid Trademarks Unless They're Yours. Using your competitors' trademarks to profit from the brand can result in a law suit. Sometimes you can get permission to use trademarked terms. A store that sells Tide can request permission from Procter and Gamble and likely get it, as manufacturers generally sell through vendor sites.

Bio:

Paul J. Bruemmer <mailto:paul2@web-ignite.com> is the CEO of Web Ignite, <http://www.web-ignite.com/> a search engine marketing company founded in 1995. His articles have appeared on ClickZ, B2B Interactive, MarketingProfs, Marketing Sherpa, New Media, Pandia, Search Engine Guide, SitePoint, and Traffick.

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