

STOICA

Keyword Research for SEO

Step by step process and useful tools for finding best keywords to target



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Introduction

When it comes to optimizing your website for search engines, one of the first and most important tasks you have is to determine what keywords to target and optimize for.

The process of researching the right keywords is truly the foundation for the rest of your search engine optimization strategy as it influences and directs all other tactics.

Here are the main reasons why keyword research for SEO matters and you should invest time in this process:

- Keyword research should enable you to have a better understanding of what your potential clients look for and are interested in. The main purpose of your website is to increase your brand awareness and ultimately attract new customers. And in order to capture new customers, you need to appeal to the right kind of audience when they search for specific products, services or pieces of information online. Grasping what that audience is searching for and managing to rank high on the search results for those keywords will help achieve just that.
- Second of all, all subsequent SEO tactics are built around the keywords you want to target, so betting on the right ones will make or break your SEO success. New content creation should focus on tackling topics that potential customers search for online, on-page optimization is done around main keywords and so forth. Particularly for new content creation, delving into the right topics and targeting the right keywords is key to both ranking well and keeping your audience interested in your content.

Done properly, keyword research is a time-consuming task, however getting it right the first time will not only save you time later on but will also enable you to implement the most efficient tactics.

Who Can Benefit this Guide

There is a great deal of online resources on how to conduct keyword research for SEO. However we feel none of them - at least none of the free ones - lay down the entire process step by step. So, in this guide, we aim at walking you through our method in an easy to follow manner. This guide is for SEO specialists, particularly ones just getting started with SEO looking to streamline their keyword research, do comprehensive research and maximize their SEO return.

Step 1: Identify Broad Topic Areas

First off, you want to look at the broad topics that are relevant to the specific business/website you want to optimize. A good place to start is to put together a list of the most frequent questions your current customers ask - what are the most common topics that come up over and over again?

Other useful sources can be:

- questions your potential customers and website visitors ask. You can look at chat conversations with visitors from your website (if you have such an option) and contact forms, emails to customer support.
- If you have a salesperson/team, you can get their feedback as to what objections or points of interest they often address
- social media channels and forums relevant to your industry can also bring to light some ideas you might have not thought of yet.

Once you have gathered your broad topics, we advise to go through it and ask yourself “Do these topics satisfy the needs of customers throughout the entire sales funnel? Am I covering subjects that interest someone in the awareness stage, as well as someone in the consideration or decision stage?”. A person in the awareness phase might be looking to various solutions for a particular problem,

while someone in the decision phase might want to know how your offering is better than the competitors', payment options, guarantees and so forth.

So make sure you address all these areas and also put each topic in one of the three categories: **awareness, consideration, decision**.



Identifying broad topic areas will give you a good start, enabling you to stay organized and ensure that you won't leave any relevant topic out. It will also allow you to come up with niche topics that your competition might not have tapped into.

Having together such a comprehensive list of topics can also help with your content strategy, as you have a starting point in creating articles and blog posts.

Step 2: Develop Lists of Keyword Variations

Once you have a list of relevant broad topics in place, you can move on to populating it with more specific queries for each topic.

There are three types of keywords you will work with:

- Head keywords
- Body keywords
- Long tail keywords

Head keywords are usually single words keywords; because they are very general, the search volume for these queries is large, with huge competition. Keep in mind that head keywords have a poor conversion rate, as they are not specific at all and people at all stages of purchase intent (or even people not looking to buy at all) might search for them.

Body terms will refer to queries made up of two or three keywords; they are more concise so the search volume is smaller than with head keywords, but the competition is also a bit lower. These keywords have a good enough conversion rate, as the searches are more focused.

Long tail keywords consist of four or more keywords; they are very specific, high-intent terms and convert well, users searching for them have a good idea of what they need/want. Long tail keywords get little search volume, but combining several such phrases together makes for a significant total search volume.



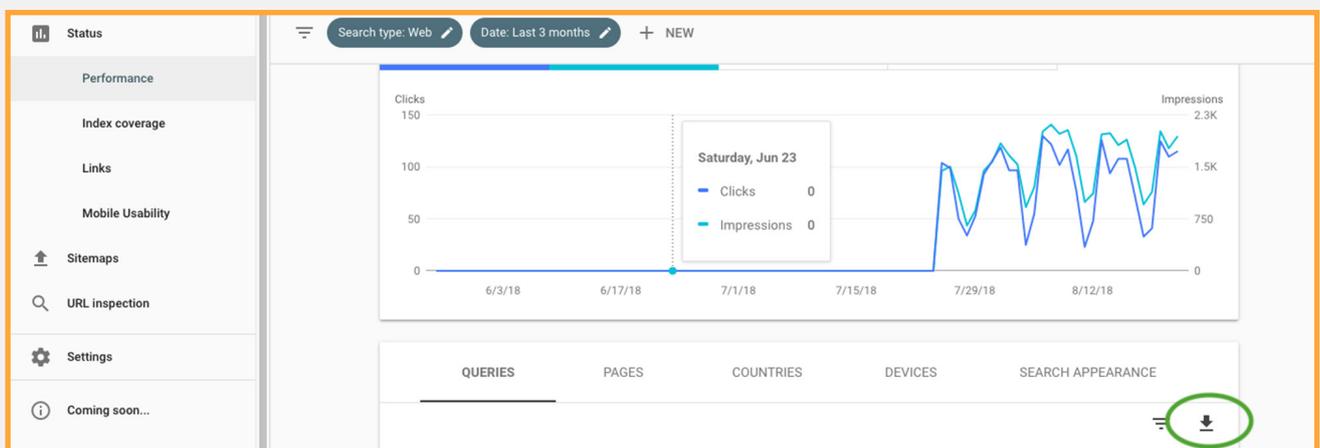
We believe that the best approach is focusing on a **mix of body & long tail keywords**, as you can reap the benefits of both categories.

Now that you have your list of broad topics, split into stages of the sale funnel, you can move on to filling each category with as many keywords as it makes sense, trying different variations.

The easiest way to start searching for keyword ideas is using the topics you already have and get suggestions from there. The below tools, most free to use, can help generate tons of valuable search terms.

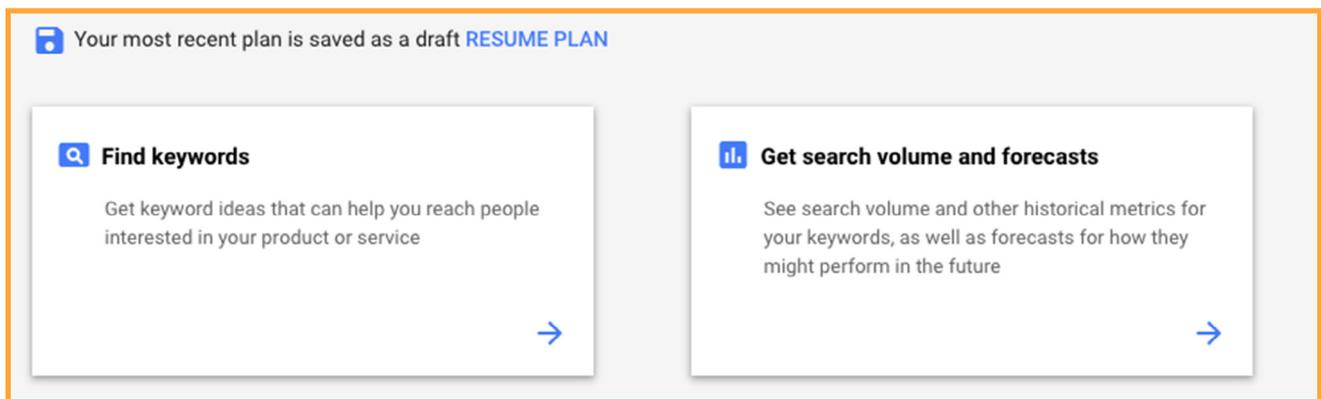
Some of the most popular tools used for generating keywords:

Google Search Console - best keywords to work on are the ones you already are found for. You can identify these keywords either by using paid tools such as MOZ Pro, SEMRush, Ahrefs or you can use Google Search Console (GSC) for free. For GSC go to Performance tab -> Queries (new view) and download the list of queries.

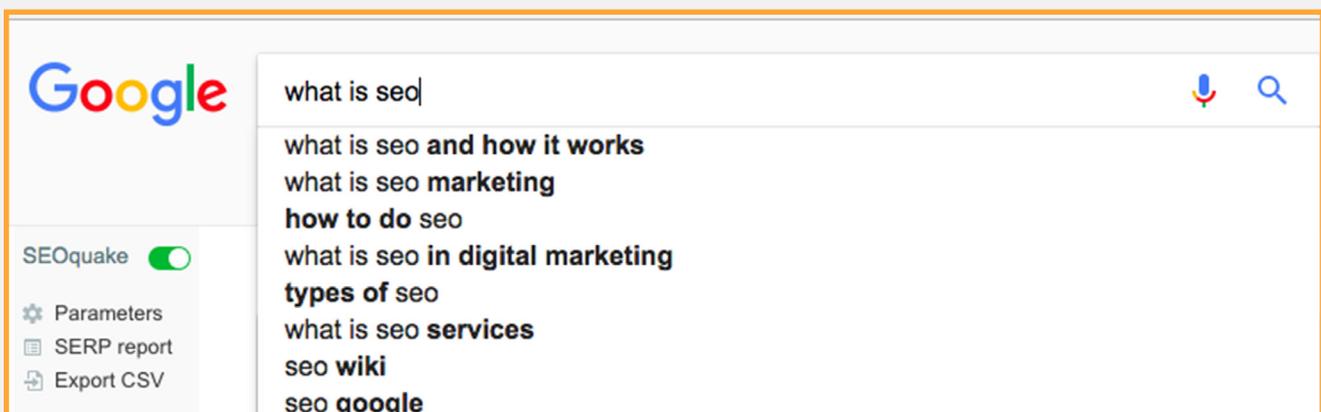


Google Ads Keyword Planner - this is a free tool from Google, however, in order to access it, you will need a Google Ads (formerly Google AdWords) account. The keyword planner allows you to perform two important tasks: **find keywords ideas** and **see search volume and other historical metrics for your keywords**, as well as forecasts for how they might perform in the future. The terms provided by the tool are commercially focused, as Google tries to maximize Ads paid campaigns' success, so the tool will return keywords that actually convert and keep some poor converting terms out.

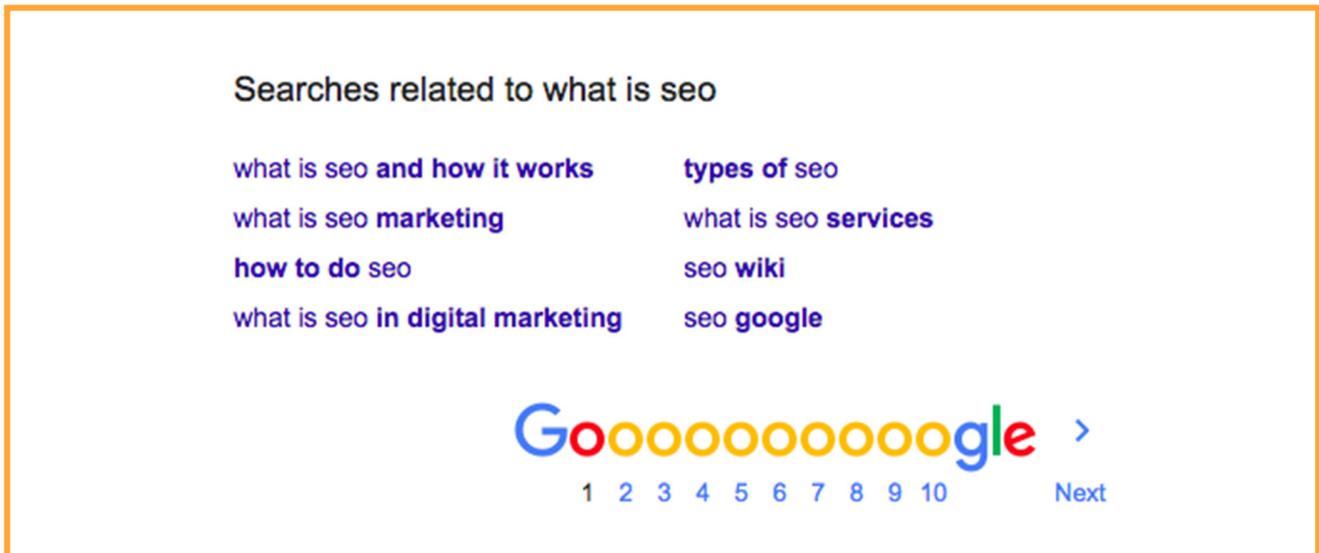
In the **Find keywords** section, you can input up to 10 keywords at once, you can input a URL or both keywords and a URL at the same time. Using a URL to search for keywords ideas is a great opportunity to study your competition and gauge what queries they are targeting.



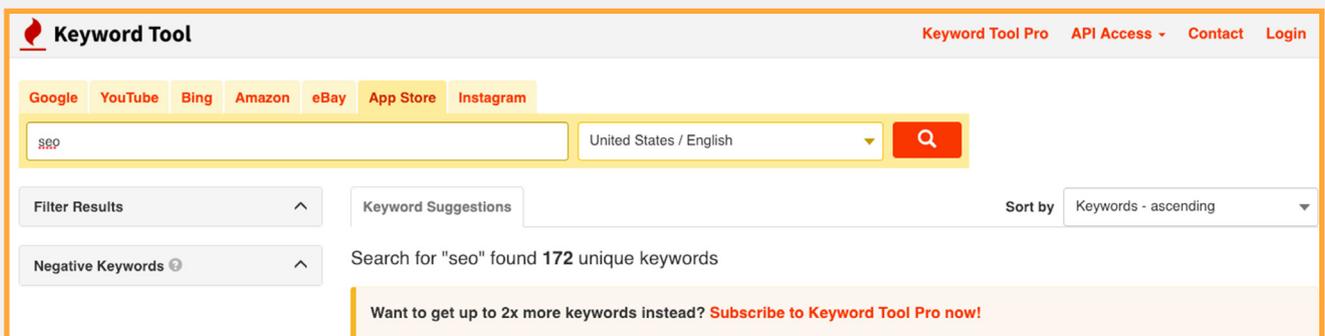
Google suggestions - whenever you type in a query into Google search bar, the search engine will provide additional search suggestions that can be a great fit for your keyword list.



Google related searches - similar to the Google suggestions, at the bottom of the search results you will find searches related to your query.



KeywordTool.io - this is an alternative to Google Keyword Planner, offering keyword variations based on a head term you provide. The paid version of the tool also provides you with estimated search volume in bulk for your entire list, making it easier to streamline your work.



Answer The Public - this is another tool you can use in order to generate keywords and content ideas. The tool will provide various types of terms - questions based, comparison and allows you to download the terms.

At this step, your list should look something like this.

Top of the funnel (awareness)	Topic #1	keyword keyword
	Topic #2	keyword keyword
	Topic #n	keyword keyword
Middle of the funnel (consideration)	Topic #1	keyword keyword
	Topic #2	keyword keyword
	Topic #n	keyword keyword
Bottom of the funnel (decision)	Topic #1	keyword keyword
	Topic #2	keyword keyword
	Topic #n	keyword keyword

Step 3: Isolate Best Keyword Variations Based on Key Metrics

Your next task is to decide which queries to keep in the list and which ones to eliminate.

At this phase having a data-driven approach is critical, as you need to decide what keywords you will focus on and try to rank for, from a broader pool of terms. We believe the following criteria help us make an educated decision: **monthly search volume, relevance, competition**, and optionally **CTR**.

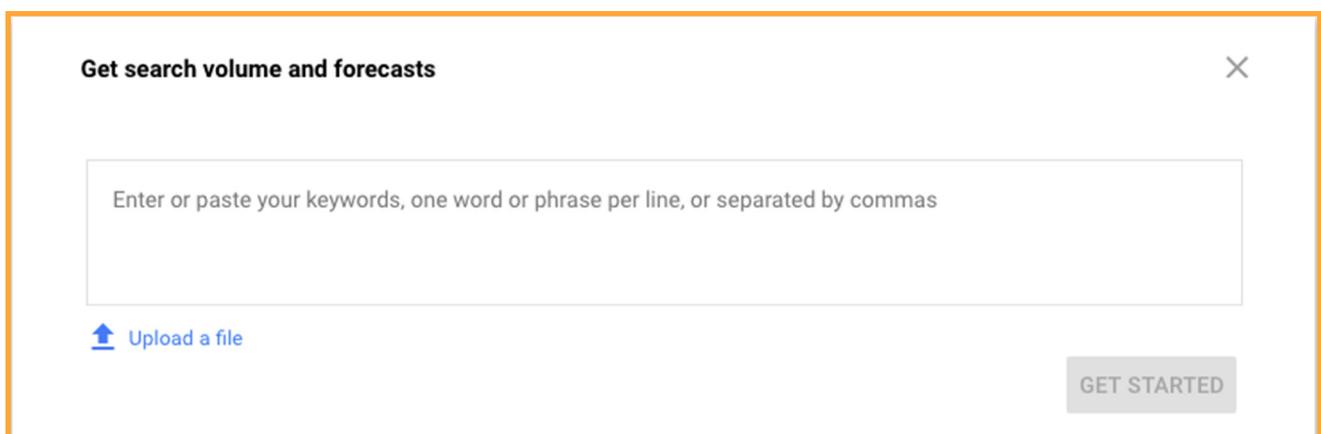
Monthly search volume - this shows you how popular a keyword is, the more popular the term, the larger the audience you can reach. Oftentimes you will find that a term you believe to be relevant has very little search volume, say less than 10-50 searches per month. In this case, the best solution you have is to try and find an alternative term that is equivalent to your term but has a higher volume, as in the end ranking for keywords that are not very popular will attract little new traffic.

Relevance - this is more of a biased/subjective component, as you will have to decide if and how attractive a specific keyword is, bearing in mind what your audience's needs and interests are. Ask yourself: is the term you are analyzing likely to be searched by your targeted audience? Are they asking questions around this term? Is this term connected to any of the interest topics previously identified?

Competition - this will show you how much competition there is for a given keyword; high competition is a signal that ranking for that term will be quite challenging to achieve. Ideally, you should aim for keywords that have low competition and high search volume.

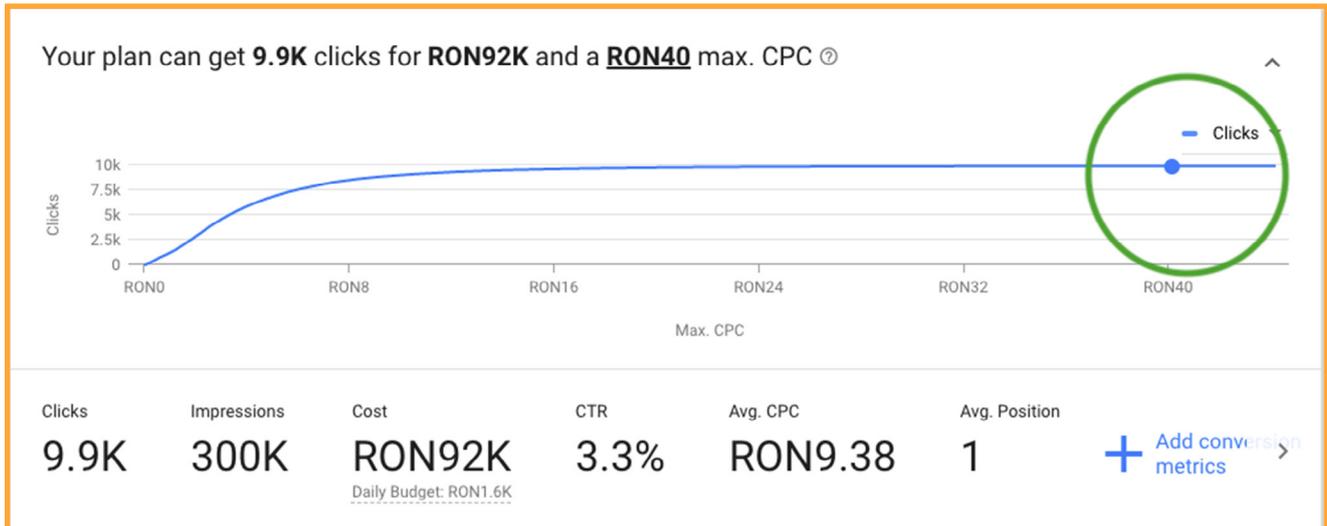
Where can you get your data from?

1. You can obtain information on **search volume** from Google Keyword Planner **Get search volume and forecasts section**; save time by copying/pasting all keywords in bulk or by uploading a file with all terms.

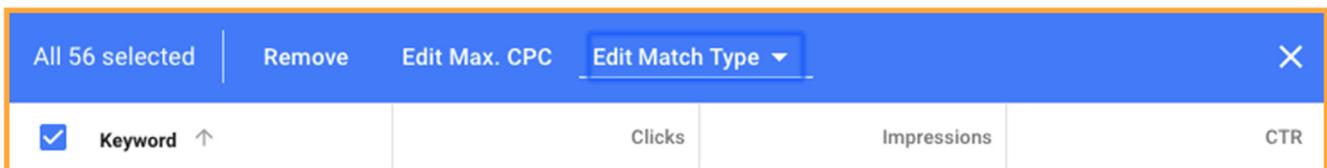


The screenshot shows a web interface titled "Get search volume and forecasts" with a close button (X) in the top right corner. Below the title is a large text input field with the placeholder text "Enter or paste your keywords, one word or phrase per line, or separated by commas". At the bottom left of the input field, there is a blue upward-pointing arrow icon followed by the text "Upload a file". At the bottom right, there is a grey button with the text "GET STARTED".

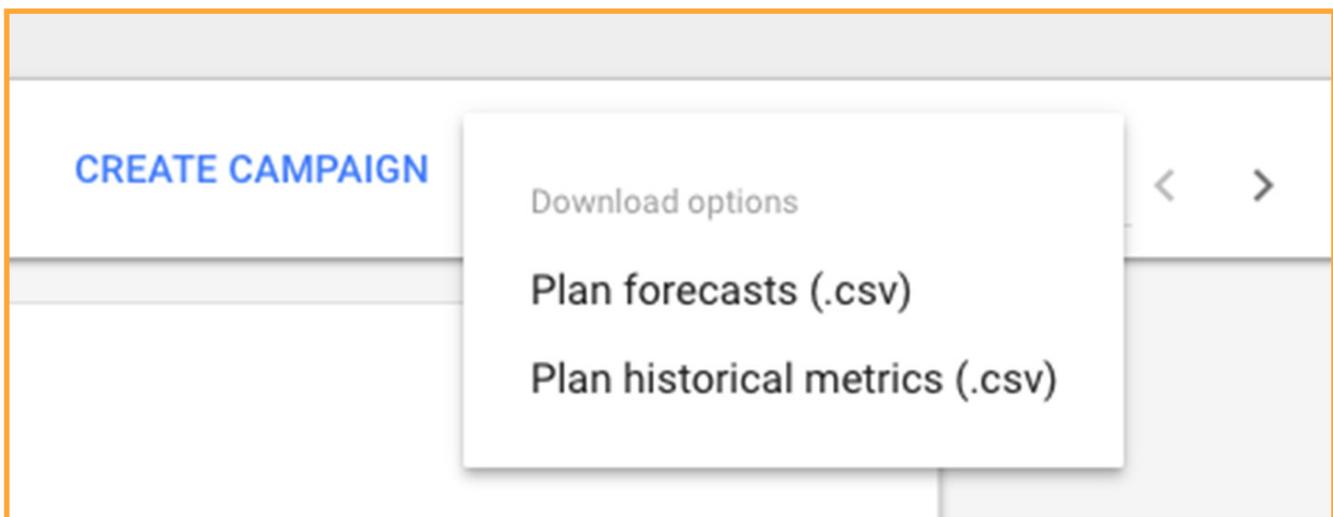
To ensure you get a forecast as close to the actual monthly search volume for that keyword, expand the top box and set the CPC to the maximum, as shown below.



Then select all keywords and set the Match type to Exact Match Type.



Last, go to the top right-hand section, click on the download icon (next to the data range selector) and download the Plan forecast report. The search volume you got is a pretty close estimate to the actual search volume for each term.



2. Competition - as you already noticed, the Google Keyword Planner provides a competition score; this is the estimated competition for keywords bids in Google Ads. Therefore we don't advise taking your keyword competition information from there. To assess how **competitive a given keyword is in organic searches**, you have two options available.

1. The simplest way is to use a paid tool that will provide you with a difficulty score, allowing you to save tons of time. [Moz Keyword Explorer](#), [SEMRush Keyword Difficulty Tool](#), [Ahrefs Keywords Explorer](#) are great and reliable tools to use, [Can I Rank](#) and [SEO Profiler](#) keyword tools have been gaining traction as well. (MOZ and SEMRush keyword tools can also be used without subscription but with limited features).
2. The not so simple but free version is to follow the next steps:
 - Install the [MOZBar extension](#); this is compatible with Chrome web browser. The MOZBar allows you to view data such as **page authority (PA)** score, **Domain authority (DA)** score, number of links pointing to a web page and number of links pointing to a website (this last feature is not available for the free version).
 - Search for your keyword into Google and look at the first 10 organic search results. In particular, check the PA and DA score and number of external links pointing to the page. Is the DA higher than your website's DA? How many links point to your page compared to how many links point to the analyzed page? Google will display the most relevant results for a given search, **ranked** by the page's and website's authority (authority being a measure of how many external websites link to a specific website). Therefore if the first 10 results come from pages and websites with a high PA and DA, and tons of links point to the page, than you most likely have a **high competitive keyword**. If you find to be close to the PA and DA of the first 10 results, your keywords can be labeled as having **medium competition**, and if find you score better than you have a **low competitive keyword**.

What Is SEO / Search Engine Optimization? - Search Engine Land

<https://searchengineland.com/guide/what-is-seo> ▼

Get started learning all about **SEO** from the industry's most trusted source, Search Engine Land.

Review basics of **search engine optimization**, ranking factors ...

[Types Of Search Engine](#) · [HTML Code & Search Engine ...](#) · [Google: SEO](#)

2) PA: 66  28,378 links

DA: 90 



Link
Analysis

- Additionally, you can check the content for each of the search results; have a quick look and figure out if that looks like high-quality content or if you could come up with a better material.
- Analyze your keywords one by one and label them accordingly: low, medium, high.

The second option is quite laborious, but if for some reason you are not ready to use a paid tool, you can rely on this method to get a good idea of how difficult it will be to rank for each keyword.

CTR - this could also be an interesting metric to factor in, as estimated CTR could indicate the potential of conversion for a given search term. However, take this metric with a grain of salt, as CTR in Google Keyword Planner represents the average results across all Google Ads advertisers in a specific ad position. So it can give you an idea if a keyword has a potentially better conversion than another, but it's not an absolute metric.

At this point, your list of keywords should have evolved into something like this.

			Monthly Search Volume	Competition	CTR (optional)
Top of the funnel (awareness)	Topic #1	keyword	10 - 100	High	6.30%
		keyword	1K - 10K	Medium	2.90%
	Topic #2	keyword	10 - 100	Medium	1.00%
		keyword	100 - 1K	Low	0.80%
Topic #n	keyword	1K - 10K	Low	1.20%	
	keyword	100 - 1K	Low	1.10%	

			Monthly Search Volume	Competition	CTR (optional)
Middle of the funnel (consideration)	Topic #1	keyword keyword	.....	.....	.....
	Topic #2	keyword keyword	.....	.....	.....
	Topic #n	keyword keyword	.....	.....	.....
Bottom of the funnel (decision)	Topic #1	keyword keyword	.....	.....	.....
	Topic #2	keyword keyword	.....	.....	.....
	Topic #n	keyword keyword	.....	.....	.....

Once you have all the above data in one place, you can start the fun task of filtering out terms.

What we find helpful here is to view each topic & correspondent keywords as a separate mini-list. This way you can prioritize & eliminate keywords across each topic, without eliminating a single topic entirely.

So, taking each topic mini-list one by one, start eliminating the keywords with **little search volume**.



It is difficult to say what is low and high volume as it depends on how niche or large your market is. Take a look across your entire list and try to figure out what is an average volume and use that as a reference point, eliminating terms with less volume than that. For some businesses, a search volume of 100 per month is very low while for others it might be a significant one.

Next, move on to eliminating the terms with **high competition**, as those will be very difficult to rank for. A word of caution here:

depending on the market you are in and its competitiveness, you might find your most relevant keywords to be also highly competitive. If you can't find alternative keywords with medium or low competition, then you can keep some high competition queries, but make sure you also add some medium and low competition variations. Factor in **relevance**, compare keyword variations and judge which variation is more likely to be interesting for your audience.

Optionally, you can also take into consideration the forecasted click-through rate. If you have a hard time deciding between two or more variations of a keyword, that are all relevant and have similar search volumes, you could use the **CTR** to determine which ones to choose or eliminate.

By now your list should have gotten considerably smaller, with keywords that are relevant to your business, with a significant estimated search volume and preferable as little competition as possible.



You can create two different Excel sheets - one with the entire list of keywords and one with only remaining keywords after filtering. This way, when you want to add more keywords to your list to compare them against previously considered alternatives.

Step 4:

Map Keywords to Website Pages

To ensure you stay organized and have clarity when optimizing your website around targeted keywords, we advise to map out the previously chosen terms to your website pages.

What you have to do is to simply create an excel sheet and put in all the web pages that you want to optimize, together with targeted keywords for each page. Having selected keywords to cover the entire sales funnel, you should have keywords for all pages, whether

they are product pages or blog posts. The header of your Excel sheet can look something like this.

Page URL	Target keyword	Slug	Title tag	Meta description	H1	Body content	Image ALT text
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There is not a fixed number of keywords you should target per page, however from our experience we find that targeting one to three keywords per each page is optimal.

Step 5: Measure and re-assess

The last step in this process is a repetitive one: after having mapped keywords to web pages and optimized respective pages, what you need to do is track and measure how these pages are performing, how your ranking for targeted keywords changes over time as well as what other keyword opportunities arise. Allow for a few weeks before re-assessing and go through your targeted keywords every two, three months, eliminating keywords that are not paying off results and adding in fresh ideas.

STOICA



Have you got any questions related to keyword research, SEO in general or this paper in particular?

We would love to hear from you!



Drop us a line at elena@stoica.co, and we will try to get back to you with the best answer



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