



KEYWORDS FOR INTERNET MARKETING, Highlights and Directions

INTRODUCTION

MANY FORMS OF INTERNET MARKETING HINGE ON KEYWORDS, YET ONLY ONE FIRM OUT OF 100 UNDERSTANDS HOW TO PROPERLY SELECT AND USE THEM. AS A RESULT, 99 OUT OF 100 MARKETING PROGRAMS FLOUNDER, WASTING VALUABLE TIME AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES. THIS *INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING* WILL GIVE CEOS THE HIGH LEVEL UNDERSTANDING OF KEYWORDS NECESSARY TO DRIVE MARKETING RESULTS.

“ONLINE MARKETING” IS A BROAD TERM THAT MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE, THAT CAN TAKE IN EVERYTHING FROM AFFILIATE MARKETING TO WEBSITE DESIGN. FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING, WE’RE FOCUSING ON THREE ASPECTS OF ONLINE MARKETING WHERE KEYWORDS HAVE ENORMOUS IMPACT:

1. SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)
2. PAY-PER-CLICK ADVERTISING (PPC)
3. CONTENT MARKETING, INCLUDING WEBSITE CONTENT, OFFSITE CONTENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

THESE THREE ACTIVITIES DRIVE *HIGHLY QUALIFIED* SEARCH ENGINE TRAFFIC TO A FIRM’S WEBSITE, BLOG AND OTHER DIGITAL PROPERTIES. WHEN PROPERLY EXECUTED, THEY ARE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE. HOWEVER, TIME AND TIME AGAIN, WE SEE TWO SITUATIONS:

- A) FIRMS SQUANDER RESOURCES ON ELABORATE SEO, PPC OR CONTENT MARKETING PROGRAMS THAT ARE FUNDAMENTALLY AND FATALLY FLAWED DUE TO SHORTCOMINGS IN THEIR KEYWORD STRATEGIES; OR,
- B) FIRMS COMPLETELY MISS OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE TRAFFIC BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT MADE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN KEYWORDS AND ONLINE DEMAND.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A HIGH-LEVEL EXPLANATION OF THE ROLE KEYWORDS PLAY IN ONLINE MARKETING, HELPING YOUR FIRM *RECOGNIZE* AND *CAPITALIZE* ON ONLINE MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES.



Section 1: Strategy and Budgeting

CAPTURING ONLINE DEMAND

What Are Keywords?

Keywords are search terms: the words people type into the search box of a search engine. They are of utmost importance for driving website traffic and generating leads because they are the words potential customers use when they are searching for the stuff you sell.



Branded versus Non-branded Keywords

Firms often grow complacent because they get lots of traffic from branded keywords such as “acme widget company.” However, branded keyword traffic is a given; Google and other search engines will almost always give high rankings to company web pages when a company’s name is part of the search term. What really counts is how much traffic is generated from non-branded keywords — search terms people use when they’re looking for your stuff, but don’t know who you are, or don’t know you sell it. Increasing your share of non-branded keywords is the way to outperform the competition.

Keywords Make Existing Online Demand Measurable

Google and other search engines report the search volume for all search terms, enabling firms to gauge the relative popularity of keywords relevant to their business. If the search term “inexpensive industrial widgets” is used 10,000 times a month and the term “high quality industrial widgets” is used 1,000 times a month, we know that “inexpensive” has ten times the online demand of “high quality.”

Keyword Selection: The First Step to Greater Search Engine Traffic

By identifying and optimizing its web content for high volume keywords such as “inexpensive industrial widgets,” a firm can increase its volume of search engine traffic in a systematic way, and capitalize on the demand represented by those keywords. Keyword research that is incomplete, flawed in its methodology or not undertaken, will undercut search engine traffic volume.



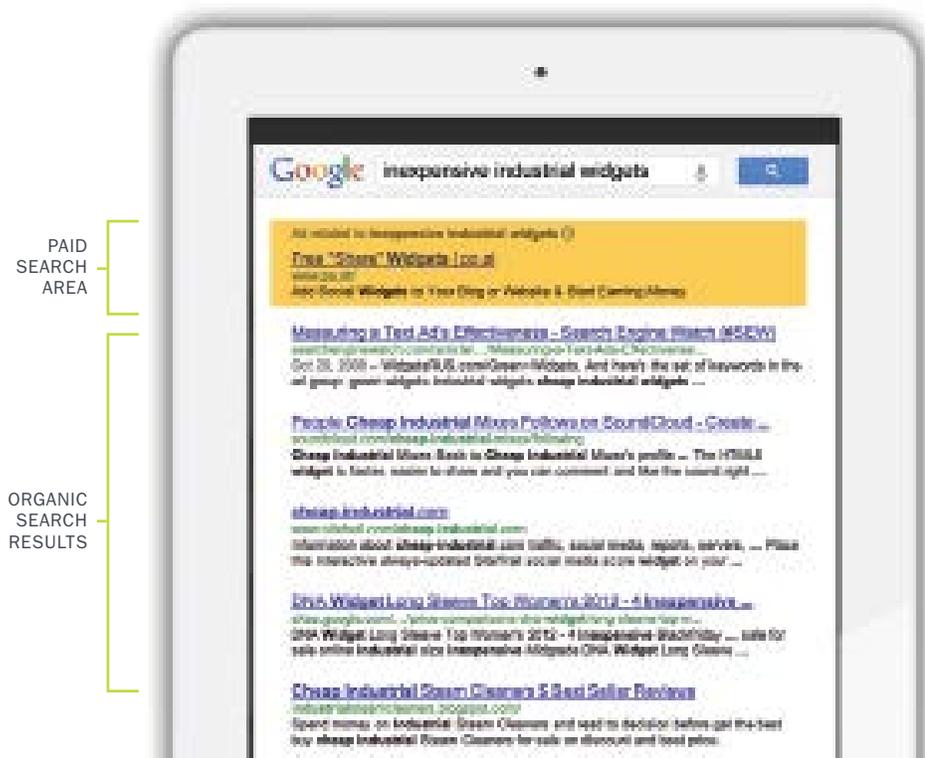
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Organic Search Visibility

When someone does a search on Google, Google displays results ranked in order of how relevant the web page is to the keywords used by the searcher. These are *organic* results – and the higher a page ranks, the more people click on it. So, if the widget maker can get its web page that talks about “inexpensive industrial widgets” moved up from page 10 of the search engine results to page one for searches on that term – those 100 visits a month might increase to 1,000 or more. The primary marketing discipline that focuses on improving organic search visibility is called search engine optimization, or SEO.

Paid Search Visibility

When someone does a search on Google or Bing, the search engine company also displays advertisements that relate to the search term being used, positioned above or alongside the organic results. Pay-per-click advertising, or PPC, involves managing campaigns that serve up ads for keywords (anywhere from handfuls to millions) that relate to a firm’s products and services. So, if the widget maker’s PPC campaign includes “inexpensive industrial widgets,” it increases the pool of potential clicks by as much as 10,000 a month. If the campaign ignores this term – it reduces the click-through opportunity to zero.





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Effective Marketing Starts with Keywords

From the discussion above, it should be clear that understanding aggregate keyword demand and your firm's share of that demand are essential for driving qualified traffic. Marketing efforts must focus on the right terms in the right proportion to optimize online visibility. Without an organized system of identifying and managing keywords, web traffic cannot be systematically improved.

Keywords and Budgets

For most businesses, tens of thousands of search terms are used by people looking for the stuff they sell. Understanding your total universe of search terms is fundamental to establishing an appropriate budget. If the widget manufacturer identifies 100,000 relevant search terms, there may be only enough money in the budget to attack 5,000 of them. It therefore becomes critical to know which terms to pursue – and which to ignore.

Keywords, Budgets and Competition

Since costs are directly related to actual demand ... a smart tactic used to guard against budget waste is paying attention to what your competitors are doing. If a handful of firms dominate visibility for the highest volume keywords, it could be very expensive if not cost-prohibitive to overthrow them. In such cases, focusing on a larger number of smaller volume keywords could be the recipe for success. Also, keep in mind that online competitors may be completely different from traditional or perceived competitors. Firms sometime scoff at competitors with poor reputations that rank highly for important search terms. However, these secondary competitors are capturing demand (i.e., attracting clicks from searchers) – that could be, and perhaps should be, coming to you.

Bottom Line:

Keyword Strategy — Define it, measure it and market to it.



Section 2: Execution

THE LANGUAGE OF ONLINE MARKETING – AND 5 REASONS WHY MOST FIRMS FAIL TO SPEAK IT

Falling into Keyword Traps

Keyword strategies involve identifying the right keywords to focus on, and then using those keywords (and variations of them) in your website content, PPC ads, PPC landing pages, and social media content. While many firms falter before they start by forgetting to identify these terms, many more fail even though they have done their keyword due diligence. Why? – Because they fall into keyword traps. Here are six of the most common:

$$\text{PROPER KEYWORDS} + \text{TRAPS} = \text{SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN}$$

Trap 1

Misjudging User Intent

The essence of successful marketing is positioning your content to capitalize on the right keywords. One way that firms chase the *wrong* keywords is failing to understand user intent. For example, consider a popular search term like “video delivery.” With more than 200,000 Google searches a month, it would be tempting for a firm that sells video transmission equipment to optimize content around that term and capture more of the online demand. But what are people looking for when they search for video delivery? Childbirth delivery? How to download video to a computer? Video transmission equipment? After conducting a Google search, it becomes apparent that most searches on this term are related to childbirth. If the firm in question focused on “video delivery,” it would attract the wrong kind of visitors, wasting budget dollars.

Trap 2

Using Vague Keywords that Bleed Budgets

Sometimes, chasing the biggest volume keywords is a recipe for disaster. The term “packaging supplies” generates 110,000 monthly searches and is enticing for large volume wholesalers of packaging supplies. However, the people doing those searches could be individuals looking for a mere handful of moving boxes, all the way up to a Fortune 100 company looking for a supplier for a \$5 million contract. Not only that, searchers could be collecting information, looking to order online, or seeking a consultation. Most firms would be better off focusing on more precise keywords that relate more directly to the products and services they offer, and the segments of the market they serve.



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Trap 3

Allowing Image Concerns to Take Winning Keywords Off the Table

In an earlier example we considered a case where “inexpensive widgets” had 10 times the search volume of “high quality widgets.” Nevertheless, some widget makers would completely ignore the higher volume term in their keyword strategy because they do not want to be perceived as low price or cheap. In many cases this thinking is shortsighted. If a widget maker captures demand (i.e., attracts traffic) for the “inexpensive” keyword, it has captured a lead – one that can be sold on a high quality product. Without the traffic, there are no opportunities to upsell.

Trap 4

Succumbing to Toxic Keyword Fixations

In theory, keyword strategies are created in the clinical atmosphere of a marketing laboratory. In reality, emotion often comes into play. A business owner may be consumed by a desire to outrank a rival competitor for a keyword that has relatively low value. A marketing manager may be driven to achieve #1 ranking for a ridiculously competitive keyword simply because it is the pet favorite of the CEO. Situations like these do nothing but impede traffic growth and lead generation – and waste precious marketing resources.

Trap 5

Building a Keyword Prison with Jargon

Customers drive the language of online marketing through the terms they use to conduct searches. The language of online marketing is the language of searchers, the language of customers. If a firm highlights its own jargon in its web content, social media conversation and PPC campaigns, it will usually be speaking a foreign language. Often a firm’s content creators think that emphasizing popular search terms “dumbs down” their content. But before searchers become interested in how smart you are, they are interested in how *relevant* you are. In order to be relevant, you must have high visibility for the terms your customers like to use, not the ones you like to use.

Bottom Line:

Keyword Execution — Capturing more highly qualified traffic by ignoring peripheral issues.



Section 3: Assessment

4 WAYS TO RECOGNIZE KEYWORD INCOMPETENCE

Are We Doing It Right?

There are a number of ways to get a handle on how well your organization is leveraging the power of keywords. Here are four of the most telling:

Diagnostic Tool 1

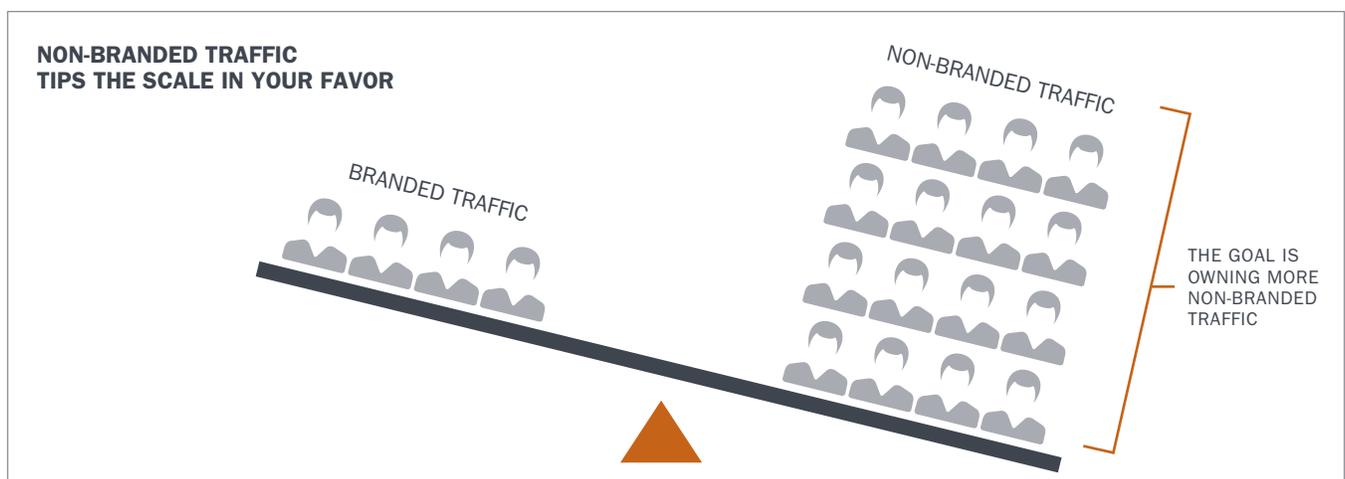
Articulate Your Keyword Strategy

If you ask your marketing team to describe the current keyword strategy and are met with blank stares, it's a good indication that your website, PPC and social media content are lacking a coherent, unified strategy and are therefore underperforming. If there is a documented, or documentable process in place, it can then be benchmarked against the ideas discussed in this brief and more technical resources such as Marketing Sherpa or SEOmoz that outline keyword strategy best practices.

Diagnostic Tool 2

Measure Your Branded to Non-branded Ratio

Getting a lot of site traffic from your branded keywords won't win you any marketing awards. In fact, if the lion's share of your site traffic comes from branded keywords, it is almost certain that you have not been deploying a sound keyword strategy in your online marketing efforts.





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Diagnostic Tool 3

Are Keyword Reviews Ongoing?

Keyword research and strategy continually change: search term volumes change, new terms come into play, a firm's product and service focus changes, new products are introduced, etc. In addition, analyzing search traffic, paid search campaign results and social media activity helps firms move beyond theory and sharpen the keyword focus on terms that are working best for them in real life. If your firm reviews keyword strategy monthly or quarterly, you are continually improving. If not, you are almost sure to be in a holding pattern or worse, losing ground.

Diagnostic Tool 4

Conduct an Onsite Keyword Optimization Review

In most cases, a firm's site content is the heart and soul of its keyword strategy, the place that attracts the most traffic and generates the most leads. Using your own resources or an outside firm to perform an audit of your site's keyword effectiveness will make it clear whether you are capturing significant online demand ... or leaving leads on the table for your competitors to pick up.

ARE WE DOING IT RIGHT?

- ARTICULATE KEYWORD STRATEGY
- MEASURE BRANDED TO NON-BRANDED RATIO
- ONGOING KEYWORD REVIEWS
- ONSITE KEYWORD OPTIMIZATION REVIEW

Bottom Line:

Keyword Assessment — Keyword strategy may be part rocket science, but knowing whether you're on the right track is not.



Section 4: Action Plan

5 WAYS TO FIX KEYWORD PROBLEMS THAT UNDERMINE RESULTS

How to Get on the Right Keyword Track

The good news is, most shortcomings in a firm's approach to keywords can be improved without a complete overhaul of everything. True, there are cases that call for a website to be completely rebuilt or a PPC strategy to be overhauled – but they are infrequent. Here are five steps you can take immediately to right the keyword ship.

Action Step 1

Start Fresh with a New Keyword Analysis

If an existing keyword strategy is a year or two old or nonexistent, doing random tweaks will be like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. A more sounder approach is to conduct new keyword analysis annually to identify current online demand, and use that analysis as a framework for implementing tactical adjustments and/or large-scale content revisions.

Action Step 2

Update Onsite Keyword Optimization

In the previous section we noted the value of conducting a site audit. Once this has been completed and keyword analysis has been updated, extremely useful site updates can be made. By revising key elements of on-page content, meta information, and navigational structure, and search visibility can be strongly enhanced. **(For a detailed explanation of this, refer to our previous Intelligence Brief, [SEO for the CEO at www.straightnorth.com/company/intel-briefs](http://www.straightnorth.com/company/intel-briefs).)**

Action Step 3:

Begin Testing New PPC Campaigns

Ongoing testing of keywords in PPC campaigns is highly effective for identifying search terms that resonate with your customers. Insights from PPC tests can be applied to keyword usage on all types of online content and lead to better organic and paid search visibility.



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Action Step 4

Add Keywords to Your Social Media Communication

Google, Bing and other search engines index and rank social media content. By inserting the right keywords in those seemingly insignificant tweets and Facebook posts, a firm can materially improve its visibility across social media platforms and search engines.

KEYWORD ACTION PLAN



Action Step 5

Track Results with a Vengeance

As we mentioned earlier, keyword strategy is not a one-time event; instead, it is an exercise in continuous improvement. While many firms are content with implementing a coherent program, the real winners are the firms that always look for ways to improve. Careful review of site performance, PPC campaigns and social media metrics reveal new keyword opportunities, underperforming pages and hidden gems.

Bottom Line:

Keyword Action Plan — For successful online marketing, it's not so much where you are today, but how far and how fast you can move the dial.



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About Straight North

WE ARE A TEAM OF FORWARD-THINKING INTERNET MARKETING PROFESSIONALS WITH BATTLE-TESTED STRATEGIC, CREATIVE AND TECHNICAL ABILITY. WE DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT INTERNET MARKETING SOLUTIONS THAT INSPIRE ACTION, GROW REVENUES AND INCREASE PROFITS. WE SPECIALIZE IN USING THE INTERNET AS A MARKETING CHANNEL AND PLATFORM FOR DRIVING LEADS AND INCREASING SALES TO GROWTH-MINDED COMPANIES — ALL UNDER ONE ROOF.

IF THIS INTELLIGENCE BRIEF SPARKED SOME THOUGHTS IN YOUR MIND ABOUT YOUR WEBSITE OR INTERNET MARKETING ACTIVITIES, PLEASE GIVE US A CALL TO DISCUSS HOW STRAIGHT NORTH CAN IMPROVE YOUR SITE'S CONVERSIONS, INCREASE TRAFFIC AND GENERATE POSITIVE INTERNET MARKETING ROI.



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