

## Expanding Your Web Presence

### Overview:

The discovery phase of an Organic Optimization campaign precedes strategic planning and is often considered to be the first step. The process includes a review of important metrics that influence an implementation strategy. The discovery phase includes:

- **Keyword Exploration**
  - Semantic Variations
  - PPC Costs
  - Popularity
  - Relevancy
- **Website Construction Obstacles**
- **Competition Ranking Attributes**



Most of the Keyword Exploration metrics are easily attainable from a variety of sources. Website Construction obstacles require a trained eye to seek out conditions that can cause search engine spidering and indexing issues. The most difficult, and most often ignored, metrics are Ranking Attributes of websites that are currently ranking well.

### Keyword Exploration

With the right tools, Keyword Exploration is straightforward. Tools like Wordtracker (a subscription based service) offer the capability to seek out keyword Semantic Variations and Popularity. The service lists similar keyword phrases and the number of search conducted across the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of search per day.

However, as helpful as these tools are, they are not perfect. The sources for their data are typically based on a small sampling that may not represent the demographics of a served market. Some services source from foreign country search engines, others from the United States. Even with their flaws, they are the best resources for discovering keyword variations and estimating popularity.

Another helpful metric is the Pay-Per-Click (PPC) cost for a given keyword. Both Yahoo and Google offer tools to estimate the cost associated with a specific keyword, and define the relative market value. Higher prices, mean greater the perceived value for that keyword. Greater perceived market value correlates well to more intense organic optimization.

Keyword Relevancy is a measure of the average users intent. It is complex because keywords mean different things to different people. For example, "ball" may refer to a spherical object or a special event? Or, "java" may refer to a coffee bean, an island of Indonesia or a server script language? Without additional information, these keywords are ambiguous. Searchers may start a search using a single keyword term, but commonly refine their search by adding addition terms to form a keyword phrase. For example, "java" becomes "java bean" or "java software". "Ball" becomes "soccer ball" or "formal ball" or "dance ball". More terms reduce keyword phrase ambiguity.

At best, keyword Relevancy is subjective. Keyword tools can help provide some level of understanding by examining related phrases.

For example, consider the keyword "hot plate". The list of related phrases helps define the typical user's intension.

Keyword	Est Searches/Mo.
hot plate	5160
electric hot plate	840
two burner hot plate	720
hot plate manufacturers	570
small hot plate	450
spinmaster hot plate	450
micro hot plate	420
alton brown ribs hot plate	420
single gas hot plate	360
thd hp16 hot plate power attenuator	300
design of hot plate stirrer	300
sunpentown induction hot plate	240
snl hot plate	240
cheap motels and a hot plate	240
formation of hot springs plate tectonics	240
hot plate small	240
model 620 hot plate	210
<b>hot plate laboratory</b>	<b>210</b>

A quick review of a list of keyword phrases incorporating the terms "hot" and "plate" shows that only a small percentage of searchers would use "hot plate" when seeking laboratory equipment.

From an Organic Optimization perspective, keywords that are more specific (less ambiguous):

- Offer a better chance of ranking success with less effort
- Attract visitors that convert better.

### Website Construction Obstacles

A website that is not Search Engine Friendly (SEF) can sabotage the best optimization efforts. Fundamentally, websites need be constructed in a manner that allows search engines to crawl, read web page content, and index website pages.



**Crawl** or spider are terms used to describe how a search engine robot ("bot" for short), inspects websites. All major search engine bots start at the website domain name – typically a home page. They read links on the home page and follow them to the site's interior pages.

There are several reasons why a search engine bot may not crawl a website. Most are listed on search engine Webmaster Guidelines pages.

Google: <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=35769>

Yahoo: <http://help.yahoo.com/l/us/yahoo/search/basics/basics-18.html>

MSN: <http://www.seoconsultants.com/search-engines/guidelines/>

Yet it is still common to find websites that have been designed using techniques that are not SEF.

The most common infractions are:

- Passing session variables in the URL
- Improper re-directing of alias or other domain names
- Content copied from other websites
- Insufficient body content (flash or graphic websites)
- Hidden text (hidden div tags / css)
- Poor HTML coding practices

Basic observation combined with several publicly available tools may be used to check a website's SEF condition.

**Passing session variables in the URL** may be observed by checking interior pages. If the URL appearing in a browser includes an attribute like "SID=" followed by more than 8 to 16 alphanumeric characters, the attribute is likely to be a session ID. Most search engines will not crawl these pages. Google states:

*"Allow search bots to crawl your sites without session IDs or arguments that track their path through the site."*

**Improper re-directing of alias or other domain names** is common. Publicly available HTTP header check services may be used to inspect current condition. Whenever possible, avoid using 302 redirects. Instead use 301 redirects.

**Content copied from other websites** is frowned upon and can negatively affect rankings. [www.copyscape.com](http://www.copyscape.com) is a tool that reports copies of web page content on other websites.

**Insufficient body content** negatively affects rankings. If search engines are unable to determine what a web page is about, rankings may be compromised.

General guidelines suggest that SEF pages contain a minimum of 250 words in paragraph format. Since "stop words" (a, is, the, are, it, etc.) make up approximately 40-50% of typical content, the remaining words are what the search engines use to determine page substance. This amount of remaining text provides sufficient opportunity for keyword phrases to be repeated naturally throughout the text.

**Hidden text** is considered SPAM. Search engines will penalize, even ban a website when these conditions are found. Currently, several HTML methods that produce hidden text are not detectable by search engines. However, aggressive competitors desiring stronger rankings can manually detect these conditions and report offending websites to search engines.

**Poor HTML** can cause search engine bots to error. Search engine bots are different than browsers and, in many cases, more sensitive to poor HTML code.

If a search engine bot errors on a page, it will not index that page nor will it continue to follow links on that page.

In some cases, excessive broken links will have a negative impact on rankings.

### Competition Ranking Attributes

Answering the question: "how are they getting ranked so high" is what Competitive Ranking Attributes are all about. Although it's a simple question, attaining an answer with reasonable confidence is very difficult. It requires attaining significant ranking attribute information for



each website page currently ranking for specific keywords and then creating a search engine model to score these attributes.

Fortunately, SE ANALYST ([www.seanalyst.com](http://www.seanalyst.com)) provides this data for the SEO community. SE ANALYST produces over 40 search engine metrics for each top ranked website by keyword and consolidates these metrics into 3 basic groups:

- On-page Factors expressed as Keyword Density with special breakout for Body and Title tags.
- Link Reputation derived from backlink anchor text.
- PageRank metrics and contribution calculations.

An algorithm modeling search engine rankings combines each metric and produces a total score value.

Reports allow users to segment keywords into levels of completion.

#### Keyword Competitiveness by Tier

Tier	Body	Title	Back Links	Page Rank	Total Score	Page level for Optimization
Tier 1	---- Strong ----					Home
Tier 2	- Strong -		Weak	Mid	Mid	1 <sup>st</sup> interior
Tier 3	----- Mid -----					2 <sup>nd</sup> interior
Tier 4	---- Weak ----					3 <sup>rd</sup> + interior

Search engine rankings for tier 1 keywords are represented by website pages having strong on and off-page optimization attributes. These keywords typically require optimization on pages that have strong backlink reputation – most often, the home page.

Tier 2 keywords lack the backlink reputation requirements but still have strength in other metrics. 1<sup>st</sup> level interior pages may be well suited for these keywords.

Due to their weaker competitive attributes, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tier keywords may be placed deeper within the site and still can produce reasonable ranking results.

Although optimization efforts may not be able to attain superior metrics for each ranking attribute, it is the combination of all attributes that produce rankings. Since page Title is an important attribute and within Webmaster control, higher Title keyword densities are often a necessity to compensate for other weaknesses. Unfortunately, higher keyword density in the Title necessarily compromises the number of keywords that can favorably compete on a given page.

This condition is most significant for Tier 1 keywords requiring link reputation and home page status. With added requirements of high Title density, the number of Tier 1 keywords that can achieve strong rankings is often limited to 2 or 3.

### Conclusion

The Discovery Phase is a prerequisite for strategic planning. A winnable strategy incorporates all the information attained in this process.

At the site level, discovering Search Engine Friendly (SEF) obstacles is a necessary step.

At the keyword level, the discovery phase aids in choosing the best combination of keywords for organic optimization and/or PPC.

Keyword	Relevancy	Searches /Mo.	PPC \$	Competitiveness
keyword1	20%	14,500	\$3.25	Tier 1
Keyword2	60%	8,900	\$2.85	Tier 1
Keyword3	100%	1,700	\$2.45	Tier 2

Sample discovery matrix