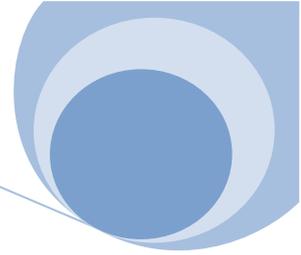


Keyword Research & Competition Analysis Mastery

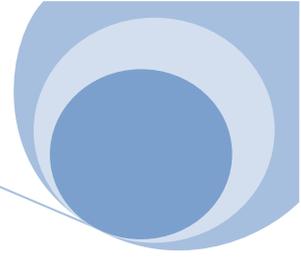
Tom Ewer
[Leaving Work Behind](#)



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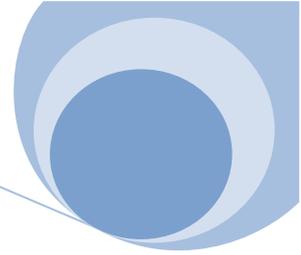
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Preface

Keyword research is something that all bloggers and online businesses should practice. It doesn't matter what your niche is – there is always something to gain from effective keyword research.

For instance, if you are trying to build an AdSense-based niche site portfolio, the benefits are obvious:

Effective keyword research > more traffic > more ad clicks > more income

If you are a freelance writer, the theory is similar:

Effective keyword research > more traffic > more leads > more clients > more income.

Throughout this guide, I will be assuming that you are using [Market Samurai](#) (not an affiliate link – [why?](#)). If you don't have this extremely useful piece of software yet, give it a try – there is a free trial available. In my humble opinion, it is more than worth the purchase cost. I have no ulterior motive in saying that, as I do not stand to profit from you buying it.

If you do not want to use Market Samurai, you will still be able to follow this guide, but you will have to do a lot more manual (as opposed to automated) work. You do not *need* Market Samurai in order to carry out effective keyword research – but it does make life a whole lot easier.

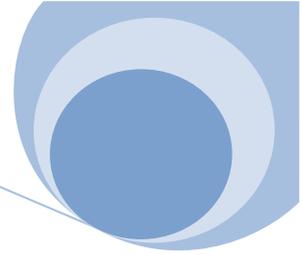
If you want to find out more about some of the best free keyword tools, check out an article I did recently over at [WPMU: The 6 Best Keyword Tools For Your WordPress Blog](#).

What I am about to present to you is a mixture of what I consider to be the 'fundamentals' of keyword research, in addition to my own opinions and methods, which you may or may not agree with. I want to make that absolutely clear, as it is not my intention to present the following as the "rules" of keyword research – mainly because widely-agreed "rules" do not exist.

If at any point you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. You have three options: Twitter ([@tomewer](#)), my [Facebook page](#), or email (tom@leavingworkbehind.com).

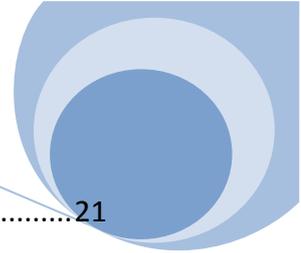
I hope this guide is of use to you – enjoy!





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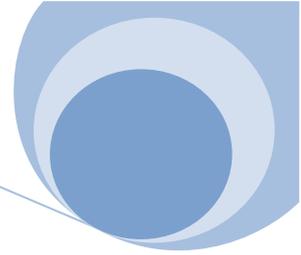
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Step 1 - Choose A Seed Keyword

The seed keyword that you choose will depend entirely upon what you are trying to achieve.

For the purposes of this guide, I am going to assume that you are in one of two camps:

1. You have no idea (yet) of what keyword you intend to target (I call this “Blind Keyword Research”).
2. You already have a good idea of the niche/topic you intend to target (I call this “Sighted Keyword Research”)

As you might expect, your approach to choosing a seed keyword will vary depending upon which camp you are in. However, there is one key fundamental that applies across both camps: do not target one-word keywords. They’re just too hot. If you show me a one-word keyword that you have ranked in the top 10 of Google for (without spending a considerable amount of money or using a very well established website), I will give you a shiny penny.

There is also another very good reason to not consciously target one-word keywords – they are too vague. Even if you *do* manage to rank for a one-word keyword, you may find that the vast majority of visitors aren’t necessarily that interested in what you have to offer.

For instance, say that you run a blog dedicated to antique cars, and you somehow manage to rank for the keyword “cars”. You would receive an enormous level of traffic, but the percentage of people who would actually stick around would be extremely small, as only a tiny percentage of searchers would actually be interested in antique cars. You would be far better off expending a lot less energy in ranking for “antique cars”, which would give you targeted traffic.

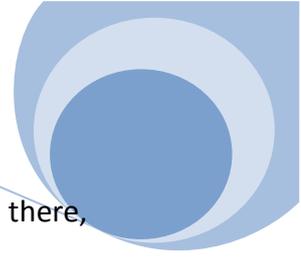
Beyond that one point, it’s all fair game. So let’s take a look at these two different camps:

Blind Keyword Research

You probably want to start generating income from niche/authority sites, but you do not know where to start. You have an idea in your head that you want to target relatively low-competition, high-traffic keywords, but your plan stops there. How do you go about making up keywords?

At this stage of keyword research, the process can be very organic. For instance, when I was researching for my first niche site, [Modeling For Kids](#), I started off with the seed keyword





“teacher training”. Don’t ask me what steps I took to get to “modeling for kids” from there, because I can’t remember!

As you will learn shortly, Market Samurai will take your seed keyword, process it, and spit out up to 800 related keywords for your consideration. In this way, you can go about finding many varied keywords without too much imagination. The best piece of advice I can give you is that you should never stop following paths. As long as Market Samurai is producing sensible-sounding keywords, keep drilling down to see if you can find something of worth. Do not be afraid to go off on tangents and explore keywords that hadn’t even crossed your mind.

Beyond that, there are a few simple strategies for seed keyword inspiration. The following is inspired in part by Pat Flynn’s article, [Finding A Profitable Niche: My Process Revealed](#).

Consider the following:

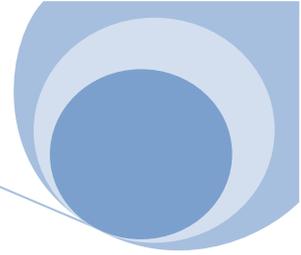
1. The wants and needs of yourself and others. For instance, say I want a cheap razor. Your seed keyword could be “cheap razors”.
2. Things that people have passion for. For instance, I love golf. I would love to know how to be a better putter. So I might start with the seed keyword, “putting tips”.
3. Things that people fear. There are plenty of middle-aged (and younger) men out there who fear going bald. So your seed keyword might be “how to stop going bald”.
4. Trends. If you have your fingers on the pulse of what is “trending”, you can potentially exploit keywords that are not yet too competitive. There are two great resources that expose the latest and hottest trends: [Google Trends](#), and [Twitter Hashtags](#).

You can cover an awful lot of ground with just these three strategies. The key is to focus on *emotions*. If you can target a niche that nails an emotional need in a healthy proportion of people, you will likely have an attractive keyword in your hands.

Sighted Keyword Research

Let’s say you have a blog about parrots, and you want to start up a section on training. The seed keyword selection process is pretty darn straightforward – “parrot training” would be the most obvious keyword to start with!





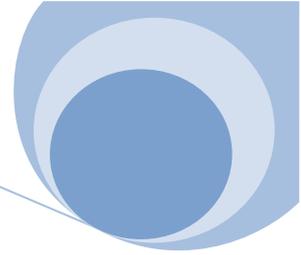
However, do take time to consider alternative seed keywords. For instance, “parrot training” may well be too competitive a term for you. You may therefore wish to start the new section of your blog by targeting a more specific keyword, like say “cockatiel training”. In this way, you can target a far less competitive keyword whilst also starting to build up momentum with which to target “parrot training” at a later date.

You may have a broad category in mind when considering your seed keyword, but don't be afraid to break it down. If you cannot rank for a competitive keyword immediately, you can concentrate on ranking for less-competitive related keywords, which will give you the power to target the broader keywords in time.

Moving On

The seed keyword is just the beginning. You don't need to get too wrapped up in selecting the *perfect* keyword. The chances of you actually proceeding with your seed keyword are pretty low. It is called a 'seed' keyword for a reason.

Before you proceed with your seed keyword, please make sure that you are not making any of the [common keyword mistakes](#) I have previously written about. **Please do not skip this step!**



Step 2 - Generate Additional Keywords

With your seed keyword decided upon, you now want to generate a list of related keywords. Before you go any further, sign up for a Google AdWords account and link it to Market Samurai.

Keyword Sources:

Google Keyword Tool - Account:

In the keyword research module, make sure that you tick the "Google Keyword Tool" checkbox and select "Include Additional" from the dropdown box.

This is extremely important. It will give you a list of up to 800 related keywords, rather than 100. When it comes to keyword research, 8 times as much data is very handy!

Once you have your Google AdWords linked to Market Samurai, click "Generate Keywords" and fetch yourself a cup of tea, as the process can take quite some time.

There are a few options in the first Keyword Research screen that you can use to remove unwanted keywords:

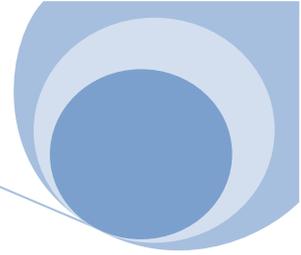
Phrase Length:

min: word(s)
max: word(s)

You can filter out keywords of certain lengths with the above drop down boxes. You may wish to set the minimum phrase length to 2, as the chances of you finding a viable 1 word keyword are minute.

This button will add all possible permutations of your seed keyword. So if you seed keyword was "cheap tennis shoes", by clicking this button you would add the following additional keywords for analysis:

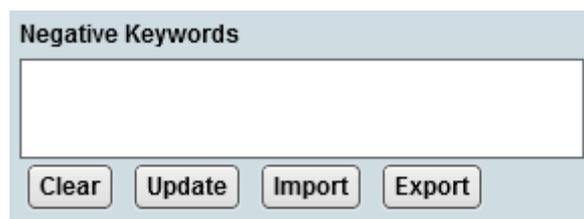
- "cheap shoes tennis"
- "tennis cheap shoes"
- "tennis shoes cheap"
- "shoes tennis cheap"
- "shoes cheap tennis"



You can put additional seed keywords in the above box (for instance, you might choose to include “inexpensive tennis shoes” alongside “cheap tennis shoes”).



If you add a word to this box, any generated keywords that **do not** include the word will be filtered out.

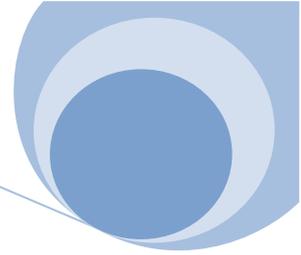


As you might expect, if you add a word to *this* box, any generated keywords that **do** include the word will be filtered out.

I do not tend to use the above boxes that often, but they can be useful at times. For instance, you may be generating keywords for a seed keyword that can have two meanings. Say you generate keywords for “crane” as part of your blog on construction. You might put the word “bird” into the Negative Keywords box in order to filter out any irrelevant keywords (because cranes are of course a species of bird).

You can also manually remove any keyword from your list by clicking the cross to the right of it. This adds the whole keyword to the Negative Keywords box. As you might expect, clicking on the tick to the right of a keyword will add it to the Positive Keywords box.

Once you have generated your additional keywords and removed any obviously unwanted ones, you are ready to move on!



Step 3 - Filter Your Keywords

Once Market Samurai has generated your list of keywords, you can proceed to keyword analysis. Before you take a closer look at the keywords, there are three things that we need to do:

1. Set the Match Type
2. Set the Period
3. Select and set fields/filters

Setting The Match Type

Match Type:

This is a very important step. In my opinion, you should always base your keyword research on Exact Match data. For a full explanation of the different match types, check out [this article](#).

Setting The Period

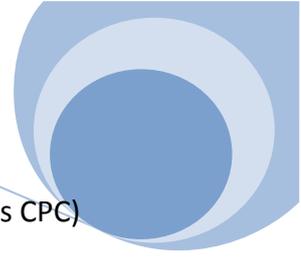
Period:

This is entirely up to you. I personally like to base my research on daily searches, but if you would like to go ahead on a weekly or monthly basis, it makes no real difference.

Selecting And Setting Fields/Filters

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Organic: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Total Searches + <input type="checkbox"/> SEO Traffic (SEOT) + <input type="checkbox"/> Phrase-to-Broad (PBR) + <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trends	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adwords: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adwords Traffic (AWT) + <input type="checkbox"/> Adwords CTR (AWCTR) + <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AdWords CPC (AWCPC) +	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Competition: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SEO Comp (SEOC) + <input type="checkbox"/> Title Comp (SEOTC) + <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> URL Comp (SEOUC) + <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Title/Comp (SEOTCR) + <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adwords Comp (AWC) +	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerciality: <input type="checkbox"/> Adwords Value (AWV) + <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SEO Value (SEOV) +
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Market Samurai can provide you with an enormous amount of data, a lot of which I consider useless for the purposes of keyword research for organic search competition analysis. But it is up to you to decide what you might find useful, so let's go through each item in turn. In case you do not have the time or inclination to read up on every single one, I have asterisked (*) what I consider to be the most important items.



In case you do not know, all search engine specific data (e.g. Total Searches, Adwords CPC) are all sourced from Google. When we carry out keyword research with Market Samurai, we are essentially acting like Bing and Yahoo! do not exist.

Just one more thing before we proceed - if you have read any Market Samurai tutorials in the past, you will no doubt have been advised of "best practice" filter numbers (for example, "total searches should be set to 2,000 per month"). The fact is, the "correct" numbers to put into your filters can alter drastically based upon what you are trying to achieve. So take advised filter presets with a hefty pinch of salt, and rely more upon your own intuition and experience over time. Sorry if this comes as a disappointment, but I am not going to give you any numbers when it comes to filters. I *will* however provide you with a lot of guidance, which will lead you to formulate your own ideas as to what is acceptable to you, and what isn't.

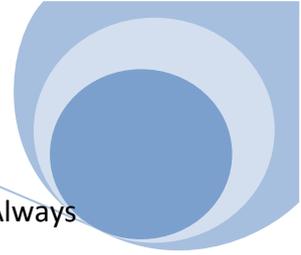
Total Searches *

Total Searches displays the estimated number of searches per day, week or month (depending on which option you select), for the keyword in question. Please note - number of searches does not equate to number of visitors! The percentage of people who click through to your site can be anywhere from 0% - 40% of Total Searches, depending on numerous factors.

I'm not going to get into the specifics of organic search results conversion rates, because that could easily fill a whole chapter in its own right. But we *will* discuss some conservative estimates shortly.

The data presented by Total Searches is based upon average searches over the last 12 months. It can be misleading if your chosen keyword is seasonal. For instance, if your chosen keyword is "Christmas tree" and it is June, the actual number of searches will be much lower than as shown in Total Searches. But when December comes around, the actual number of searches will be far higher. If you are wary of the potential "seasonality" of your keyword, check out Trends below.

So what filter should you set for Total Searches? It depends entirely upon what you are trying to achieve. For instance, if you are writing a daily article for your blog, you may be perfectly happy to target a keyword that gets just 50 searches a day. But if you are trying to



find a primary keyword for an authority site, you might set your filter much higher. Always consider the context of your search when setting a filter for Total Searches.

SEO Traffic (SEOT)

Useless to us. SEOT is extrapolated from Total Searches. It is a very simple and completely arbitrary formula:

$$SEOT = Total\ Searches \times .42$$

SEOT can be extremely misleading. I believe Market Samurai have used data that is 5 years old (and based upon the usage of a now defunct search engine) to extrapolate that the number one spot in Google will get you 42% of Total Searches. Or to put it another way, they assume that 42% of people who search for a term will click on the 1st result. In reality, this number can vary wildly. In my experience, the click through rate for top spot in Google can be anywhere from 5% to 30%, depending upon a huge number of factors.

Use Total Searches as your start point in calculating estimated traffic. Please ignore SEOT. I assume an organic search conversion rate of 20% to 30% for my keywords if I expect to rank 1st in Google. Beyond the 3rd spot, the level of traffic I expect to receive as a percentage of Total Searches drops off considerably (to around 2% to 5%). I would much rather be pleasantly surprised by a higher conversion rate, than find that my income projections are way off due to a lower conversion rate.

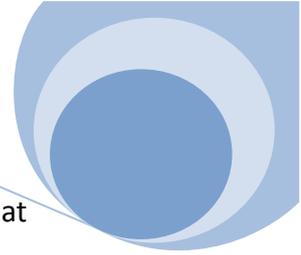
Phrase-to-Broad Match Rate (PBR)

This took me a long time to get my head around. Moreover, I consider it a completely useless piece of information. Why? Because PBR relates to a correlation between Broad Match and Phrase Match numbers, and I do not use either.

For those who want to know, PBR is the percentage of Phrase Match searches compared to Broad Match searches. So, if the Broad Match number for a given keyword is 1,000, and the Phrase Match number is 500, the resulting PBR would be 50%. With this metric, Market Samurai is attempting to measure the relevance of Phrase Match keywords against Broad Match keywords. That is all very well and good if you factor Phrase and Broad Match numbers into your projections, but I do not. I will take the bird in the hand (Exact Match numbers) against the bird in the bush (Phrase/Broad Match numbers) every time.

Trends *





This will display data on trends (funnily enough). So if a keyword is far more popular at certain times of the year, or "seasonal", Trends will reveal this. You can't set a filter for Trends, but you should use it as a point of reference to make sure that you are not unwittingly picking a seasonal keyword.

Trends returns some very odd (and almost definitely erroneous) data at times, so do take it with a pinch of salt.

AdWords Traffic (AWT)

This is an estimate of the number of clicks (daily) that someone advertising on Google might expect to receive. It is completely useless to us (and as with SEOT, probably inaccurate).

AdWords Click Through Rate (AWCTR)

Another estimate - this time of the percentage of Total Searches that will click through to the number 1 advertiser in Google. Useless.

AdWords Cost Per Click (AWCPC) *

This is a very handy piece of data for anyone looking to establish a niche/authority site, and can also be useful for anyone as part of a larger investigation into the value of a keyword. As Market Samurai puts it, AWCPC is "an indication of what you might expect to pay to be the #1 ranked advertiser for a particular keyword in Google".

If you put AdSense on your site, you will receive a cut of the AWCPC amount for every click, so that obviously makes it very relevant to you. Higher AWCPC = higher commission to you.

It is important to note that AWCPC should not be the only piece of data you reference to decide upon the value of a keyword, even if you are setting up a niche or authority site.

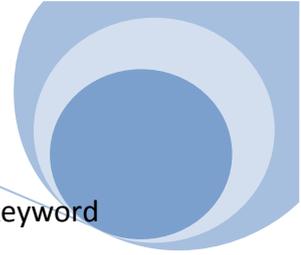
Please also refer to AWC below at a bare minimum.

Setting a filter for AWCPC is a toughie, as it does not alone determine the value of a given keyword. It is however a good indicator – if a keyword has an extremely low AWCPC, you can be pretty sure that there isn't much value in the keyword.

Generally speaking, I would say to set your AWCPC filter relatively low. However, if you are researching keywords specifically for an AdSense site, you will want to be quite aggressive.

SEO Competition (SEOC) *

This is right up there with Total Searches and SEOT as the most misunderstood fields.



SEOC is the total number of global pages that have been indexed by Google for the keyword in question. It is an *indication* of how competitive a keyword is, but is not the be all and end all when it comes to assessing the competitiveness of a keyword.

In my opinion, you should err on the side of generosity when setting a filter for SEOC. A high number of sites ranking for a given keyword does not necessarily mean that the top 10 will be too competitive (although it does make it more likely). When it comes to *directly* assessing the competitiveness of a keyword, SEOC is completely useless – the only important factor is how competitive the top 10 spots are.

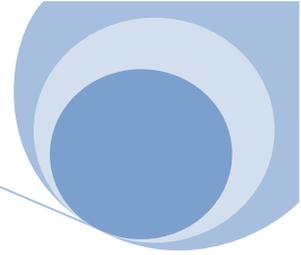
As with Total Searches, the filter you set for SEOC will depend entirely upon what you are trying to achieve. For instance, if you are researching a primary keyword for an authority site, you will be able to stomach much a much higher SEOC than if you are researching a keyword for an article. The most important thing to remember is that SEOC is not the ultimate decider of the competitiveness of a keyword. With that in mind, I tend to be quite generous with my SEOC filter.

Title Competition (SEOTC), URL Competition (SEOUC) & Title/Comp (SEOTCR)

The first two fields show you the number of pages in Google's index that include the keyword in (a) their title (SEOTC) and (b) their URL (SEOUC). SEOTCR is the percentage of pages indexed by Google for the keyword in question that include said keyword in their title. These three fields aren't particularly useful, as they take **all** of the pages in Google's index (as opposed to just the top 10) into account, which can be misleading. For instance, you might spot a keyword with a really low SEOTCR (say 12%), whilst the SEOTCR of the top 10 is actually 100%. In that way, a keyword can seem ripe for the picking in terms of competitiveness, when in reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

AdWords Competition (AWC) *

This is another handy piece of data for judging the commerciality of a keyword. AWC shows you how many companies are bidding for AdWords spots for the keyword in question. More bidders means a more valuable keyword. If AWC is low, then even a relatively high AWCPK might not be that impressive. Only one or two advertisers bidding for a keyword is an indicator that the market isn't that competitive.



Again, as with SEOUC and SEOTCR, I don't set a filter for AWC.

AdWords Value (AWV)

This simply estimates the cost to an AdWords advertiser, and is of no use to us.

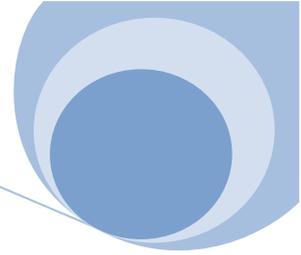
SEO Value (SEOV) *

SEOV is an estimate of how much an advertiser on Google would have to pay out if the total number of SEOT searches clicked through. If that doesn't make sense, the formula is as follows:

$$SEOV = SEOT \times AWCP$$

For our purposes, it is a horrendous calculation that should be completely disregarded in terms of projecting income. It *is* however useful as a comparable. What I mean by this is, it gives us a rough idea of how valuable a keyword is compared to another. Whilst the *number* should be disregarded, you can sort a list of keywords by this field to get a rough idea of the order of value.

Because the actual numbers returned by SEOV do not actually represent anything useful for me in reality, I do not set a filter.



Step 4 - Shortlisting

You should now have all of your filters set. Deselect any fields that you do not want to see - this will avoid confusion and reduce the time it takes Market Samurai to download all the relevant data. Go ahead and click "Analyze Keywords".

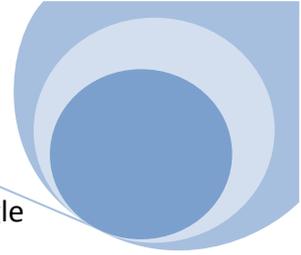
You will now have lots of lovely data to analyze. Over time, you may develop your own methods for analyzing the remaining keywords. The following method is the most efficient I have designed for my purposes.

First of all, I sort the keywords by SEOC (lowest number first). Whilst no one field determines the worth of a keyword, I like to start with the least competitive keywords first and work my way up. With that in mind, SEOC is the best broad measure of the competitiveness of a keyword, and as such, is a good starting point.

What you want to do now is pick out keywords that are of interest to you for shortlisting.

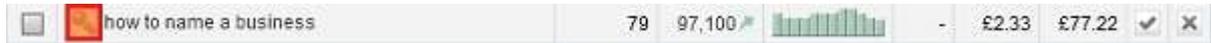
What are you looking for? Well, your filter will have done a lot of the work for you. Now it is a case of running some quick manual checks to narrow your list down further. I tend to go through each field in turn and consider the following:

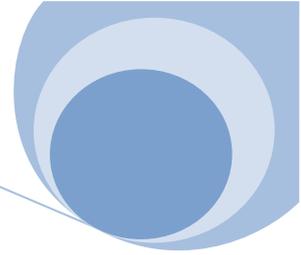
- What is the intent of the searcher?
- Searches - obviously, the higher the number of searches, the better, although your filter should be set as such that all keywords have an acceptable number of searches.
- SEOC - the less pages that are competing for the keyword, the better. However, as above, your filter should be set as such that all keywords have an acceptable SEOC number.
- Trends - does anything unusual stand out?
- AWC - if I am interested in the commerciality of a keyword, the higher the number here, the better. If AWC is low, that will lesson my valuation of the keyword in terms of Google AdSense.
- AWCP - a high value is often good. This field is considered in partnership with AWC to assess the value of the keyword in terms of Google AdSense (and in a broader sense of intrinsic value, to an extent).
- SEOV - this is only useful as a method of sorting the keywords. If I am specifically building a website for AdSense revenue, I will sort my keywords by this field, as SEOV



is the best broad method of sorting keywords by their value in terms of Google AdSense.

When you are happy with a keyword, you need to hit the little key icon next to it. This will open the keyword up in a new tab.





Step 5 - Competition Analysis

This is, without a doubt, the most important part of keyword research.

As some of you may know, I currently work in my father's family business, where I head up the management and development of a commercial property portfolio. My father gave me a very sage piece of advice when I was first starting out, going back 5 years:

You make your money when you buy a property, not when you sell it.

This may not make a great deal of sense, but the point is, the easiest way to make money is to buy cheap. If you buy cheap, you can sell at market value and still make money. If you buy at market value (or above), you are going to struggle to make good money.

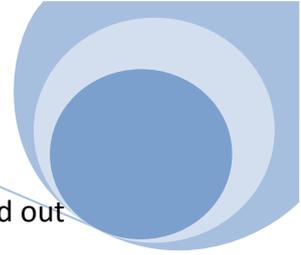
The same principle applies to keyword research. Cheap properties are represented by keywords with a favorable level of competitiveness. The benefit may be *realized* when you hit the first page of Google, but it is *determined* when you first target the keyword. Choosing keywords with acceptable or favorable levels of competitiveness is integral to an effective keyword research strategy.

So how do you effectively analyze the competitiveness of a keyword? Well, it isn't easy, that's for sure. And as per usual, I cannot simply give you a formula and set you on your way. What *you* consider an acceptable level of competition might be considered impossible by the next person. It relies entirely upon the resources available to you in terms of SEO.

Fortunately, there is plenty of advice I *can* give you to get you started with competition analysis. But the best advice you will get will be internal. Experience alone gives you the edge.

Keyword competition analysis is carried out on a singular basis - i.e. you can't "batch analyze" keywords. So go ahead and select the tab for the keyword that you want to analyze, then click on one of the SEO Competition button.





You should now be presented with a blank screen (unless you have previously carried out competition analysis for the keyword you have selected) and a number of check boxes at the top. Make sure that they are all checked.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Off Page	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On Page
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Domain Age (DA)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Page Backlinks (BLP)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PageRank (PR)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Domain Backlinks (BLD)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Google Index Count (IC)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Page .edu/.gov Backlinks (BLEG)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referring Domains - Domains (RDD)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DMOZ Directory (DMZ)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referring Domains - Page (RDP)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yahoo Directory (YAH)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Keyword in Title? (Title)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Keyword in URL? (URL)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Keyword in Description? (Desc)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Keyword in Header Tag? (Head)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Google Cache Age (CA)

Go ahead and click "Generate Results". Market Samurai will now fetch all of the requested information and download it into a table that represents the top 10 web pages in Google. Remember - if you're not in the top 10, you may as well not be ranking at all, as the traffic you can expect to generate will be absolutely minimal. That's why Market Samurai only shows you the top 10 results in the SEO Competition module.

Much like step 3, the information available to you is of varying use. It is very important to consider all of the data collectively. You might look at one specific field and feel bullish (or bearish), but you must always consider that field within the context of all of the available data.

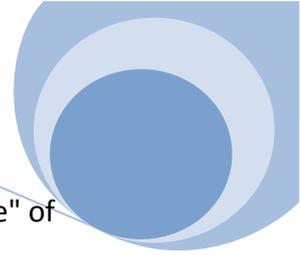
Let's take a look at each piece of data in turn. I have not asterisked any this time, as I feel that every field has a part to play in competition analysis.

Domain Age (DA)

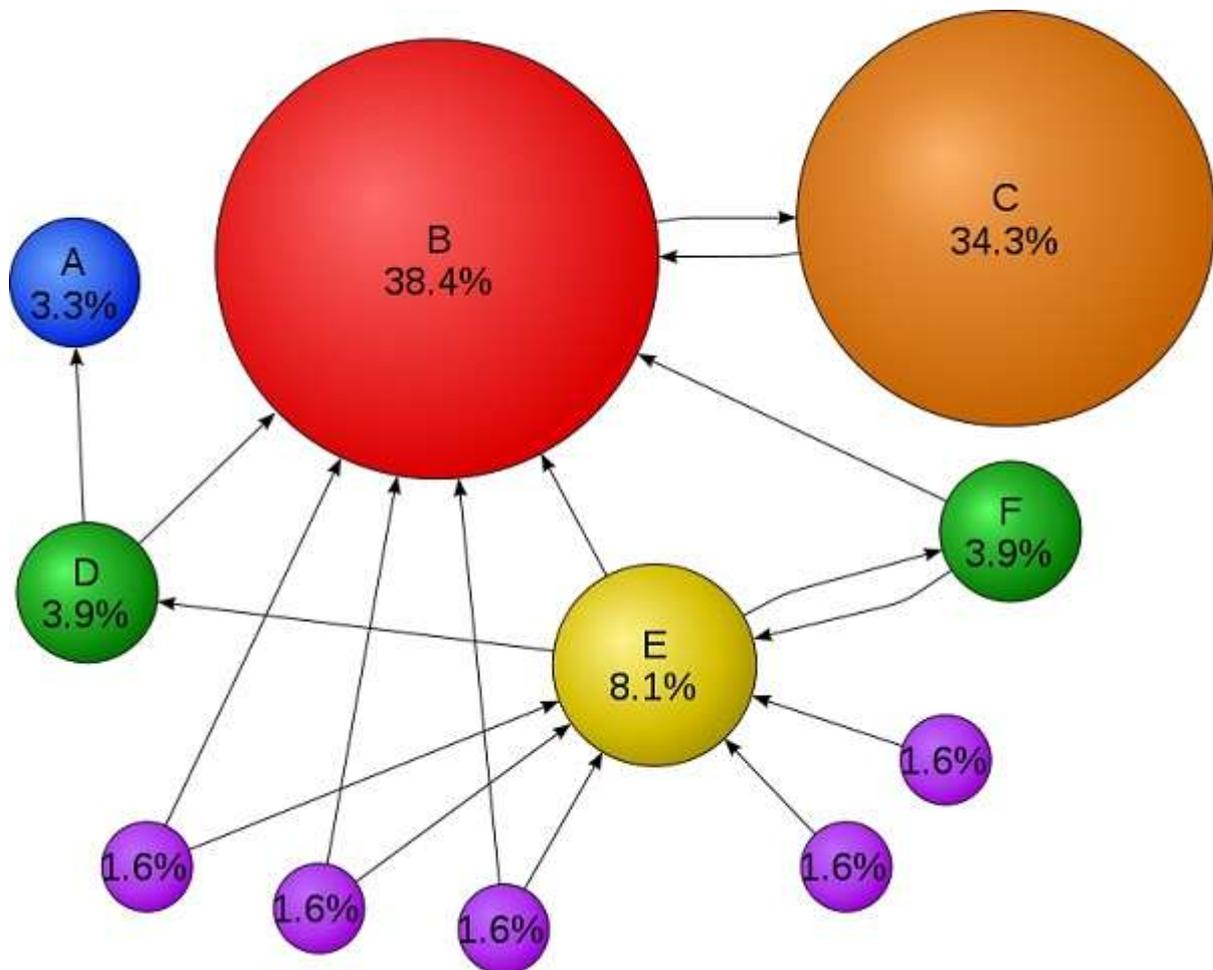
As you would expect, this will display the age of the domain on which the page is hosted. Google likes aged domains. They like aged domains that have aged "site structures" even more. What I mean by this is that if you have site that is say 5 years old, but the current makeup of the site was only established a week ago, Google wouldn't look upon it as favorably as a site that has been in existence (both in terms of domain age and site structure) for 5 years.

PageRank (PR)

It is not the intention of this article to go into the intricacies of Page Rank, but a brief introduction is necessary in order for you to judge its importance and relevance to keyword competition analysis.

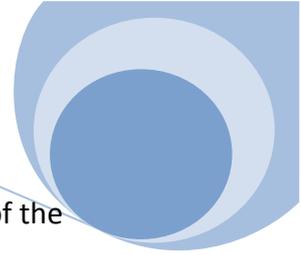


Page Rank is an algorithm that Google has used over the years to measure the "value" of web pages. In a nutshell (and please understand that this is a very basic explanation), Page Rank is determined by the number and quality of external links that point to the web page in question. This is best explained with a diagram:



Each circle represents a web page, and the percentages represent the "authority" of each page (i.e. how much Google likes it).

- The purple circles have barely any authority, as no pages link to them (they only link externally to other pages).
- A has slightly more authority than the purple circles, because it is linked to by D.
- D and F have the same level of authority, as they are both linked to by one page (E). Their authority is slightly higher than A's because they are linked to by a page that has a higher authority than the page that links to A (D).



- E has considerably more authority than D and F because it is linked to by all of the purple pages **and** F.
- B has the greatest authority because it is linked to (either directly or indirectly) by all of the pages.
- Although C is only linked to by one page (C), that link is of great value because it comes from a high authority page. Therefore, it also has high authority.

Page Rank was once a huge factor in determining a web page's placement in Google, but it has decreased as an influence over the years. Not only that, but Page Rank is "officially" (i.e. visibly) updated infrequently. At any given point, it is entirely feasible that you are not looking at the "true" Page Rank of a website. Google has made a concerted effort to move away from Page Rank as the key to search engine rankings in an effort to promote what they see as more important ranking strategies (quality, relevant content, and so on). Having said that, many of the data points that determine Page Rank (such as backlinks, discussed shortly) are still hugely important to search engine rankings.

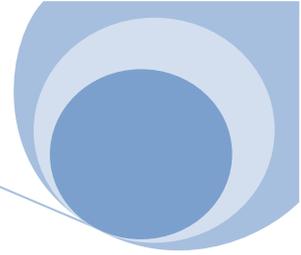
For the purposes of competition analysis, you should note Page Rank, but not be unduly led by it. The fact is, if a site has a very high Page Rank, it is likely that other factors will also be high, thus discouraging you without having to refer to Page Rank alone.

Google Index Count (IC)

This is the number of pages on the domain in question that Google has indexed (but not necessarily the number of actual pages on the website). If a site has a high IC, you should consider whether the rest of the pages indexed by Google are likely to be relevant to the keyword in question. If not, the high index count is far less intimidating.

For instance (and this is hypothetical, so do not be led by the keyword I use), say you have a small authority site centering on recycling, and you are researching the keyword "home recycling". The top result has a high index count, which is initially concerning. However, you then notice that it is an article on home recycling from a local newspaper. The rest of the site isn't at all relevant to recycling. Your initial concern is dampened.

On the flip side, if the top result has a high index count and was say part of the largest recycling website in the world, you would have ample reason for concern (and not only in terms of IC).



Referring Domains - Page (RDP) & Page Backlinks (BLP)

We all know what links are - a "path" from one web page to another. You've also no doubt heard of backlinks, or *incoming* links (i.e. links that point towards a web page, rather than lead away from it). If I link to [Google](#), that is considered an external link from my perspective. From Google's perspective, that is a backlink in their favor.

It is not the purpose of this book to discuss the intricacies of backlinking and SEO, but you do need to have at least a basic understanding of SEO strategy in order to analyze the competitiveness of web pages.

Backlinks have a big impact on the ranking of any given web page. There are three main questions to bear in mind when analyzing the impact of backlinks on the authority of a webpage:

1. Are there a lot of backlinks?
2. Are they *quality* backlinks (i.e. from high authority/high PR pages)?
3. Are they from lots of different domains, or just a few?

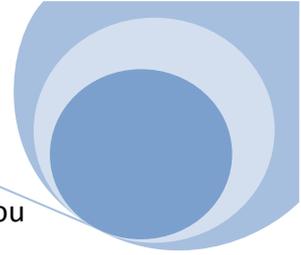
This is where RDD, RDP, BLP, and BLD come in. You will want to refer to all four of these fields in your competition analysis.

Start with RDP. This shows the number of *domains* that are linking to the web page listed in Google's Search Engine Results Page (SERP). If this number is too high, there is no point in analyzing the other fields.

If you can accept the RDP number, then you should next take a look at BLP. This shows the number of *backlinks* pointing to the web page listed in Google's SERP. Although you may not immediately notice why, this is different to RDP – and it is a key difference. Let's take a look at two different scenarios to highlight that difference and demonstrate the impact it can have on your consideration of the authority of a webpage.

Scenario 1

You are looking at page which has 10 RDP and 1,000 BLP. This initially might seem rather intimidating, as there are 1,000 backlinks pointing to the page. If you are setting up a niche site, or are just new to SEO and don't want to tax yourself with too high a number of backlinks, 1,000 may seem like too much to handle. However, there are only 10 referring domains. This means that all of those 1,000 backlinks are only coming from 10 domains.



Google highly discounts the value of multiple links coming from the same domain. You might be able to outrank that page with just 20 backlinks from 20 different domains. Doesn't sound so taxing now, does it?

Scenario 2

You are looking at page which has 500 RDP and 500 BLP. The number of backlinks is much lower than scenario 1, which is encouraging. However, relatively speaking, this is an infinitely better-optimized page. 500 backlinks from 500 different domains will knock the scenario 2 page out of the park every single time.

So remember - backlinks are important, but referring domains are a heavy influencing factor too.

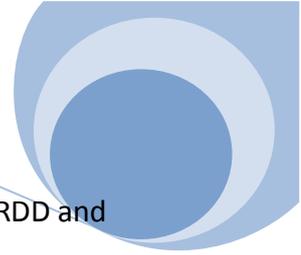
Referring Domains - Domain (RDD) & Domain Backlinks (BLD)

RDD and BLD are the same as RDP and BLP, except that the numbers take into account **all** domains and backlinks pointing to **all** pages on the domain on which the page in question is hosted.

How you value RDD and BLD will depend on the type of site you are looking at.

Take [Squidoo](#) for example. Hundreds of thousands of individuals publish their content on individual pages on Squidoo. If you spot a Squidoo page in the SEO Competition module in Market Samurai, you will see **enormous** numbers in RDD and BLD. However, that shouldn't be too intimidating, as those fields take into account all of the links and domains linking to all of those hundreds of thousands of pages on Squidoo. The page in question is just one of many hundreds of thousands of unrelated pages that happen to be hosted on one domain, and Google does a pretty good job of recognizing that.

The same theory can be applied to many different sites - such as Youtube, eHow, Wordpress.com, and so on. Take RDD and BLD with a pinch of salt under such circumstances. It is when you see high RDD and BLD numbers coupled with high RDP and BLP numbers that you should be concerned. Say you own a golf blog and you want to rank for "golf balls" (again, this is a hypothetical, so don't quote me on this specific keyword). You check out the competition and notice a spot in the SERP results produced by Market Samurai that you think you could slot into. Why? Because BLP and RDP are pretty low.



However, the site is hosted on golf.com, which will produce enormous numbers for RDD and BLD. High sitewide relevancy + high RDD/BLD = stay away.

How Many Backlinks Are Too Many?

Good question, but I'm afraid not one that is within the scope of this book to answer. It is a pure SEO question, and one that could take up a whole book in itself. The fact is, the number of backlinks that are acceptable depends entirely upon (a) the objectives and (b) the skill set of the person carrying out the SEO for the site that you intend to rank.

For instance, if you are looking to set up a "set and forget" niche site, you will only be able to stomach a very low number of backlinks. But if you are looking to set up a long-term authority site, you will be able to accept a higher level of backlinks.

Ultimately, here are two questions that you should ask yourself when considering what stipulates an "acceptable" number of backlinks - "how many backlinks do I think I can attract and/or build, and what level of quality would they be? In the answer to that question, you will find your acceptable level of backlinks (and of course, referring domains).

Page .edu/.gov Backlinks (BLEG)

BLEG represents the number of backlinks from pages on .edu and .gov domains. Google values such backlinks more highly than "regular" domains (e.g. .com, .net, .org and so on) because they assume that the level of authority from an educational or governmental website will be higher. If BLEG produces a high number, it should be cause for concern.

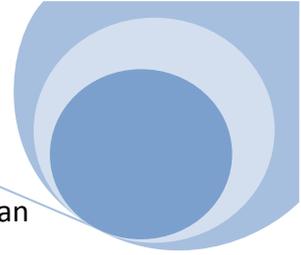
DMOZ Directory (DMZ) & Yahoo Directory (YAH)

These two fields will tell you whether or not the page in question is listed on the two most authoritative web directories in the world. Google looks favorably upon sites listed in these directories, although in my experience, they are not heavily influencing factors.

Keyword in Title, Keyword in URL, Keyword in Description & Keyword in Header Tag

In Market Samurai, these four fields represent the onsite optimization of the pages you are analyzing. Google will look favorably upon pages that have the keyword in their title, URL, description and headers.

I have noticed time and time again that Google loves URLs that include the keyword. If you are building niche sites, it can in fact be **very** complimentary to rankings to have an "exact



match" domain. That is part of the reason why creditcards.com (which is essentially an affiliate site) ranks above heavy hitters such as VISA and Mastercard in Google (this may not be the case in your locale, as Google adjusts rankings according to location). If your keyword is also in the Title of your page, then all the better.

Google also loves seeing the keyword in the headers on your page (denoted by these tags: <h1>, <h2>, etc). They also like to see the keyword in the meta description tag (which, incidentally, will be what is shown below your page's title in the SERP).

Although onsite optimization is not limited to these factors alone, for the purposes of competition analysis, it is usually sufficient to form a reliable judgement of the authority of a page.

Google Cache Age (CA)

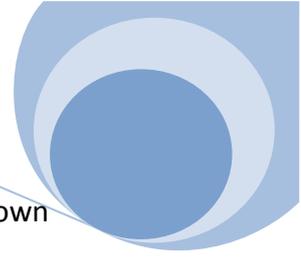
This can be a useful indicator of how highly Google values a page. It tells you the number of days since Google last indexed the page (i.e. when one of its bots went over to the page and reevaluated its content).

A high Cache Age doesn't necessarily indicate that a site is ripe for the picking. Deeply rooted pages may not get cached that often, but they may be part of a larger authoritative site, full of relevant information.

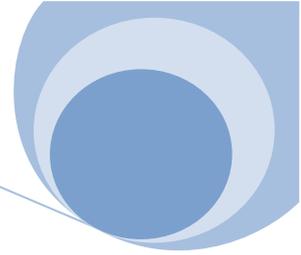
On the flip side, if you come across a root domain that hasn't recently been indexed by Google, that can give you a strong indication that the spot in the SERP is ripe for the picking. Google quickly grows tired of sites that are not regularly updated. And if a root domain has a high CA, that probably means that it isn't being updated regularly. If you come charging into the fray with regular updates and lots of quality relevant information, Google will have to think long and hard about keeping that old, stale page on its 1st page.

In Conclusion

As I have already stated, you must analyze each of the above fields whilst keeping all of the information available to you in mind. For instance, you might initially be intimidated by a relatively high number of backlinks, but you might offset that against very poor onsite optimization. If you could get *nearly* as many backlinks, with better onsite optimization, you might do enough to attain a spot in the top 10.



When you have finished your competition analysis, you will be left with a whittled down shortlist of viable keywords. Now it is time to determine the value of the remaining keywords so that you can determine which you will move forwards with.



Step 6 - Valuation

In reality, there are 101 ways in which you can assess the value of a keyword, and the methods vary depending on what you are trying to achieve. So I cannot tell you how you should go about shortlisting keywords, because I don't know what you are trying to achieve! Instead, I will give you what I consider to be the main principles that should underpin any method of keyword valuation. These principles are split into two camps - traffic-based valuation, and income-based valuation.

Traffic-Based Valuation

There are many reasons why estimates of the value of a keyword might be irrelevant to you. Say you have an online pet store and are running an [inbound marketing](#) campaign. You are interested in getting as many pet lovers on your site as possible. It isn't so important if they are in a buying mood when they hit your site, as you intend for your site to be an ongoing resource for them, which they will go to when they *do* finally want to make a purchase. Moreover, 'non-buying' visitors can be powerful allies when it comes to promoting your site to their friends, family and colleagues, who may be buyers.

In this way, your valuation of any given keyword is highly simplified. Since you have already gone through the 7 step mental checklist described in Step 4 and the Competition Analysis in Step 5, any keywords you are left with should be viable. At that point, Total Searches is the defining factor when considering the worth of a keyword.

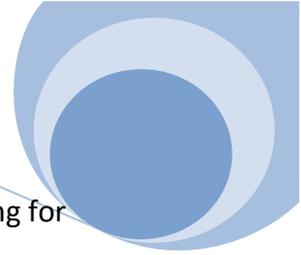
Income-Based Valuation

Assessing the value of any given keyword is more of an art than a science. There are a lot of moving parts to consider. Having said that, you can boil your assessment down into a very simple formula that can be used to analyze and compare keywords:

$$\text{Keyword Value (KV)} = \text{Number Of Visitors (NOV)} \times \text{Value Per Visitor (VPV)}$$

As discussed in Step 3, you should set the NOV at a fairly conservative level (and you should also take into account *where* you think you will be able to rank in the top 10, as this will have an impact on the NOV). The real difficulty is in assessing the value per visitor.

Depending upon your monetization strategy and experience, this calculation can range from being pretty easy to nigh-on impossible (in which case, you either walk away, or take a punt, depending on your potential exposure to risk).



Let's take a look at an example. You have an established authority site and are looking for inspiration for additional articles. You have spotted a promising keyword with 200 searches per day. You assume that you will receive 40 unique visits per day. Your monetization method is Google AdSense. Your site has been running for several months, so you have some good data to work with. You know that on average, 3% of your unique visitors click on an advert (known as your click through rate, or CTR). You also know that you typically receive 25% of the AWCPD that is shown on Market Samurai (let's call this cost per click commission, or CPCC). The AWCPD for the keyword you are considering is \$2.20. With this information, you can estimate what your minimum income will be to a reasonable level of accuracy, using the following calculation (broken down line by line):

$$\text{Keyword Value (KV)} = \text{Number Of Visitors (NOV)} \times \text{Value Per Visitor (VPV)}$$

$$KV = NOV \times (AWCPD \times CPCC) \times CTR$$

$$KV = 40 \times (2.20 \times .25) \times 0.03$$

$$KV = 40 \times (0.55 \times 0.03)$$

$$KV = 40 \times 0.0165$$

$$KV = 0.66$$

With the above data, you have extrapolated an estimated minimum keyword value of 66¢ per day if you rank 1st in Google. This figure should be conservative for a few different reasons, such as:

1. You are only counting organic searches from Google (i.e. not from Bing, Yahoo, etc)
2. You have only taken exact match searches into account (i.e. not Phrase or Broad match searches)
3. You have not taken alternative sources of traffic into account (social media, direct traffic, etc)

The principles of the above formula apply to any calculation of the value of a keyword. For instance, let's say that you run a marketing company. You have spotted a keyword with 50 searches per day. You assume that you will receive 10 visitors per day. Your site-wide conversion rate (CV) is 2% and your average client (AC) makes you \$500.

$$\text{Keyword Value (KV)} = \text{Number Of Visitors (NOV)} \times \text{Value Per Visitor (VPV)}$$

$$KV = NOV \times (AC \times CV)$$

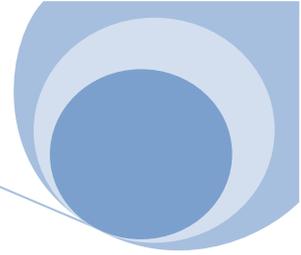
$$KV = 10 \times (500 \times 0.02)$$

$$KV = 10 \times 10$$

$$KV = 100$$

The keyword should be worth a minimum of \$100 (on average) per day to you. There are certainly other things you should take into account when calculating these estimates (for example, are the conversion/average earnings rates for this keyword likely to match my site-wide rates?), but you can consider the above formula the basic principle.

With such information to hand, you can step things up a notch. If you are feeling particularly savvy and have experience with SEO, you can actually estimate the cost to you of ranking for a given keyword and can then subsequently calculate your [Return On Investment \(ROI\)](#).

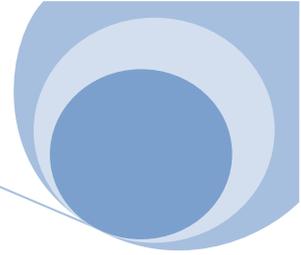


Step 7 - Trial, Error & Experience

This is by far the most important step that you need to take. Without wanting to sound like I am blowing my own trumpet too much, I would have killed to have this book in my hands when I was first starting out, but I didn't. I scraped around for all of the information I could find, digested **a lot** of misinformation and was sold a lot of false promises, and came out of the other end (and continue to grow and develop in terms of my keyword research abilities) with what I consider to be a pretty good understanding of the principles of keyword research.

I have consciously strayed away from giving you any specific numbers for you to "plug in" to Market Samurai. [Leaving Work Behind](#) has no specific alliance with niche sites, authority sites, affiliate sites, business blogs, freelance blogs, or any other type of online property. This guide is designed for *anyone* who is interested in keyword research, and as such, I will not hazard to guess what your specific goals are.

The only way in which you will nurture and develop a good understanding of what is and isn't acceptable to you is to practically execute the advice in this guide. And if at any point you feel overwhelmed or confused and do not know where to turn, please feel free to [contact me](#) - I would love to hear from you.



A Favour

If you have found this guide helpful, I would really appreciate you sharing it with anyone who you feel might benefit from it. Rather than sending them the guide directly, please direct them to <http://www.leavingworkbehind.com/keyword-research-competition-analysis-mastery-the-ebook/>.

If you have your own blog, I would love for you to review this guide and link back to the above page.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the guide, feel free to leave a comment on the page above, drop me a line on my [Facebook page](#), [tweet me](#), or [send me an email](#).

I hope to speak to you soon!

All the best,

Tom