

Keyword Research 101

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Researching your keywords takes time and tools. You might *think* you know what your primary keywords should be, but I have seen web site owners painfully discover that they were sadly mistaken.

You may be on the right track, but just need to do some tweaking. The first step is to brainstorm and make a list of, say, 25 of what you think might be keywords and phrases a web searcher would use to find your page. Come up with both single words and phrases. We'll use some neat tools to narrow these down and even discover some nuggets you might not have thought of.

As a rule, optimizing for a single word is a lesson in frustration. For instance, can you imagine how many pages on the web would be competing for a single word like *cars*? Millions!

However, using a single keyword to search for hidden nuggets is, well, priceless!

Keyword Research Tools

Next, you will need some tools to help you find those perfect keyword phrases for your site. Although there are tons of commercial tools on the market ([Keyword Discovery](#) is one of the best), I am going to concentrate on some freely available tools that I have found of particular value. These will help you find out how popular your keyword phrases are (how many times they are searched for in a given time period) and how much competition you will have with your phrase. And, because this article is targeted to the newbie [SEO](#), these free tools give you a chance to kick the tires before you buy the top of the line model.

My favorite is the [Google AdWords Keyword Tool](#). What? You say you are not running any AdWords pay per click campaigns! Why would you use this tool?

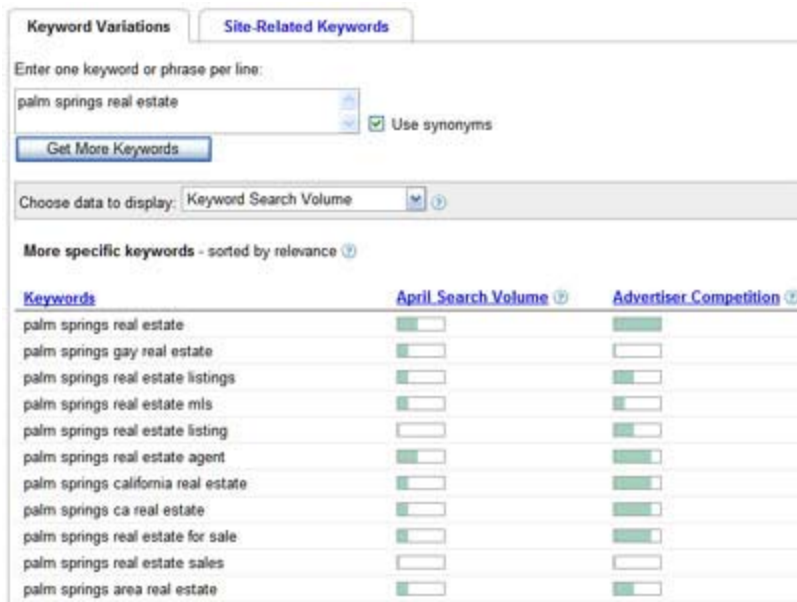
The answer is that it is free for anyone to use. You do NOT have to be running any AdWords PPC campaigns and the tool gives valuable keyword research information in a graphical, easy to understand format, perfect for the newbie!

And, yes, this tool is based on AdWords, so the search volume reflects PPC search and competition, but these *estimates* will apply to organic search as well.

Here's a perfect example of how what you think you want to rank for might be in opposition to reality.

I live in Palm Springs, California and have done web design for real estate agents in the past. We must have 10,000 real estate agents in the desert and each and every one of them has a web site and each and every one of them would like to rank #1 for the keyword phrase *palm springs real estate*.

To demonstrate how difficult and impractical a task that would be based on the competition, take a look at the screen shot I took after running the Keyword Variations tool of the Google Adwords Keyword Tool (be sure to check the *Use synonyms* box for a more comprehensive list).



The trick here is to find more green in the Search Volume bar and less green in the Competition bar. In this example, you'll see 100% competition for a moderate search volume for the phrase *palm springs real estate*. This tells me that optimizing for that phrase is probably not worth the effort. It would be better to try to target other phrases with less competition for the search volume.

For instance, the Palm Springs area has a large gay population and there's no competition (no green bar) for *palm springs gay real estate* which has a moderate amount of search volume. That's the kind of search phrases you want to look for - search volume with little or no competition. Look around. You never know what keyword phrases you will discover.

See how you can think you know what to target as far as keywords and how easy it is to be way off?

Try running your single keyword ideas through this tool and you are likely to find good keyword phrases with little or no competition for you to target as well. And, the Google AdWords Keyword Tool makes downloading the keyword lists you generate a snap for offline use.

Then, select the keyword phrases that look like they might work for you and run each of them through the tool again to create a list of even more highly targeted keywords.

Another free, non-graphical tool you might want to try is the [Free Keyword Suggestion Tool from WordTracker](#). WordTracker also offers a good paid version, but the free tool is enough to get you started.

Unlike the Adwords Keyword Tool, this tool takes data from DogPile.com and Metacrawler.com, so the results are more organic in nature, but, as you will see, somewhat similar.

Using the same test phrase, *palm springs real estate*, we get the following results:

palm springs real estate

366,061,205 searches (last 90 days)	
Searches	Keyword
181	palm springs real estate
146	palm springs california real estate
109	real estate palm springs california
98	real estate in palm springs
97	palm springs real estate listings
95	real estate palm springs condos
89	palm springs commercial real estate
44	real estate palm springs
19	palm springs real estate california
15	palm springs real estate coldwell banker
14	mid century modern real estate palm springs
14	real estate in palm springs california
12	real estate agent palm springs
8	california palm springs real estate agent

As you can see, you get a list of keyword phrases and the volume of searches for them in the past 90 days. This gives you a great place to start looking, but it does

not give you any idea of the competition as the Adwords tool does. My suggestion is that you use both tools, comparing the lists to see what you might have missed on one or the other.

A similar tool is the [Yahoo Search Marketing Keyword Selector Tool](#) (Formerly Overture Keyword Selector Tool), which is based on Yahoo PPC searches.

This should get you started in your keyword research. This article is intended as a companion piece to [S E O 101](#) and will be updated periodically.

I go into more detail in my S E O 101 workshop, offered to web site owners and small businesses. Check my blog at <http://www.weboptimist.com> for more information or contact me to set up a custom workshop for your business group of five or more people in the Palm Springs area of Southern California. Travel is possible for large groups.