



## Keyword Phrase Selection for Search Marketing

The key to obtaining a high relevant ranking begins with the selection of relevant keyword phrases. The importance of this task cannot be overemphasized. Attaining a high ranking for keyword phrases that searchers are not using is senseless. Keyword phrase selection entails not only understanding the business for which the keyword phrases are being developed, but also understanding the competitors, and understanding the potential customer, or searcher.

The measure of search engine success for your website is not simply how much traffic a search engine is generating, but rather the amount of qualified traffic a search engine generates. The distinction is crucial. The key to attracting qualified traffic is by ranking well in the search engines for highly targeted keyword phrases.

### Think like your target audience

Targeting the general keyword, "homebuilders" for a homebuilder who works exclusively in the Philadelphia area would not be desirable. Adding geographic modifiers (in this case "Philadelphia homebuilders" or "homebuilders in Philadelphia") makes for a better quality keyword phrase, more likely to attract much more targeted visitors, who in turn are more likely to need the services of the homebuilder.

Another example is a travel agency that specializes in vacation cruises. In this case, targeting the general keyword, "travel" is not desirable. Consider the possibilities for someone doing a search for the general keyword, "travel". They could be helping their child with a paper on some aspect of travel; looking for the Travel channel; looking for information on time travel; looking for driving directions for their travel across the country; looking for a travel club such as AAA. You get the point. In fact, most people do not search using such general keywords anyway. Experience using search engines has taught most searchers that using a general keyword is likely to result in many millions of results—none of which is what the searcher was looking for. In this example, our travel agency would be much better served by targeting the keyword phrase, "Caribbean cruises".

### Be realistic and target niche phrases

Just because a keyword phrase is a very popular search term, it does not mean it's the best phrase to target for your business for two reasons. For one, it may simply be too competitive. Very popular search terms usually return many millions of results. The top rankers for such competitive keywords are usually the big players in your industry. Translation—they have a ton of money to spend on search marketing, and it's difficult to impossible to compete against them for such keyword phrases. And secondly—perhaps more importantly—you will often find that visitors who search on very broad or competitive keyword phrases are not true members of your target audience—they are less likely to purchase from you, or be interested in your services than someone who knows exactly what they want.

In virtually all cases, you're better off targeting popular "niche" keyword phrases. The emphasis is on the word, "popular". In other words, we're talking about keyword phrases that people are indeed using in their search queries. As such, even niche keyword phrases still generate a good flow of traffic. In fact, study after study shows that niche keyword phrases yield more sales per visitor. Put simply, people who land on your site through niche keyword phrases are your target audience, and as such, they are more interested in your products and services than those who might land on your site through a more general keyword search.



## **Choose meaningful keyword phrases**

This might sound like a no-brainer, but some people can't resist creating an endless list of keyword phrases that have little if anything to do with their business. The thought process behind such a strategy is that if there is even the slightest chance a searcher might be interested in their business with the use of even unrelated keyword phrases, then it's worth targeting them. You may be tempted to optimize for phrases that are only loosely related to your site's content -- but don't do it. The phrases you target must be relevant to your products and services. A good rule of thumb is this: you should be able to describe your entire breadth of products and services in about 25-40 keyword phrases.

## **Do your research**

How do you know which search terms to target? Or, put another way, how do you know which search terms your target audience is using? There are several ways to accomplish this. First, since you have a high knowledge level of both your business and your industry, you should generate a preliminary list of keyword phrases by conducting a brainstorm session. Then, consult with a thesaurus for synonyms and related phrases. A word of caution here—sometimes your high knowledge level of your business and your industry can be a detriment if you are out of touch with how your target audience thinks. In some cases, your target audience thinks of your products or services in different words than you do. If your website has a good statistics application integrated with it, you can use it to report on the terms people are using to arrive on your website. You should also do your due diligence in studying your competitor's websites. And, don't forget the obvious: ask your existing clients to help you develop a list of keyword phrases they would use to describe your products or services.

## **Turn it over to the experts**

Once you've developed a preliminary list keyword phrases, you should hand control over to search engine marketing experts such as netStride. We are able to take your list and vet it by comparing your keyword phrases with recent searches performed on the major search engines. By doing so, we can determine the frequency with which each of your phrases has been searched on. Through this process, we can also find other relevant keyword phrases that are generating quality searches on the major engines. In the end, your expertise in your business and industry combined with netStride's expertise in search engine marketing and technology will result in a well honed list of relevant keyword phrases likely to drive targeted traffic to your website.