

Expanding Your Web Presence

Overview

When someone uses a search engine, they are on a mission; they are looking for information that is represented by a 'keyword phrase' (single or multiple terms). The search engine provides a list of website pages and advertisements which they consider to be relevant to the keyword phrase. But this simple concept is more complex than meets the eye. When choosing the best keyword(s) for an online SEM marketing effort, several factors must be considered.

- Keyword ambiguity
- Relevancy
 - Visitor intended meaning
 - Search Engine Results
 - Misspelling
- PPC vs. Organic search results

Ambiguity

Search Engine Marketers promote keywords they believe their audience will use to find their products/services/information. But the same keyword phrase may have multiple meanings. It may be ambiguous. For example: consider the keyword "needle". According to WordNet (wordnet.princeton.edu), "needle" has 6 different primary meanings.

Noun

1. the leaf of a conifer
2. a slender pointer for indicating the reading on the scale of a measuring instrument
3. a sharp pointed implement (usually steel)
 - **direct hyponym / full hyponym**
 - **crochet needle, crochet hook** (a needle with a hook on the end; used in crocheting)
 - **dry point** (a steel needle for engraving without acid on a bare copper plate)
 - **hypodermic needle** (a hollow needle)
 - **knitting needle** (needle consisting of a slender rod with pointed ends; usually used in pairs)
 - **packing needle** (a large needle used to sew up canvas packages)
 - **sewing needle** (a needle used in sewing to pull thread through cloth)
 - **part meronym**
 - **eye** (a small hole or loop (as in a needle)) *"the thread wouldn't go through the eye"*
 - **point** (sharp end) *"he stuck the point of the knife into a tree"; "he broke the point of his pencil"*
 - **direct hypernym / inherited hypernym / sister term**
 - **implement** (instrumentation (a piece of equipment or tool) used to effect an end)
4. **phonograph needle, needle** (a stylus that formerly made sound by following a groove in a phonograph record)

Verb

5. **goad** (goad or provoke, as by constant criticism) *"He needed her with his sarcastic remarks"*
6. prick with a needle

Without more understanding of the searcher's intent, it is impossible to determine their objective. Yet, when a

keyword is in context, its meaning may be very clear. If a searcher enters "needle" into a search query box on a website containing sewing supplies, "needle" would have a specific meaning: "sewing needle".

Search engines are, by design, contextually neutral. They do not bias their search results to suit specific subjects. Consequently, search results may contain website pages that do not match the searcher's intent. Google has made some strides to bias their results based on user history, but their system requires that users open a "web history" account and be logged in. For the vast majority of searches, keyword ambiguity is a significant issue.

As no surprise, keywords phrases that have fewer terms are more likely to be ambiguous. Keyword phrases with more terms include some context or qualification. In 2001, the average keyword phrase was 2.4 terms. In 2007, Google admitted that the average keyword phrase was more than 3 terms. These longer keyword phrases are called "long tail" keywords.

Search Engine Marketers should avoid keywords that are ambiguous. Whether for an organic or PPC campaign, marketers expend time and money to attain website visibility associated with keywords. If the keyword is ambiguous, then, potentially, a large portion of searchers using that same keyword may not be interested in a website's information. In this situation, the value of the marketing expense is compromised and returns are lower.

Relevance

Keyword phrases that are not ambiguous are not necessarily relevant. Consider the keyword "dog food". There are different *kinds* and *parts* of "dog food".

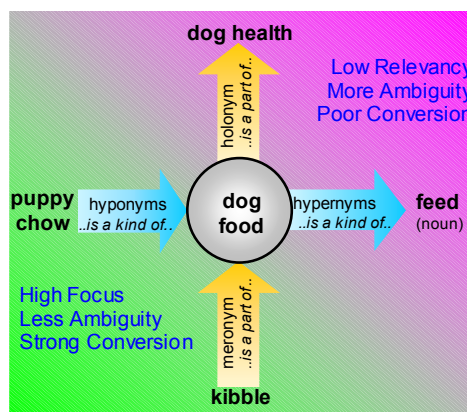


Figure 1: Keyword synset example

study of semantics, there are specific terms called synsets to describe these relationships (see figure 1).

While it is true that each synset in this example has correlation to the keyword "dog food", not all may be relevant to a website's theme, products or services. In virtually all cases, hyponyms and (to a lesser degree)

meronyms provide:

- Higher Focus or relevancy
- Less Ambiguity
- Stronger click through conversion

Keywords – A Critical Success Criteria (continued)

Visitor's Indented Meaning

There is no scientific method of measuring relevancy. It is more of a subjective measure. But one good way to determine whether a keyword is relevant is to answer the following question.

Would a high percent (80%+) of searchers use <keyword> to find the products/services/information offered on xyz.com?

If the answer is YES, then a keyword phrase is likely to have sufficient relevancy and value in an Organic and/or PPC campaign.

Search Engine Results

There are some circumstances where relevancy is high yet the search engines return results that are not relevant. In these cases, a keyword phrase may have some ambiguity. The alternative meaning, although not as popular, does attract websites that have stronger SEO value. Consequently, search engines may rank website pages higher that have alternative, less popular definitions.

Acronyms often fall into this category. For example, consider the acronym "PSP". It could mean "PlayStation Portable" or "Paint Shop Pro" or "Paintball Sports Promotions", etc. Acronymfinder.com reports 96 meanings for "PSP". It is impossible to know which is the more popular; however, Google's page 1 results are biased toward "PlayStation Portable".

Whether an acronym or relevant keyword phrase, if the search engine ranks non-relevant website pages, searchers will likely abandon their search for an alternative phrase.

Misspelling

Misspelled keywords use to be a prized tactic because the keyword space is typically less competitive. Now, most major search engines offer the corrected spelling to searchers. Typically searchers accept the corrected spelling before clicking on any search results.

There are, however, some exceptions. In some cases, a keyword phrase may have 2 or more legitimate spellings. Collocation is one such term. It may be spelled as 'collocation' or 'colocation'. Google provides no corrected spelling in this case and both spelling produce relevant results.

PPC vs. Organic Search Results

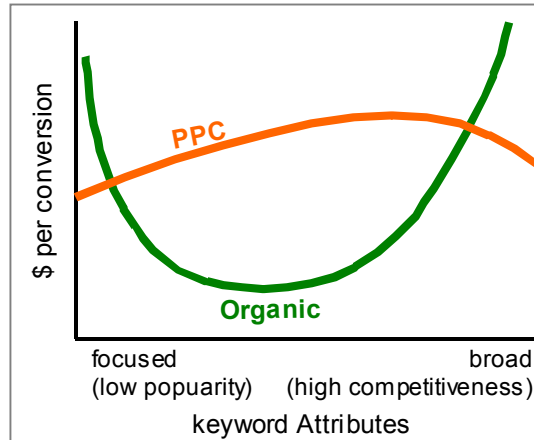
PPC sponsored links and Organic Search Results appear on Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs). Both are intended to offer searchers a choice of relevant website pages in response to a keyword search query. But PPC and Organic campaigns have significantly different cost models and user experiences that affect keyword choice.

Managers of organic optimization campaigns spend resources for search engine visibility with the intention of securing clicks. Effort is expended or 'sunk' regardless of the clicks attained. PPC sponsored link managers attain visibility for free and only pay for clicks. PPC costs are

'variable'. Although this statement seems obvious, the implications are significant.

In a variable PPC cost model, the cost per click conversion is relatively flat. The cost per click is relatively the same no matter how popular a keyword phrase may be for a given vertical market space. Variations in PPC cost occur when a keyword overlaps with other vertical markets.

Organic Optimization is different. There is a 'sunk' cost associated with the optimization of each keyword. For keywords that may not be very popular, the 'sunk' cost per click conversion is high. Likewise, the keyword phrases that are popular and more competitive require significantly greater organic optimization effort resulting in a high click conversion cost. The sweet spot for organic optimization is in the middle: keywords



that have some popularity and are, from a competitive ranking point of view, reasonably attainable.

The cost curves for PPC and Organic campaigns are different for each vertical market and require keyword research to determine the best approach.

PPC and Organic listings offer different user experiences that affect keyword choice. Most searchers know that PPC sponsored listings are paid listings. And because these listings are small, they can be scanned and qualified quickly. Thus, PPC listings may venture into keyword spaces that are more ambiguous or less relevant because searchers qualify them by the listing description. This qualification reduces clicks from non-relevant traffic.

Organic listings, on the other hand, have twice the amount of text. Not only are they longer, they may be more difficult to read in those cases where Google uses 'snippets' of text from the page body. These 'snippets' may not be as descriptive or concise as a PPC listing. Lastly, searchers trust the search engine to deliver relevant organic results. Therefore, organic listings are more likely to obtain a click by virtue of their search engine ranking rather than user qualification. The result is clicks from more non-relevant traffic.

Conclusion

Developing a comprehensive keyword strategy is the starting point of any Search Engine Marketing (SEM) effort. Some keywords are better suited to PPC campaigns; others for organic campaigns. Choosing the best combination is a matter of significant research that will maximize the amount of relevant traffic while minimizing costs.