

Best Way to Use the Google Search-Based Keyword Tool for SEO

Contributed by Webmaster
Sunday, 22 March 2009
Last Updated Sunday, 22 March 2009

By Janet Driscoll

I've recently read several blog posts touting how valuable the Google Search-Based Keyword Tool is, and while I tend to agree, I think there are very specific uses for this tool as opposed to the Google AdWords External Keyword Tool. First, let's examine how the two tools differ.

Google Search-Based Keyword Tool

According to Google, the search-based keyword tool "provides keyword ideas based on:

- * Based on actual Google search queries
- * Matched to specific pages of your website with your ad and search share
- * New to your Adwords account (typically excluding keywords matching those already in your account)"

Enter a website into the website field and click "find keywords" to begin your search. You can also optionally add keywords to the list.

Upon testing this feature (without tying it to my Google AdWords account per bullet three above), Google did a decent job at analyzing the Search Mojo website for potential keywords (click image to enlarge):

Google Search-Based Keyword Tool Results

Notice that Google provides a bar to indicate the competitiveness of the term, not unlike you might see in Google AdWords when selecting keywords. This tool also allows you to save your keywords to a "draft," allowing you to conduct multiple searches (say on many various websites) and compile one master list of keywords that you want to keep track of.

Google AdWords External Keyword Tool

The Google AdWords External Keyword Tool by contrast is essentially the same tool found in Google AdWords used for mining keywords just open to the external public. However, unlike the Search-Based tool, the AdWords Tool also shows different information. There are two ways to use the AdWords Tool: entering descriptive words or phrases or searching website content.

Descriptive Words or Phrases

Enter several relevant terms into this search box and Google will return search volume information on the provided terms

as well as possibly related terms (when "use synonyms" is checked). For example, when entering the term "search engine optimization" as the descriptive word, this is the result returned:

Google AdWords External Keyword Tool Results

Notice that this tool also shows a competitive status bar, but more importantly, it displays the search volume both on average and for the previous calendar month. When predicting best possible search volume when selecting keywords for SEO, this information is critical.

Website Content

Like the Search-Based Tool, the AdWords Tool can also check a website for potential keywords. A sample search on Search Mojo's website yielded the following (click image to enlarge):

Google AdWords External Keyword Tool Results

Unlike the Search-Based Tool, the AdWords Tool organizes the potential keywords by groupings by subject area.

Where the Search-Based Keyword Tool Has the Most Potential

So after comparing the two keyword tools for SEO uses, what are the strengths of the Search-Based Tool?

Save Draft Keywords

In my opinion, the greatest advantage that the Search-Based Tool has is its ability to "save draft" keywords. While the AdWords Tool does allow you to download all keywords to CSV, you can't pick and choose words to download it just downloads them all. But the Search-Based Tool allows you to pick which keywords you like best from a larger list and save JUST THOSE keywords to an overall draft list. Pretty handy.

Identify Competitors' Target Pages

Another great advantage of the Search-Based Tool comes when examining the URLs of your competition. Notice that the result above displays the URL of the page that the suggested term was pulled from. Armed with this data, you can get a closer look at how your competition is handling on-page SEO edits for this given page, given the keyword that Google suggests.

Where The Search-Based Keyword Tool Falls Flat

However, if you're using the Search-Based Keyword Tool for SEO, I'd reconsider and primarily use the AdWords Tool instead, or use the AdWords Tool in combination with the Search-Based Tool. Why?

Search Volume

The Holy Grail of SEO keyword selection is trying to determine which keywords are both a) most relevant to your website and b) have the greatest search volume. Because the Search-Based Tool doesn't provide last month's search volume, you may not recognize immediate shifts in search habits of searchers. That's important for SEO, when you are selecting the top keywords to optimize for, rather than building a large keyword list for PPC. For instance, while "online resumes" was searched nearly 40,000 times on average, in January 2009 it was searched nearly 48,000 times, a 20% difference in search volume. That's important to know.

Keyword on Your Website

The biggest problem with examining keywords on your own website is that if you're undergoing an SEO effort, you may not have good keywords on your site right now. If that's the case, you may get less relevant keyword results if you rely on Google to scan your website for keyword ideas.

Your Best Bet: Use a Combination of Both Tools

So what's the answer? I think a combination of both tools, using each for their strengths mentioned above, yields the best results in the end. I suggest using the Search-Based Tool first to do competitive research and making an initial search term list, then entering those terms in the AdWords Tool to establish search volume and download the results to CSV.

Janet Driscoll Miller is the CEO and Lead Search Strategist of Search Mojo a full service search engine marketing firm. Her company offers both Search Engine Optimization (SEO) services and Pay Per Click (PPC) Management services to help clients improve search engine rankings.

{mos_sb_discuss:2}