Session 3

Keyword Research

Learning Outcomes

In this session, you will learn to:

> ➢ Explain keyword basics and niche keywords
>
> ➢ Explain long tail keywords
>
> ➢ Explain the different keyword research tools
>
> ➢ List the limitations of keyword tools
>
> ➢ Determine a keyword's commercial intent

Keywords have a vital role to play in Search Engine Optimization (SEO). A Website can be optimized in relation to the right set of keywords, provided the appropriate set is chosen. These keywords are most favorable to achieve a higher ranking and must be relevant to the content. Once they are decided, the next step is to insert them at the right places.

By using the right set of keywords, advertisers can reap the benefits of boosted search engine traffic. The search for the right set of keywords is an ongoing process as well as a challenge due to the volatile Web environment.

3.1 Keyword Basics

Keywords reflect the thought of a Web searcher while he or she is searching for the intended product online. An SEO professional must select keywords that best describe the services or products of the Website.

A keyword can be a phrase or a single word. A phrase can be a long tail keyword, which is a combination of two to five words that the Web searcher is likely to specify in the search field of a search engine. In short, such a phrase helps in increasing the search result ranking of the Website. Single word keywords are problematic as they are not aimed only at potential visitors but can include many other audiences too.

3.1.1 Keyword Research

Keyword research forms the central focus of any SEO plan. It is a process that the search engine professionals perform to find the best set of keywords. It involves discovering the actual terms entered by users while using search engines. These terms are then evaluated to find similar or interchangeable keywords as well.

The keyword research process is anchored by keyword research tools. These tools function as a thesaurus and also have built-in suggestion for alternative words. Highly related and targeted keywords used on Web pages enhance the likelihood of receiving more visitors and consequently increase sales on a Website.

Following are some aspects that help an SEO consultant to choose the most informative and effective keywords:

> ➢ **Customer-Centric Keywords**: While searching for services or products, customers can help in obtaining the right keywords.

➢ **Product or Service Based Approach**: The keywords should be such that they themselves describe the services or products. Hence, an SEO consultant should understand the services or products being marketed.

➢ **Competitor Knowledge**: It is crucial to understand the strategies implemented by the competitors. This helps in implementing a better keyword strategy for obtaining a higher rank.

Repeating keywords for a Web page is considered spamming. As a result, keywords must be used once or twice and that too wisely. Avoid keywords, such as 'an', 'a', 'when', 'the', 'and', 'but', and 'or'. Also, most search engines are not case-sensitive, for example, Books and books are considered the same.
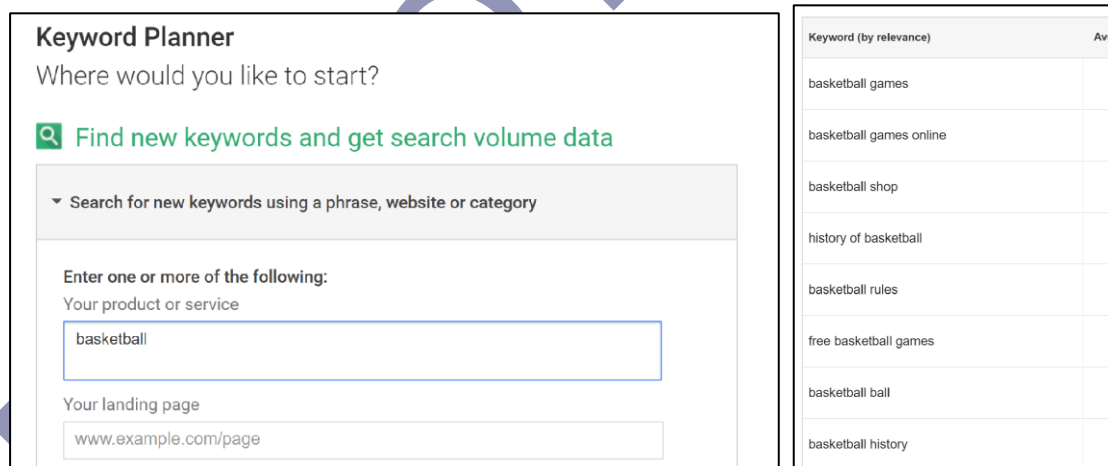
The right placement of keywords on a Web page helps search engines to analyze the Web page and go through it properly. Page titles, headings, meta tags, text images, and links are a few Web page elements where keywords must be placed. Figure 3.1 shows a common keyword research process.

Figure 3.1: Keyword Research Process

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

Most keyword research processes begin with a keyword research tool, such as the Google Keyword Planner (GKP). However, GKP is not recommended, as it is good at proposing closely related keywords and not at suggesting new keyword ideas. Figure 3.2 shows the results of specifying the word 'basketball' in GKP.

Figure 3.2: Google Keyword Planner Results

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

Figure 3.2 shows that GKP displays keywords that are closely linked to the specified keyword. It does not display keywords that are closely and indirectly linked to the product. These are mostly the profitable keywords in the market.

As most of the advertisers target the same keywords, niche topics are the best way to discover untapped keywords. Niche topics are a list of niches which are important to the users and are related to the product.

For example, someone looking to purchase basketball shoes may also search for:

➢ Basketball shorts

➢ How to get recruited by the college team

➢ Supplements for athletes

Each of these searches is a part of a unique but closely related niche topic. Niche segments may not be large enough to own a Website or a product. Most niche segments have only two to five keywords with enough commercial intent and search volume for optimizing pages.

Following are a few simple strategies to find a niche topic:

➢ **Buyer Personas**

Buyer personas are the easiest way to identify niche topics important to users. After identifying these topics, it is easy to find the most frequently used keywords. A research focusing on the buyer's personas should include the following:

- Age

- Gender

- Approximate income

- Things that they struggle with

- Hobbies and interests

- What they want to accomplish (personally and professionally)

One may have various buyer personas, which vary from one industry to another.

➢ **Forums**

Forums are similar to live focus groups, which are accessible all the time. The easiest way to find a forum is to use search strings in Google. After finding a few niche topics appropriate to a site, an SEO consultant must add them to the niche topics list.

➢ **Wikipedia**

Wikipedia is ideal for niche research. Here, one can find overviews on a topic curated by several industry experts and organized into different categories.

➢ **Reddit**

If the target audience is available on Reddit, then it is wise to follow them on it. This can reveal several niche topics easily.

Following are some of the phases keyword research is divided into, which helps in building a good list of keywords:

➢ Classify the keywords appropriate to the business.

➢ Add words to build explicit keyword phrases (adjectives, location, and so on).

➢ Understand the keywords used by the competitors for fresh ideas.

➢ Understand how viable are the keywords and keyword phrases used by the competitors by using the keyword research tool.

➢ Use the keyword research tools to get more ideas on keywords.

➢ Eliminate the generic keywords.

➢ Finalize the list with 10 to 50 keywords to be used for optimization.

Experts recommend body and long tail keywords instead of head keywords.

3.2 Long Tail Keywords

GKP provides the same set of keywords to any user. This is the reason why most keywords are competitive. It is recommended to use lesser-known research strategies to discover unused long tail keywords. One such strategy is to specify any keyword in Google's search box and then scroll to the **Searches Related to** section available at the bottom of the search results. This is where close variations of the main keyword are displayed. These are good keywords to aim at, as they are very long tail and have less competition than body or head keywords.

One can specify one of the keywords from **Searches Related to** section in Google's search field, and observe its **Searches Related to** results. Repeat this procedure till a final set of keywords, which the keyword planner does not display, is obtained.

It is important to note that as each long tail keyword may only get 100 to 1000 searches per month, several articles are required to generate a huge amount of traffic. Publishing large quantity of long, tail focused content puts one at risk of a Google Panda penalty. Hence, one should be careful about bringing out so many articles and achieve a balance.

3.3 Keyword Research Tools

Search engines offer their own keyword research tools that give statistical overview to Webmasters. For example, Google offers Keyword Planner, while Bing has the Bing keyword research tool. These types of tools help one to:

➢ Assess the competitiveness of the keywords one is interested in.

➢ Assess the quantity of traffic for those keywords.

➢ Understand keyword propositions to gain new ideas and similar phrases which can be used in the Website.

Additionally, one can also:

➢ Use keyword filters to customize the search.

➢ Choose the custom date range.

➢ Use negative keywords that will be excluded from the research.

➢ Add location or language in order to use the targeting feature. This feature helps one to target a specific language, country, or city.

Keyword research involves using tools available online. Some of these tools need to be paid for and some are free. A few of them have certain free features. However, to take advantage of their full capacity, it is recommended to invest in the premium package.

Some of the most useful paid tools are:

➢ **Moz Keyword Explorer**

Developed in May 2016, the Moz Keyword Explorer tool allows one to go through all of the phases of keyword research, beginning from discovering keyword ideas to filtering keywords and obtaining the metrics. The tool comes with a 30-day free trial and a lot of exclusive features, which are straightforward and easy to use.

To use the Moz Keyword Explorer, specify a seed keyword (foundation keyword for SEO), as illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Keyword Explorer

(Image Credit https://www.backlinko.com)

The tool displays helpful data about that keyword as illustrated in Figure 3.4.
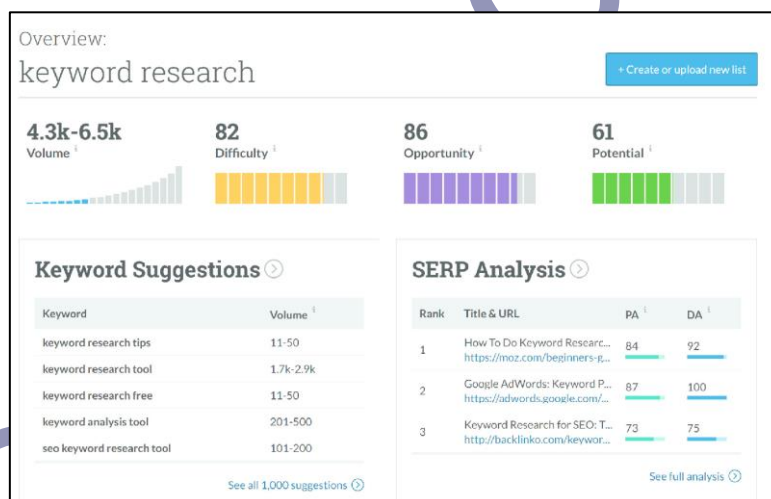
Figure 3.4: Keyword Explorer Results

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

The keyword suggestion of the tool helps one in obtaining different keywords.

➢ **Advanced Web Ranking Tools**

This tool comes with a 30-day free trial and payment plans start from $49 per month. However, it is worthy, as it blends the keyword tool with other useful features, such as SEO audit and reporting, rank tracking, and user management. The tool is useful for applying filters, identifying keywords, finding the competitors' best keywords, and refining the selection of keywords by priority.

➢ **Raven SEO Tools**

This tool enables research and reporting, link building, and combines several tools in one, including competitive and keyword research. Raven uses data from Moz, Google AdWords, Majestic, and OpenCalais to offer competitor intelligence and keyword insights. The premium membership begins at $99 per month. However, there is also a free 30-day trial.

➢ **Keyword Spy Tool**

This tool enables countering competition and viewing what is going on backstage in SEO. One can conduct research regarding the competitor's organic results, paid results, and the used affiliated keywords. This tool costs $89.95 per month, which is the starting price.

➢ **Wordtracker Tool**

This tool lets one know what the users are specifying in their searches when they are about to purchase something. Costs for this tool begins at $27 for the bronze, $65 for the silver, and $99 for the gold membership.

➢ **KeywordEye Tool**

This tool displays what the potential customers are searching on Google and the questions being specified. One can also get access to retail market data from YouTube keywords, Amazon, competitors' keywords, and their backlink profile. Trial is available for $1, while a monthly membership costs $44.

➢ **WordStream Free Keyword Tool**

Over trillion terms are stored in the database of WordStream Keyword tool. This tool aids in selecting the most profitable keyword and long tail keywords.

➢ **SEO Book Keyword Tool**

The SEO Book Keyword Tool provides cost estimates for Google AdWords, links to other vertical databases, daily search volumes, and a lot of other functions. It requires free registration, as only members who have logged in can perform keyword research and analysis.

➢ **Bing Keyword Research**

Bing's Keyword Research aids in discovering what users are searching for using the Bing search engine. This tool is available in Bing's Webmaster toolbox. It is necessary to sign in to access this tool.

After going through the paid and free keyword research tools, one can easily understand that keyword research is not just about inventiveness. It is also about having a good toolbox or arsenal ready for putting SEO creativity to practical use.

Let us understand in detail some of the useful tools which are available for free:

➢ **GKP**: This tool has an entire suite of features. It helps in creating hundreds of keyword combinations in just a few seconds, filtering low-volume searches, and recognizing a keyword's popularity. Following are the steps for using the GKP:

1. Sign-in to Google AdWords account.

2. On the toolbar, select **Tools --> Keyword Planner**.

3. Select either one of the following displayed in the **where would you like to start**?
   Sections:

   ● **Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category**: On selecting this option, a menu with all the relevant options is displayed. The keywords displayed in this tool are closely connected to the specified seed keyword. Refer to Figure 3.5.
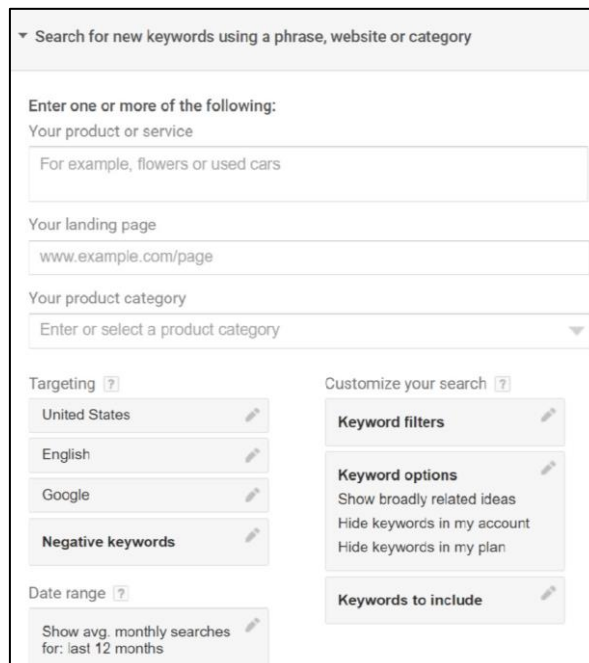

Figure 3.5: Options Displayed on Selecting Search for New Keywords Using a Phrase, Website or Category

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

One can specify either one or all of the details in the following fields:

   o **Your product or service**: This is where one should specify the seed keywords. Avoid specifying broad keywords. It is recommended to specify one to three keywords of slightly different niche markets.
   o **Your landing page**: This is mainly for AdWords users. However, one may find a few good keywords using the site's homepage or an article from the Website.
   o **Your product category**: This enables one to access Google's internal database of keywords for different industries.
   o After specifying the details in the fields, specify the **Targeting** options, which includes the country, language, search engine, and Negative keywords. One can customize the search through filters in the **Customize your search** area.

   ● **Get Search volume data and trends**: This option is helpful only if there is a long list of keywords and one wants to check the search volume. This tool is not helpful to generate new keyword ideas. Figure 3.6 illustrates the options displayed on selecting **Get search volume data and trends**.
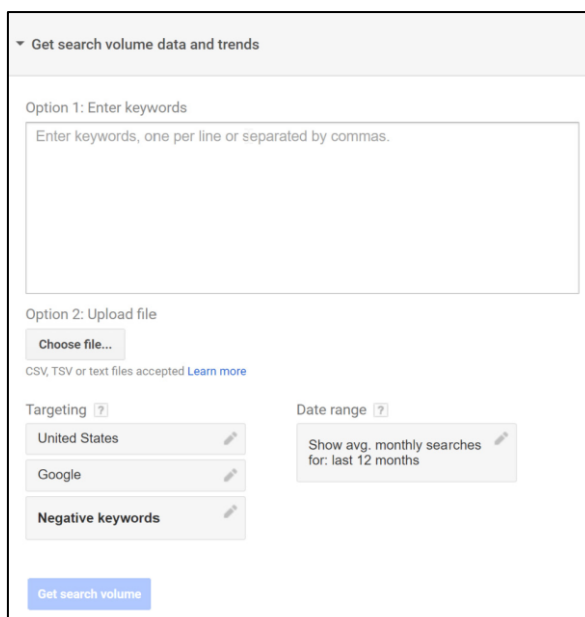
Figure 3.6: Options Displayed on Get Search Volume Data and Trends

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

In the **Enter keywords** field, either upload the list in a CSV file or include a list of keywords. Click the **Get search volume** button to view the number of users who search for the specified keywords.

● **Multiply keyword lists to get new keyword ideas**: This option collects groups of keywords and classifies them into several categories. It is helpful for e-commerce keyword research as it classifies almost every possible combination users may use to search for products and services. Figure 3.7 illustrates the options displayed on selecting **Multiple keyword lists to get new keyword ideas**.
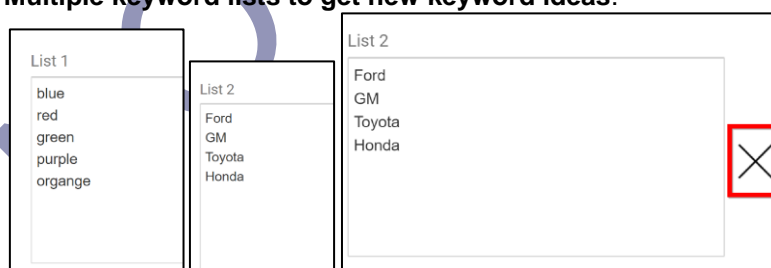
Figure 3.7: Options Displayed on Selecting Multiply Keyword Lists to get New Keyword Ideas

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

Specify a list of keywords in the **List 1** field and another list in the **List 2** field. One can add a third field by clicking the **X** button. Click **Get search volume** and a list of keywords is displayed as illustrated in Figure 3.8.
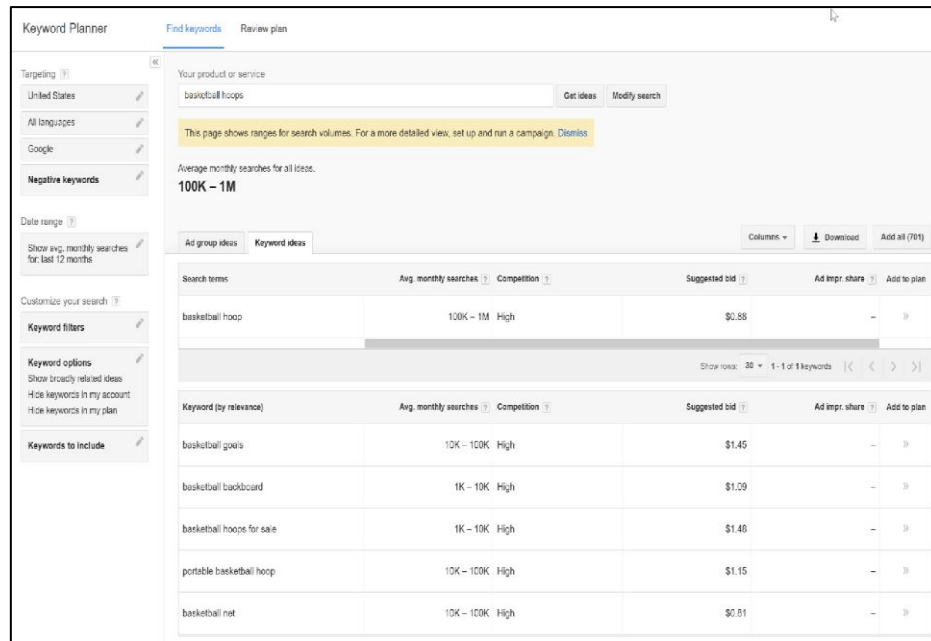
Figure 3.8: Keywords Results Page

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

Following information can be modified in the **Keyword Planner** area available in the keywords results page:

- **Keyword Planner**: These filters help to modify the results after the search has been executed.
- **Ad group ideas and Keyword ideas**: This helps to find the best keywords from the **Ad group ideas** tab.
- **Search Terms**: These are the exact keywords specified.
- **Keyword (by relevance)**: This is a list of keywords which Google considers most appropriate to the **Search Term** keyword.
- **Avg. Monthly Searches**: This is the estimate and not an accurate indicator of search volume.
- **Competition**: This reflects the number of advertisers bidding on that specific keyword.
- **Suggested bid**: One needs to suggest a higher bid to generate more traffic.

➢ **SEMrush**: SEMrush is an effective keyword research tool. It is available in two versions: free and paid. The tool is effective in indicating the size of competition for any specific keyword being used in Google. It does so with the help of metrics. SEMrush also offers similar or related terms for the keywords being analyzed. It works in a different manner as compared to other research tools.

Instead of specifying a seed keyword and providing a long list of keyword ideas, SEMrush displays the keywords for which the business competition is ranked. These are often outside-the-box keywords that are otherwise not found using any other tool.

To use the tool, just specify a competitor's domain name in the field at the top of the page. If SEO is being executed in a country outside the U.S. (for example, in Google.co.in), one can select to see the data related to that specific market. One needs to select a country from the menu, as displayed in Figure 3.9.
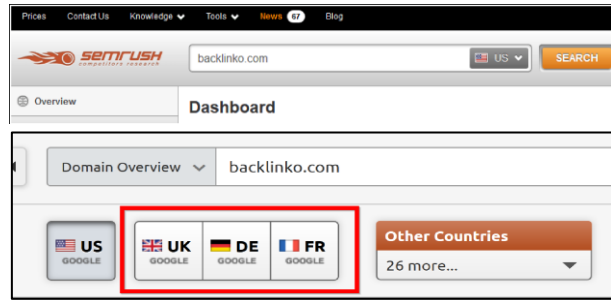
Figure 3.9: SEMrush Tool

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

Figure 3.10 illustrates the Organic Search section.
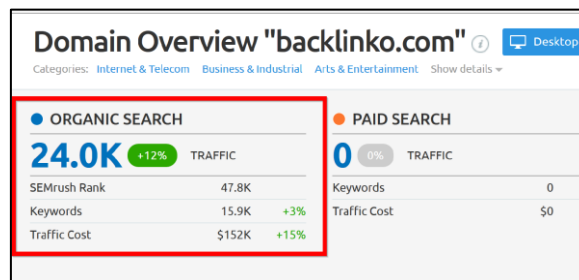
Figure 3.10: Organic Search Section

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

Following are the different terms available in the **Organic Search** section:
- **SEMrush Rank**: Shows the rank of the domain from the domain database (such as, Alexa). It is based on total organic traffic.
- **Organic Search**: Shows the estimated number of monthly organic visitors that come from Google.
- **Traffic Cost**: Indicates how valuable this traffic is based on AdWords Cost-Per-Click (CPC).

If huge volumes of organic search traffic is displayed with a relatively low traffic cost, one can understand that keywords being targeted cannot be converted easily. Figure 3.11 illustrates the five top keywords being ranked by the competitors and the site or page.
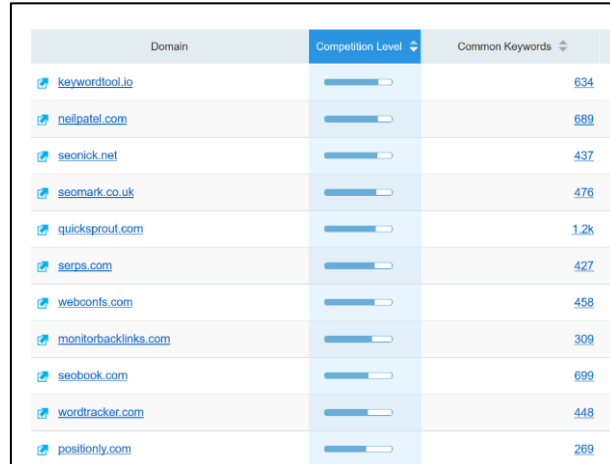

Figure 3.11: Top Five Keywords

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

Clicking **View full report** shows a detailed list. For more ideas, one can go back to the domain's overview. Clicking **Competitors** on the side bar displays the site's first page competition. On clicking one of those results, the keywords for which the competitors are ranking are displayed.

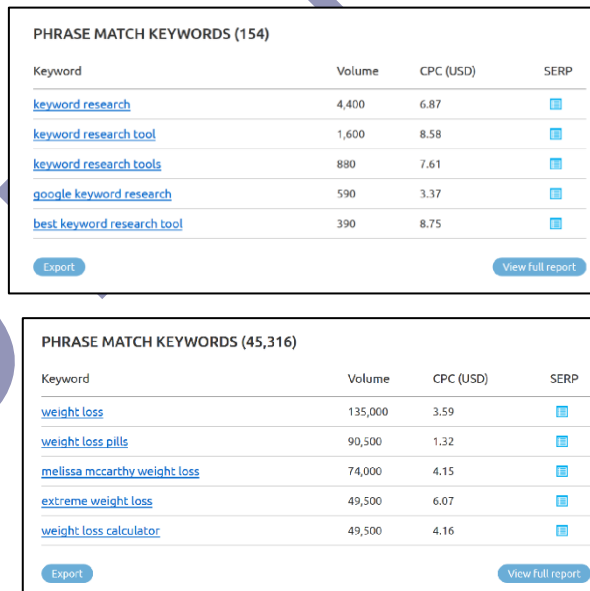One can also begin the SEMrush search with a keyword instead of a competitor's site, as displayed in Figure 3.12.

Figure 3.12: SEMrush Search

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

SEMrush also displays a phrase match report that consists of a list of long tail keywords. This is helpful for finding long tail variations of body and head keywords. For example, it is tough to rank for the keyword 'weight loss', as it is too competitive. However, it can be easier with long tail variations, as shown in Figure 3.13.

Figure 3.13: SEMrush Long Tail Variations

(Image Credit: https://www.backlinko.com)

3.4 Limitations of Keyword Tools

Keyword research tools can help a Webmaster or a site owner to comprehend what users are searching for using search engines. They do so by displaying information in an organized and

analytical way. However, these tools cannot aid in comprehending the value of the specified search word and its influence on traffic. Understanding the value of keywords is only possible through trial and error analysis.

One needs to start by brainstorming and constructing parameters out of simple questions. Some examples of these basic questions are as follows:

➢ How relevant is the keyword to the Webpage?

➢ As a searcher using the same keyword, can one be satisfied with what is displayed on the page?

➢ How much income is the keyword generating?

➢ Is the generated traffic translating into leads and consequently rendering financial gains?

After framing the basic questions, one should test a keyword in different search engines to see where does one stand with respect to competition and ranking. A keyword that brings in a good number of sponsored results and advertisements on the top of the results page is easy to convert.

One must then rely upon paid advertising using Google AdWords or Bing advertising and analyze how the traffic is, in terms of converting users and generating income. It is recommended to opt for 'exact match' option in Google AdWords and direct the traffic using those exact keywords to the most appropriate Webpage. Subsequently, it makes sense to follow the traffic for at least 300 clicks to keep track of the conversion rate. Finally, this gathered data can be used to build a rough sketch of the value of that keyword for the current online setup.

By looking at the number of users who have visited the Website and the number of users contributing to the business profit, it is easy to understand the value of each visitor in terms of money. If 200 users visited the Website, out of which four turned into a profit of $360, then each of those visitors is worth $1.8. This is a decent figure if one manages to rise to the top of the rankings to get better impressions, thus increasing the CTR over time.

3.5 Determining a Keyword's Commercial Intent

Advertisers usually do not spend enough time on the keyword's commercial intent, which is more important than its search volume. For example, let us assume that an advertiser receives over 60,000 unique visitors per month through organic search alone. However, the site generated only $400 as revenue. The site did not generate ample revenue because the advertiser focused only on the search volume and not on the commercial intent. In other words, this means that almost all traffic came only from informational keywords and users performing informational searches. These users are difficult to convert into paying customers. With some research, it is easy to find keywords used by purchasers and make the intended Webpage quickly accessible to them on the search results page.

Following are some of the high converting keywords for any business:

➢ **Buy Now Keywords**

These are keywords used just before making a purchase. Users who perform a search with buy now keywords are most likely to have a credit card in their hand. Following are some of the words that are a part of the buy now keywords set:

● Coupon

● Discount

● Buy

- Shipping

- Deal

  Some examples of buy now keywords are 'April discount', 'Buy shoes online', and 'T-shirts free shipping'. These keywords may not receive a good search volume, but their conversion rate is high.

➢ **Product Keywords**

These are keywords that focus on an explicit product, service, brand name, or category. These keywords convert well, however, not as well as the buy now keywords. Product keywords include the following:

- Best

- Review

- Cheap

- Specific brand name ('Adidas' or 'Sony')

- Specific product ('Samsung Galaxy' or 'Macbook Pro')

- Product category ('Wordpress hosting' or 'running shoes')

- Top 10

- Comparison

- Affordable

➢ **Informational Keywords**

Majority of keywords available online are informational keywords. Users who search using these keywords do not tend to convert easily. However, informational keywords cannot be ignored, as they are an integral part of the keywords that users use for searching online. Information keywords tend to include the following words:

- Ways to

- How to

- I need to

- Best way to

An ideal way to find informational keywords is to find keywords that have low competition and high search volume.

➢ **Tire Kicker Keywords**

These are keywords that are not likely to convert in the near future. Following are a few examples of tire kicker keywords:

- Torrent

- Free

- …for free

- Download

A keyword, such as 'watch movie online free' is a classic example of a tire kicker keyword. In such a scenario, it is clear that the user is not interested in making any purchases. On the other hand, keywords, such as 'Buy TV episodes' (buy now keyword), 'Cartoon DVDs'

(product keyword), or 'How to watch sitcom episodes' (informational keyword) relatively have good chances of conversion.

After finding a popular keyword with strong commercial intent, the next step is to understand the competition on Google's first page. If the page displays authoritative, big brand results, it is recommended to move to the next keyword in the list as it will not be easy to beat such competition.

On evaluating the keyword competition, one can easily find keywords that receive a good search volume with minimum competition. It is also possible to evaluate a keyword's competition in Google's organic search results.

Quick Test 3.1

1. Which of the following statements is false?
    a. Google Keyword Planner is good at suggesting closely related keywords
    b. GKP only displays keywords that are intimately tied to the keyword specified
    c. Niche Topics is a specific keyword not a broad topic
    d. All of these
2. Which of the following Keyword Research tools is available free of cost?
    a. Moz Keyword Explorer
    b. Wordtracker
    c. SEMrush
    d. Advanced Web Ranking

3.6 Summary

In this session, **Keyword Research**, you learned that:

- ➢ Keywords play a vital role in SEO.

- ➢ The search for better keywords is a continuous process.

- ➢ Phrases can be long tail keywords that combine two to five words to search for explicit information.

- ➢ Keyword research consists of finding the actual terms specified in queries by users on search engines, with the objective of discovering niche keywords which are not yet competitive.

- ➢ The Moz Keyword Research tool has a host of elite features as compared to other tools in the market.

- ➢ Repeating keywords in a Web page is considered spamming.

- ➢ The right placement of keywords in a Web page helps search engines observe them and understand what the Web page has to offer.

- ➢ The objective of the niche topic list is to map the various topics that the target customer searches for.

- ➢ Niche topics is the simplest way to find untapped keywords.

- ➢ A buyer personality is an easy way to classify niche topics that are important for potential customers.

- ➢ GKP has a host of features that help create hundreds of keyword combinations, filter low-volume searches, and recognize a keyword's popularity.

- ➢ A keyword should be tested on different search engines to understand its ranking and get an idea of how competitive it is.

3.7 Exercise

1. Which of the following statements about keywords is false?
   a. Keywords, such as 'a', 'an', 'the' must not be used on a Web page
   b. A Web page containing repeated keywords may be considered spam
   c. Most search engines are case sensitive
   d. Do not get involved in over usage of keywords

2. Which of the following statements is true?
   a. Long tail keywords get a lot of search volume individually
   b. Body keywords are four plus word phrases
   c. Head terms usually do not convert very well
   d. All of these

3. Which of the following statements is false?
   a. A buyer persona is a simple way to identify niche topics
   b. Niche markets are large enough to support their own Website or product
   c. Niche topics allow finding the best keywords in a specific industry easily
   d. All of these

4. Which of the following statements holds true for keyword research tools?
   a. They estimate amount of traffic for specific keywords
   b. They use keyword filters to customize the search
   c. They use location or language in order to use targeting feature
   d. All of these

5. Which of the following is not a keyword research tool?
   a. Moz Keyword Explorer
   b. Google Analytics
   c. Raven SEO Tools
   d. Google Keyword Planner

6. Which of the following tool supports negative keywords?
   a. SEMrush
   b. Bing Keyword Research
   c. Google AdWords
   d. All of these

7. Which of the following statements about highly converting keywords is false?
   a. People searching with buy now keywords may literally have their credit card in their hand
   b. People searching for product keywords tend to be a bit earlier in the buying cycle
   c. Informational keywords make up huge chunk of the keywords people search for
   d. Tire kicker keywords are searches that are very likely to convert now

Answers to Exercise

1. Most search engines are case sensitive
2. Head Terms usually do not convert very well
3. Niche Markets are large enough to support their own Website or product
4. All of these
5. Google Analytics
6. Google AdWords
7. Tire Kicker Keywords are searches that are very likely to convert now

Answers to Quick Test

Quick Test 3.1

1. Niche Topics is a specific keyword not a broad topic
2. SEMrush