CONDUCTING KEYWORD RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

In this guide, we're going to focus on a specific, introductory step of search engine optimization (SEO) that applies to all kinds of content (blogs, videos, podcasts, you name it): keyword research.

If you're confident in your keyword researching abilities, great! This will just serve as a quick refresher to help you dive into content planning quickly and efficiently.

On the other hand, if you haven't heard of it before, keyword research involves analyzing Google search queries to see which ones are leading people to your site and which could potentially lead people to your site. They can be:

- Head Terms: one-word terms, such as "speaker" or "keynote"
- Body Keywords: two to three-word phrases, such as "keynote speaker"
- Long Tail Keywords: 4+ word phrases, like "keynote speaker for events in the healthcare industry" or
- Questions, such as "Where should you look for a keynote speaker?"

Knowing which search terms relate to you is crucial, especially as you're building your inbound sales strategy and need to create valuable content for your audience.

For example, if you search for "customer service examples" in Google, the top two results are "13 Examples of Good Customer Service in Retail" from VendHQ.com and "11 Examples Of Companies Delivering Great Customer Service" from Qualtrics.

Both of these pages use the keyword "customer service examples" in strategic ways so that, when someone searches for "customer service examples," their content appears first in the list of search results.

In your own content, you can ensure the same high ranking when you conduct keyword research ahead of time. In the next section, we'll cover five basic steps in the keyword research process so you can get started as soon as possible.
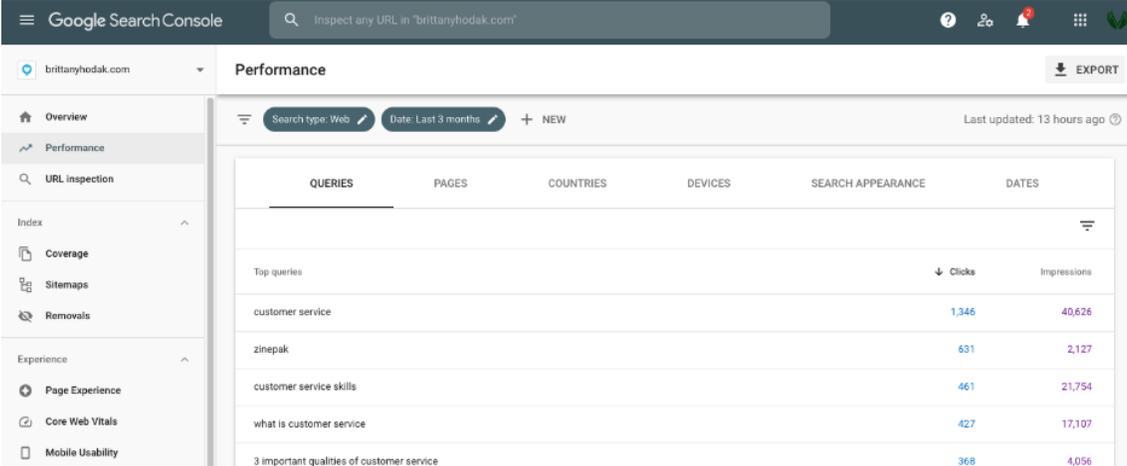
5 STEPS OF KEYWORD RESEARCH

Depending on where you look for keyword research strategy, there are a variety of tips and tricks that content creators claim will work. The following five steps, however, are the ones I've found to be the most consistently successful, both in my continuous efforts to master keyword research and in starting a content strategy from ground zero. Hopefully, as you kick off your own keyword research, they help you hit the ground running, and you can avoid some of the confusion and roadblocks that I ran into when I started.

1. LOOK FOR KEYWORDS THAT ARE ALREADY BRINGING VISITORS TO YOUR WEBSITE.

If keywords on your website or existing content are already attracting visitors, there's a good chance that the related keywords will do the same. To find these related keywords – and what your website domain is ranking for in the first place – use an SEO tool to analyze your website. Although there are many paid options for this, Google Search Console and Ubersuggest are excellent free alternatives.

If you already have the former, Google Search Console, set up, you can see which keywords are attracting visitors by clicking "Performance" in the menu on the upper left side of the screen, then scrolling down to show the "Queries" list, as shown in the screenshot below.

Alternatively, for Ubersuggest, simply input your domain in the orange search bar on the home screen. Then, click "Keywords By Traffic" in the menu on the upper left side of the screen. Again, the screenshot below shows what this should look like.

Regardless of the tool you use, once you have your list of "already successful" keywords, jot them down in a list. These won't be in your final list of keywords (since you're already ranking for them and don't need to make more work for yourself). But we will use them in Step #2 as you build the final list of new keywords. For now, we'll refer to this initial list as "Current Keywords."

2. LOOK AT RELATED KEYWORDS AND "PEOPLE ALSO ASK" FOR THOSE ORIGINAL KEYWORDS.

After finding your existing keywords, the next step is to enter each into Google to look for related keywords. To do this, simply open Google and search for the first keyword in your list. Then, scroll down to the "People Also Ask" section (usually towards the top of the list of results) and the "Related Searches" section (usually at the very bottom).

Looking back at the Google Search Console example above, you'll see that one of the first keywords listed on the Performance screen is "good customer service." If we enter this keyword into Google, under the "People Also Ask" section, it lists:

- What are 3 important qualities of customer service?
- What is an example of good customer service?
- How do you give good customer service?
- What are the 7 qualities of good customer service?

Then, under the "Related Searches" section, it lists:

- great customer service examples
- good customer service skills
- benefits of good customer service
- what are the 3 key elements to good customer service?
- good customer service comments examples
- importance of good customer service
- good customer service quotes
- good customer service paragraph

Each of these list items are related keywords that, if I was doing keyword research, I'd add to another list: "Potential Keywords."
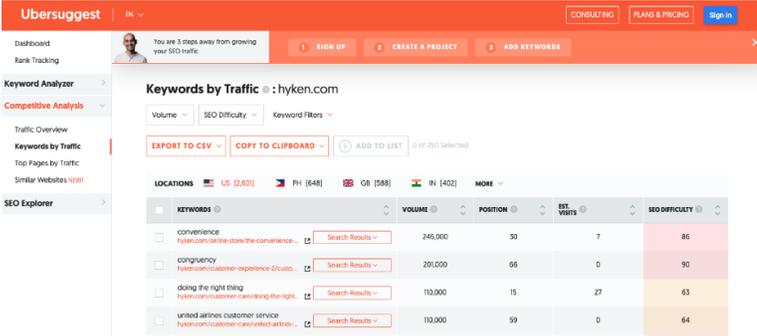
In your own searches, repeat this process for every item in your "Current Keywords" list from Step #1. First, enter the keyword into Google. Then, see if there are any relevant keywords in the "People Also Ask" or "Related Searches" sections that you can add to your Potential Keywords" list. We'll save this list and narrow it down in Steps #4 and 5.

3. LOOK AT THE KEYWORDS YOUR COMPETITORS ARE USING IN THEIR CONTENT.

Next up, it's time to look at your competitors. For this step, you're going to essentially repeat Step #1 with the domains for other thought leaders that share your area of expertise. So, for example, if you're a customer experience speaker, you might look up Jay Baer, Shep Hyken, or Blake Morgan.

The goal is to find out which keywords are attracting visitors to your competitors' websites. Then, steal those keywords so your content can rank for those keywords first when someone searches for them in Google.

Again, let's go back to the above example. Within the customer experience industry, a few speakers you might consider your competitors are Shep Hyken and Kerry Bodine. If we look for each of these
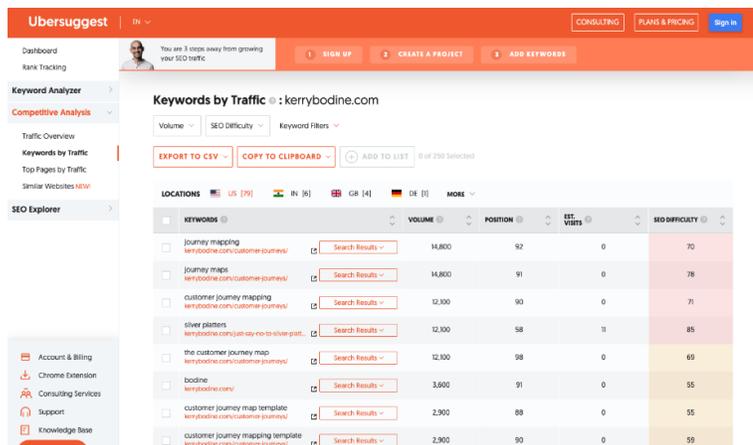

domains in Ubersuggest, you can see that, for the former, the following are some of their top-referring keywords:

- convenience
- congruency
- doing the right thing
- united airlines customer service

And, for the latter, Kerry Bodine, the following are some of their top-referring keywords:

- journey mapping
- journey maps
- customer journey mapping
- the customer journey map
- customer journey map template

Each of these keywords is ones we can steal for our own "Potential Keywords" list so that our content – for each corresponding keyword – will outrank theirs in a Google search and "steal" their traffic.

Any of the keywords bringing them traffic are fair game for your content. Even if some of them are similar (like "customer journey," singular, and "customer journeys," plural), if they're relevant to your audience, they're all worth adding to your "Potential Keywords" list.

4. RESEARCH THE SEARCH VOLUME FOR THE KEYWORDS IN YOUR LIST.

At this point, you should have a relatively large list of entries in your "Potential Keywords" list. All you need to do for this step is narrow down which are the most important and which can be saved for later.

To do this, there are two main things to catalog for each keyword. First is search volume. This asks, "How many times is this keyword searched each month?" So, a smaller search volume number means fewer searches in the average month.

Second is the keyword difficulty. This asks, "How difficult is it to outrank the current frontrunner for this keyword?" Generally, the higher the search volume and the higher-quality the frontrunner content, the harder the keyword difficulty. Easy keyword difficulty scores are between 0-29, medium are from 30-49, and hard are 50 and up.

Both of these details can be found using your preferred SEO tool. Once again, if you're starting from scratch or just want to stick with a free option, Ubersuggest is excellent.

In the screenshot below, for instance, you can see that the keyword "customer experience" has a search volume of 8,100 and a difficulty score of 88. This means that it's searched, on the average month, 8,100 times and it's extremely difficult to rank for.

For each of the keywords in your "Potential Keywords" list, record these two numbers. Both will be valuable in helping you choose which are the highest priority when you move on to the fifth and last step. Speaking of which...
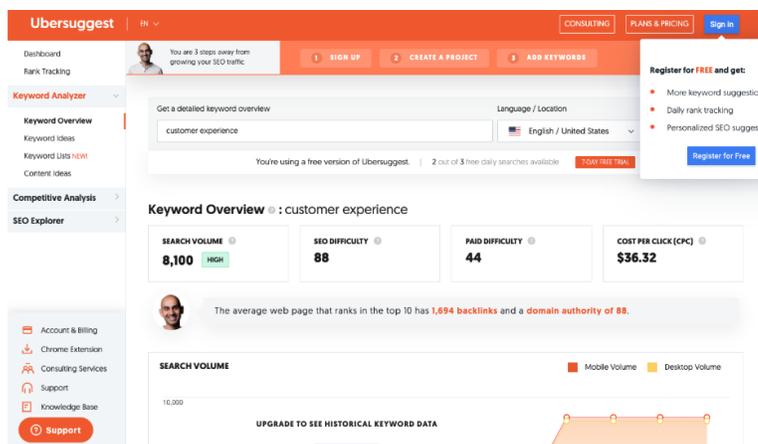
5. BUILD A KEYWORD CONTENT STRATEGY TO USE IN THE COMING YEAR.

The final step in keyword research is to build your strategy. In the previous step, you figured out which keywords had the highest search volume each month and which were going to be the easiest to rank for.

Now, it's time to find a balance between the two and choose keywords that, ideally, tick both of these checkboxes.

Generally, I'm a big fan of the quarterly planning approach. Two weeks before the end of each quarter, I follow these steps and choose 12 keywords from my "Potential Keywords" list – one for each week of the upcoming quarter – to focus on immediately.

After that, I prioritize the rest of the keywords in my list based on their search volume and difficulty (higher search volume keywords usually equal higher priority in my strategy).

Below are the primary standards I follow to keep my choices consistent from quarter to quarter.

- **High Search Volume, Low Difficulty:** Always keep these in your list. These are the ideal keywords you want in your content strategy, although they can be hard to find.
- **High Search Volume, High Difficulty:** Play this case by case. If you have enough time to invest in a thorough, high-quality piece of content to compete with the other sources ranking for this keyword, go for it! If not, save it for later. If you're able to hire a content writer in the future – or your schedule opens enough to write the blog yourself – you can come back to this keyword then.
- **Low Search Volume, Low Difficulty:** Always scratch these from your list. Unless their search volume dramatically increases by next quarter, they won't be worth expending energy over. There are some exceptions, such as if you have a very specific audience that will definitely read it, but these cases are rare.

Note: *Because Google doesn't publicize the true search volume and difficulty for each keyword, every SEO tool is, to some extent, extrapolating based on the data they have. With that in mind, the ones mentioned in this guide are the ones from which we – and SEO experts – have seen the most success. We have no reason to question their validity, based on this evidence, but if you've learned differently, please feel free to let us know.* 🙂

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- "Keyword Research: The Definitive Guide" from Backlinko (my favorite!)
- "How to Choose Keywords for SEO" from Backlinko
- "How to Do Keyword Research for SEO: A Beginner's Guide" from HubSpot
- "How to Do Keyword Research for SEO" from Ahrefs
- "How to do Keyword Research the Smart Way: Targeting Interest and Intent" from Neil Patel
- "Keyword Research: How to Do It, Tips, Tools & Examples" from Neil Patel
- "Keyword Research For Seo: The Ultimate Guide" from Yoast

Questions or Comments?

Contact us at
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and let us know what you think!