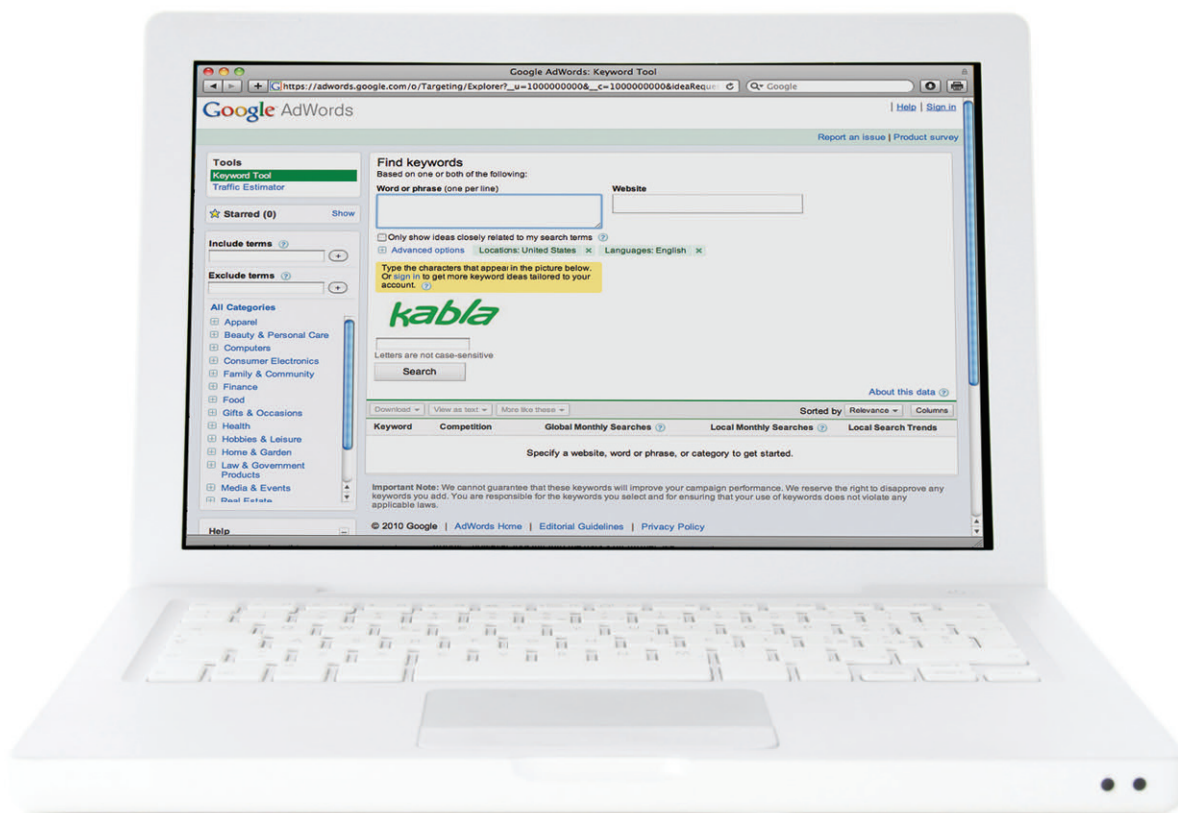


Build It, Work On It, Market It (Then They Will Come)

An Investigation in Search Engine Rankings

PART 2 OF 5

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In Part 1 of this series, we reviewed the basic steps to improving search engine rankings. We took a look at website grammar and spelling issues and discussed website content and hosting platforms that can ensure optimal website speed. If you missed last month's article, please read it now because now we are going to build upon the information presented in the December issue.

In today's society, we are all about speed and we all have "right-now" syndrome (myself included). We want it now, and we want to accomplish it very quickly. It takes too much time to cook breakfast, so we stop by a fast food restaurant on the way to work.

What if we all slowed down a little and devoted some quality time to the projects we must tackle? What if we did our research before jumping into a pool of water?

I am always amazed at how often I hear "I just don't have the time." Only 100 years ago, all anyone had was time. We used to cut down our own trees for firewood. We built our own homes. We baked our own bread. We lived a

much simpler life that required us to do most day-to-day tasks ourselves, and we took pride in what we accomplished. So how does this relate to your website?

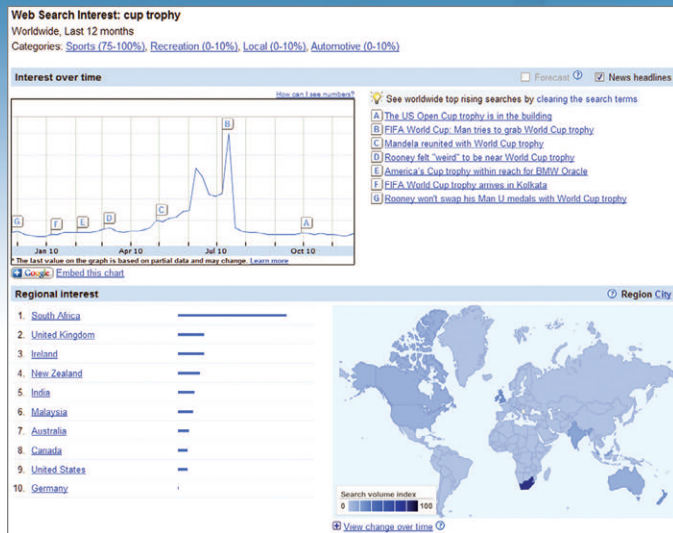
This month we are going to focus on researching the things your customers are looking for, describing your websites to the search engines to reflect that research, and ensuring your website content matches your research. These tasks take time.

Researching Keywords

It is crucial to understand how customers find you in the search engines. Focusing on keywords and phrases that have little to do with the awards industry may bring you increased website traffic; however, the quality of traffic may be less than desirable.

I always chuckle when I hear someone say "Our website ranks first in the search engines when you type in our company name and city." Well, this is not an accomplishment. Obtaining a No. 1 ranking when someone

Figure 1



▲ With 90,500 searches on “cup trophy,” a more careful analysis told us that most of those searches came from Africa and searchers were using the search term “World Cup Trophy.”

types in your company name and your city is all but guaranteed.

The question I pose in response is “If someone is searching for ‘acrylic awards,’ where do you rank? The only people who will search using your company name and city are those who already do business with you.” It is a common misconception that if you rank No. 1 using your company name and city, you must also rank No. 1 everywhere else.

As an award store owner, you must slow down, take some time, and do some research. Get out of the trophy store mindset and think like your customers. A good example is the “loving cup” keyword versus the “cup trophy” keyword. Which do you think has more searches per month?

The following data were accurate as of November 2010 and are based upon Google search data. The data represent a monthly average over a 12-month period.

- Cup trophy = 90,500 searches (**Figure 1**)
- Loving cup = 12,100 searches (**Figure 2**)

You may assume you will gain more potential buying traffic for your website if you focus on the keyword “cup trophy”; however, looking into the data a bit further, we find the majority of the 90,500 searches were generated in specific regions in South Africa. The top search term generating those numbers was “World Cup Trophy.”

When we look at the term “loving cup,” the majority of the searches came from the United States, with the United Kingdom coming in second, but with half as many searches. The people searching for “World Cup Trophy” are the wrong target market for an awards store business. These people are looking for information on the famous trophy.

It is better to gain 12,500 potential buyers versus 90,500 people who will click a link to your site and then click the back button. So think in terms of your customers. Test the terms you believe your customers are searching on and then use research tools to test your theories. This research

process is not a quick one. You must slow down and smell the Internet search engine roses. You can find the Google Adwords keyword tool at <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>.

Consider asking your customers to describe the search terms they might use to find your company. Perhaps you can send out a survey and offer a \$25 gift card to a local coffee shop for the first 10 people who respond. The data you receive will help you understand what goes on in the minds of customers and how they use the Internet.

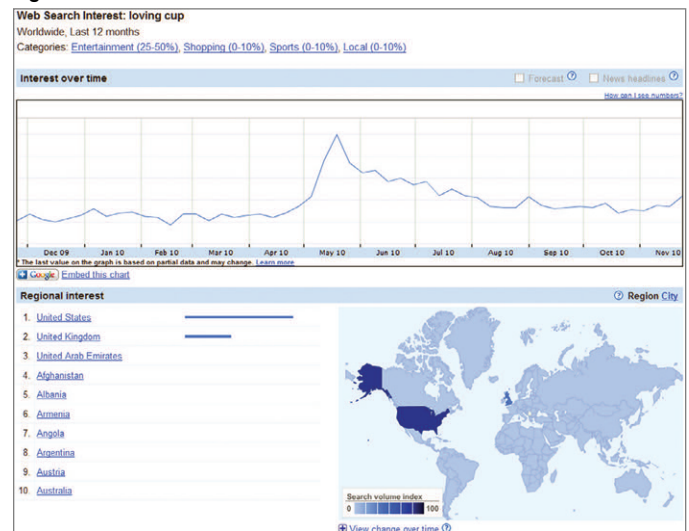
When determining the keywords to focus on for your business, do not try to be a jack of all keywords, master of none. Focus on five to eight keywords. The more you diversify your website keyword focus, the more the search engines will view your site as a generalist website. Generalist sites receive lower rankings. How do you determine what to focus on? That’s a business decision. What is your company about? Do you focus on trophies, resins, and medallions? Do you focus on acrylic awards, crystal awards, or glass awards? Figure out your business focus and go with it.

If you focus on trophies, medallions, and resin awards, you still can sell acrylic awards, crystal awards, and glass awards on your website. Focusing on a specific set of keywords does not exclude you from being found by those who use other keywords.

Meta Keywords and Meta Descriptions

Meta keywords are words or short phrases on your web pages that serve as a self-analyzed view of your website. These words tell search engines that you feel your web page is about these primary five keywords. The meta keyword tag can be added to your website by your site designer. If you are using a shopping cart program like BizWizard ShopKart, Miva Merchant, or Mercantec, you may be presented with a field in which you can simply type in your keyword. This field’s location is going to vary in different shopping cart programs (**Figure 3**).

Figure 2



▲ With only 12,100 average searches on “loving cup,” we found the majority of those searches came from the United States.

Bad Product Description

This is a beautiful award that stands 18" tall and boasts a silver finish The base is made of solid walnut stained to a high-luster finish. You can place a figure of your choice on top.



The way in which you determine the keywords to use depends upon the web page content. If your web page is about "loving cups" you may wish to have a keyword list similar to "loving cup trophies, loving cup trophy, loving cup award, buy loving cup trophy, buy loving cup award."

The number of keywords you list in your meta keyword tag depends upon the content on the page, but the number should not exceed 5-10 comma-separated keyword or keyword phrases (try to keep the number closer to 5). Take the time to research those keywords.

The meta description is a human-readable description that search engines can use when displaying your site in the search engines (Figure 4). Search engines do not guarantee they will use your meta description as the descriptor text in a search listing, but search engines often will use it if it appears to relate to your web page content and keywords.

A meta description should be written from a third-person point of view. In the example provided here, we created a meta description to describe our loving cup trophies as follows: "Offers a large selection of loving cup

Figure 3

▲ Consult the documentation that came with your shopping cart program and determine where to enter your meta keywords and meta description (usually where you title a particular page or category of products).

trophies and awards for various sports. Free shipping, free engraving offered on all loving cup trophy purchases."

In this description, we used the words found in our meta keywords; however, we put those keywords in sentence form, adhering to third-person authorship and maintained only facts. The meta description should remain factual and should not contain marketing hype. Notice we also used the word *trophies* and *trophy* in the description.

Again, there is no guarantee that the search engine will use the meta description you provide; however, the search engine will read it and use it in analysis of your rankings. As long as the search engine determines the meta description is accurate regarding the rest of the content it finds on your web page, it most likely will use your meta description.

Match Keywords to Website Content

Consistency, Consistency, Consistency! We need to be consistent in use of the keywords throughout a web page. We have been careful to research our keywords, we have included our keywords in our web page title and/or category name,

Figure 4

▲ Meta descriptions are placed as one- or two-sentence descriptions of 20-25 words right below your website's title. They should be written in third-person format and accurately reflect website content.

Good Product Description

This beautiful loving cup trophy award stands 18" tall. With great pride, the silver finish on this loving cup has been polished to a mirrored shine. The artist has placed this elegant loving cup trophy on a solid walnut-stained, high-luster base. Further enhance the look of this silver loving cup trophy award by placing a figure on top.



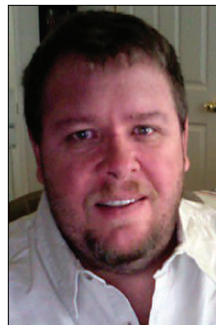
and we have included our keywords in our meta keywords and meta description. But what about the web page itself?

We need to ensure the keywords appear as much as possible on the web page within the human-readable text. This is where the search engine spiders are going to look for the accuracy of your meta keywords, meta description, and web page title. If the search engine spider finds that your website doesn't use the term "loving cup," it will discard the keywords, description, and web page title, reach its own conclusion, and rank your site based upon its conclusion.

As you write your web page text, be careful to write content to appease the human website visitor, not the search engine spider. Don't fall into the trap of embedding keywords over and over for the sake of hoping to gain rankings. Not only will it not work, but this is known as "search engine spamming" and it can quickly get your website domain name blacklisted from a search engine. Simply compose good product descriptions and describe the product (using your keywords in the description). The example of the "Bad Product Description" at the top of page 26 does not use keywords; the "Good Product Description" at the top of this page is a rewrite of that same description using keywords.

Other Considerations

An online store is not a brochure for your brick-and-mortar store. It is another business. Treat it as such. You spend lots of time working on your storefront, displaying sample products and organizing by product type. Do the same with your online store. It is a whole new business, and the rules of brick-and-mortar businesses do not apply. "If you build it, they will come" is a myth. Build it, work on it, market it. Then they will come.



Next month, we will delve into the next steps to increase your website's search engine rankings. ▲

David Matney has more than 20 years experience with Internet application development and search engine optimization. He is the developer of BizWizard ShopKart.

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