forewards

THE ULTIMATE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ECOMMERCE SEO

Getting Started – The First 2 Steps

Congratulations! You've just completed the first version of your online store's website. Your inventory has been uploaded, product pages have been created, and (arguably the hardest part) your credit card processing and payment gateway has been set up and checked. What comes next?

The agonizing wait for your first customers to arrive. To eliminate some of that anxiety, and to give your business a kick-start, what you should now be doing is putting your marketing plan into high gear gear. No matter what your business, online or in person, retail or services, marketing is ultimately the single biggest factor in your customer acquisition success. In the case of a business online that translates into the amount of traffic you get through your online storefront.

But marketing is a *huge* topic, so where exactly should you start?

If you are looking for long lasting bang for your buck online, you'll be hard-pressed to find anything more valuable than Search Engine Optimization, or SEO. SEO means making your store more easily findable by the search engines (primarily Google) when potential customers are searching for things online.

So can you begin formulating an SEO strategy for your online store?

Here are the first two steps I like to use to begin fleshing out an SEO strategy.

Step 1 - Finding Keywords

The first thing you'll need to understand when building out your SEO strategy is which keywords you want your page to be optimized for.

What is a keyword? Keywords are the words or phrases that search engines like Google will use to identify your website.

The most obvious keywords you'll probably think of are your products themselves. While this is a great start, the problem with most keywords these days is the amount of competition there is for them. Because of this you can refine your SEO keywords by going to the "long tail". What are long tail keywords? These are phrases with three or more words that can also describe your product or service. The great thing about long tail keywords is that according to the folks at seoMOZ, they make up over 70% of all online searches.

But it gets better - there tends to be less competition for many long tail keywords.

The great thing about long tail keywords is that according to the folks at seoMOZ, they make up over 70% of all online searches.
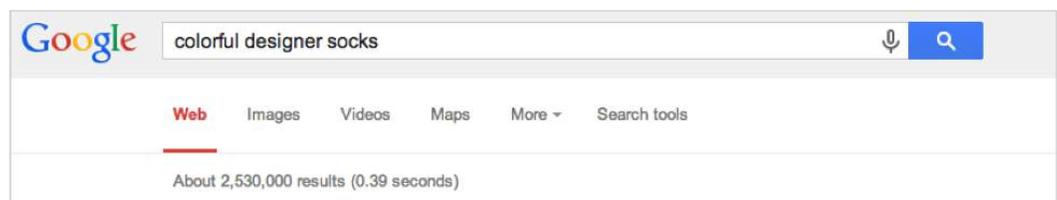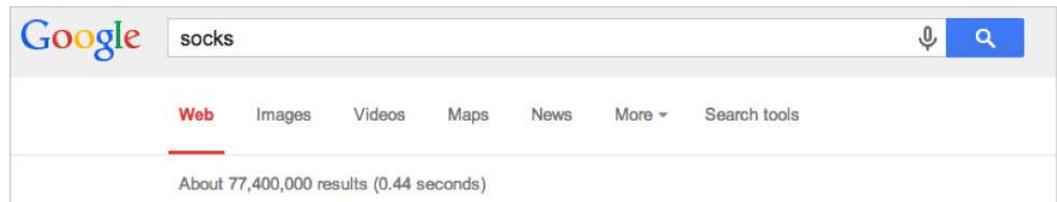

Long tail keywords have another interesting advantage as well when you look at a searcher's behavior. Web surfers searching for long tail phrases tend to be much better leads. A web surfer searching for "colorful designer socks" is probably in a stronger buying mode than someone simply searching for "socks".

So how can you come up with long tail keyword options?

I like to go through a mind map exercise to put some structure around my brainstorming. A mind map is a diagram used to visually outline information. To create one, start with a single word in the middle, and branch out from there with complimentary words.

Let's use our "Socks" example again.

You can see that by going through this exercise we can quickly get to quite a lot of variations of potential long tail keywords to begin using in our website.
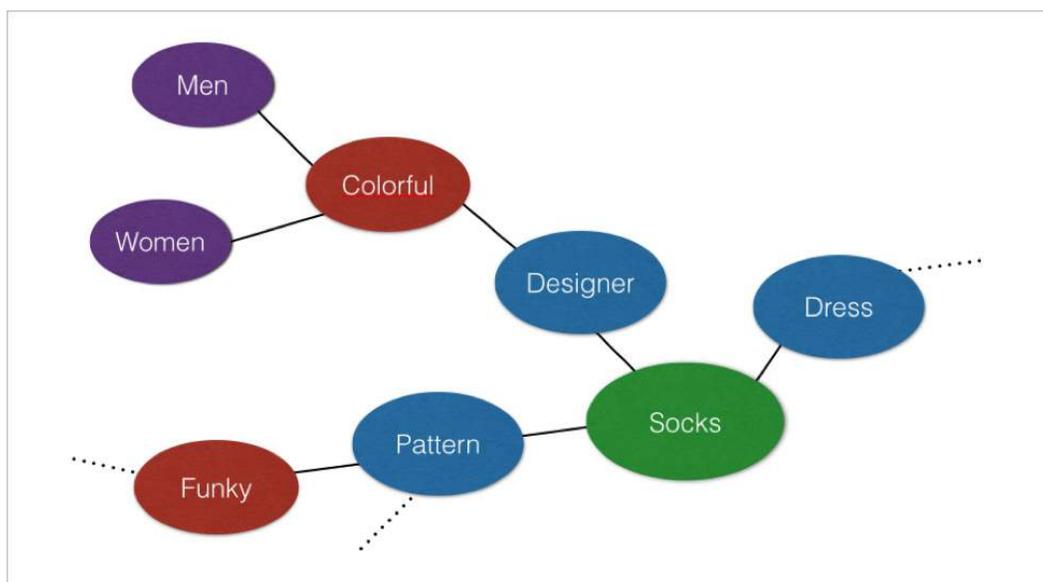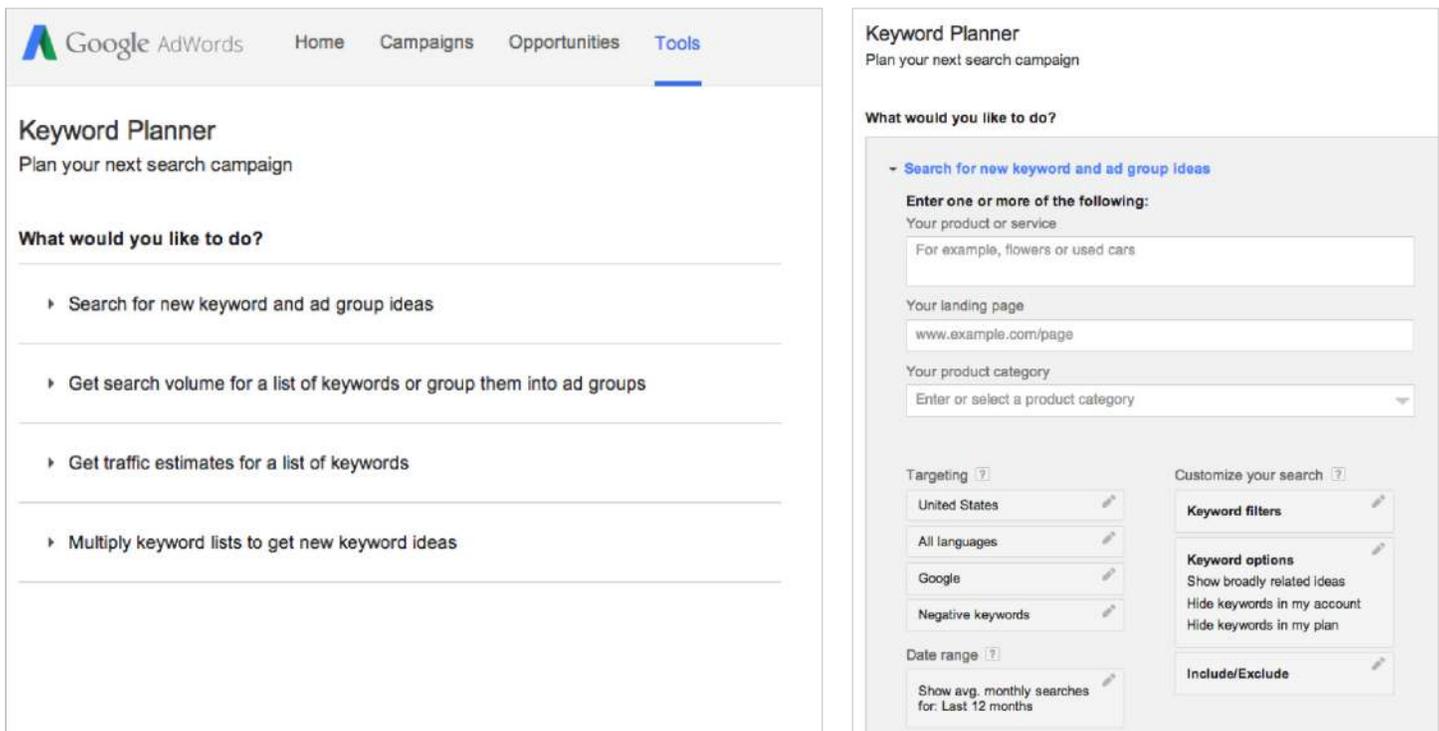

- ▶ Men's Colorful Designer Socks
- ▶ Women's Colorful Designer Socks
- ▶ Funky Pattern Socks
- ▶ etc…

# Step 2 - Picking the Keywords to Use

Now that we've got a list of keywords to start with we now have to determine which ones to focus on. It's at this point that Google can be exceptionally helpful. One of the most powerful free tools at the disposal of an online marketer today is the Google Adwords Keyword Planner.

This tool lets you do some research into what keywords users are searching for, as well as how competitive they might be to try and rank for.

The trick is you want to find (if possible) high search phrases that are also low competition. What that translates into for you, is lots of people searching for that term, and less people (other pages)
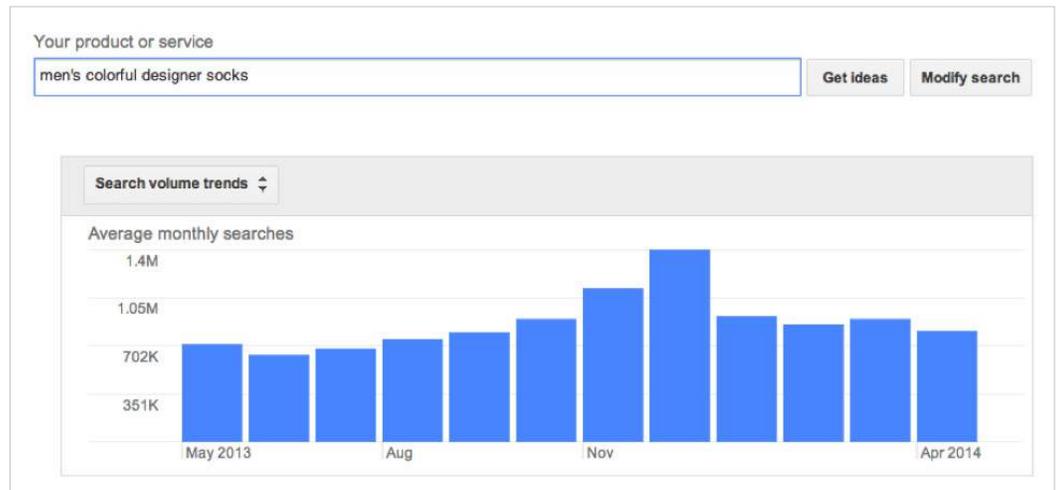
competing for those search eyes.

Turns out 'colorful designer socks' is a very popular search. This can be good or bad. But the tool goes one step further and also provides you with alternative phrases you can use for keywords.

So now between your mind map and the Google keyword tool, you now should have been able to narrow down your SEO strategy to a handful of long tail keywords.

Putting your plan in motion

Now that I've got keywords, how do I use them?

First and foremost you want o begin introducing the keywords you've discovered into your website itself. This is referred to as "on page SEO".

What are the key areas of my site for on page SEO?

Address Bar:

The first place where search engines like Google will look for keywords is in address or the URL of your pages.

This often isn't possible given how long the internet has been around and how many pages already exist. However there are a couple rings to keep in mind.

1. Your brand name can also be a keyword, or at least a term that potential customers may eventually be searching for. So that's a logical keyword you'll want to have in your url if possible.

2. Search engines don't just look at the root of your url, they take the whole address into consideration, so content posts and sub pages such as product pages can potential include URL keywords also. When you do add phrases into a URL the format that is friendliest to search is to separate the individual words with a dash. (example: www.website.com/long-tail-keyword.html)

This is one of many reason you'll soon see that blogs can be so

The graphical control element address bar (also location bar or URL bar) shows the current URL and accepts a typed URL that navigates the user to a chosen website in a web browser.

valuable to SEO since the URL for a blog post is often a perfect place to start injecting some high quality long tail keywords

Page Titles:

Another straightforward place to add keywords are in your page titles. This is often an areas that many web masters will overlook. Rather than having one common title appear on all of your pages (the name of your store for example) you should remember to optimize these fields appropriately for each field.

Here's an example of this, if you have a page designed as a product "how to", that can be an opportunity to introduce a long tail keyword such as "How to get the most out of your product".

The other easy area to add many, many keyword optimized page titles is in the blog section of your site. In fact one thing that many expert would suggest is simply taking your list of long tail keywords determined from the keyword exercise, and make them your blog titles, and blog content inspiration. Most of the time these long tails will actually make for pretty good headlines as well, since many are already or easily worded as questions.

Meta descriptions are HTML attributes that provide concise explanations of the contents of web pages.

Meta Description:

This is the embedded descriptive data in the page, another pace you want some keywords. Be careful not to go to crazy. You might think that only Google sees these but they'll be seen by potential customers as well. Specifically in SERPs (search engine results pages) these meta descriptions are the little blurbs or excerpts that you'll see along with a url in a search result.
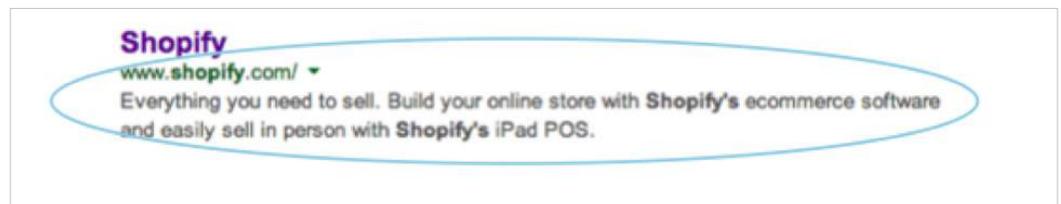
Meta Keywords:

Here's a lower value area to put keywords but equally important, Make sure when you're writing your page HTMl to include these meta keyword tags. This is your opportunity to make sure different variations of keywords are somewhere on your page, without having to worry too much about being understandable by a human since these will be hidden

Title tags H1 and H2:

Here is another high value place that a you want o inject some keywords. Much like with page titles and blog titles, here's a simple opportunity to leverage those keywords as the actual section headers on your page. For example if you have a "how it works" type section in your page, why not leverage a keyword in this headline "how do my products work"

An additional note here, using bold on any of the copy anywhere on your website can actually be a simple way to call out keywords also. However keep in mind to use the <strong> tag when doing so rather than the <b> tag as this is what search engines will prefer.

Image Alt Tags:

Another one of those small things that many people overlook. Image alt tags. Every graphic element that you have on your page can also have an alt tag associated with it. Some people forget this altogether. But this is an area you should take advantage of, to both have a more descriptive phrase associated with your image, in case of loading issues, as well as an opportunity again to introduce more keywords.

ALT Tags are invisible descriptions of images which are read aloud to blind users on a screen reader.

Content:

This one is the biggie.

One question you probably have is - "As an commerce site, how can I add content given my limited real estate?"

Well, the first suggestion is to build out a content rich section of your page. It's already been mentioned in this post over and over but there are a number of reasons why you'd want a blog as part of your page. The content hosted in a blog is more than just SEO though, it's a great way to voice your opinion and expertise on your product niche or market. Blogs can be loaded with easily consumable bites

of content. And most importantly there are a place where you can add more pages (posts) loaded with keywords to boost your search rankings.

But don't forget every other area of your page where you have copy. Blogs are important, but they aren't the be all and end all of SEO. Pages such as your About Us page should reflect your value proposition, and of course can also refer to some specific keywords also.

There is also another big area of content that many retailers overlook:

Product descriptions:

Product descriptions are a great place to introduce strategic clues for search engines to find you. Perhaps more importantly, for you as a retailer, by adding more descriptive copy to your product pages it gives you an opportunity to "sell" your clients. Written well, this copy lets customers know what they are getting and also gets them excited about getting it too.
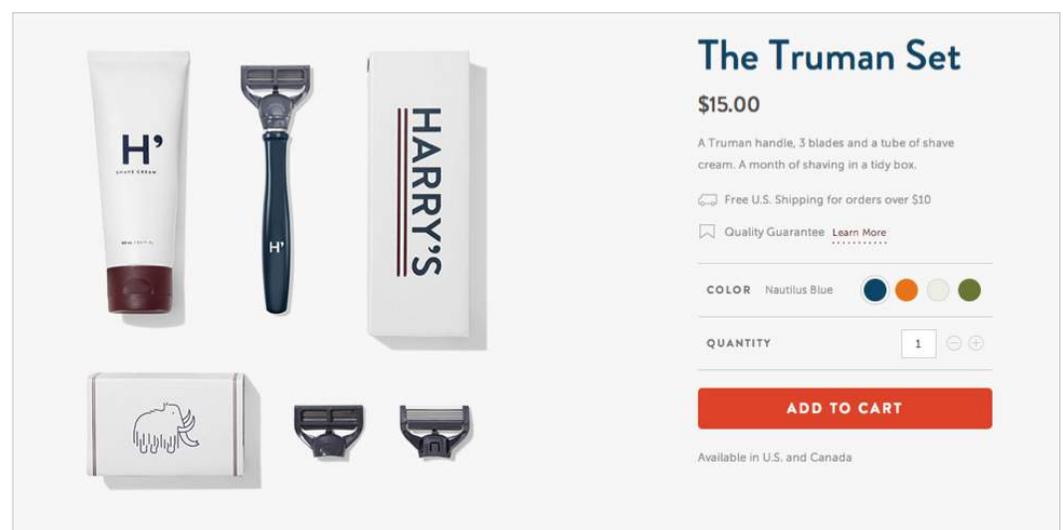
It's actually an old trick that you probably remember from the mail order catalogs of the past. Rather than just listing a product as a red
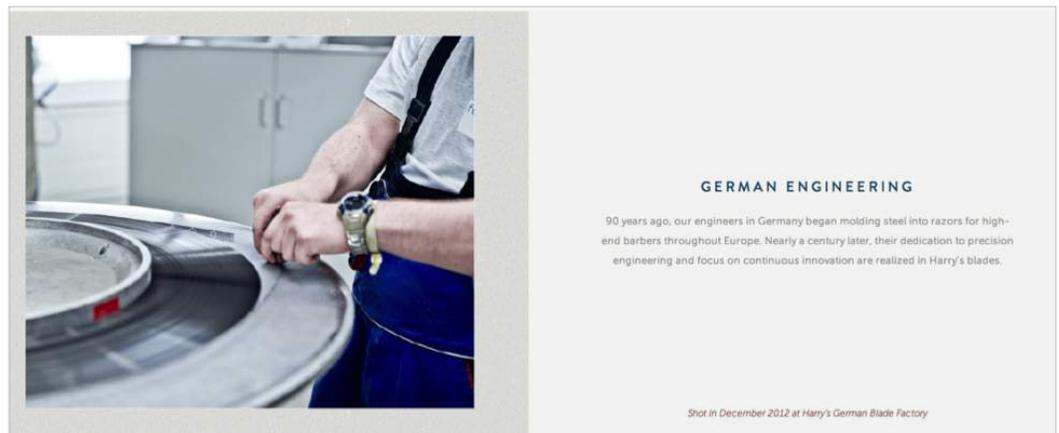
sweater, you can add some descriptive copy to tell a story about how functional or fashionable the sweater is, and how it will make you feel.

Always remember that your site shouldn't just serve as a product catalogue, it needs to also "sell" your products. Keywords are a way to ensure that you're leaving behind a big enough trail for search engines to pick you up, but when used properly they an also be a reminder to make sure your page has the appropriate amount of descriptive content and coney to effectively sell your wares.

Here's an example. The folks at Harry's are selling a pretty run of the mill thing, if you think about it. Shaving kits.

They could have left their product page like this.

Instead they beefed it up to have this section as well.

GERMAN ENGINEERING

90 years ago, our engineers in Germany began molding steel into razors for high-end barbers throughout Europe. Nearly a century later, their dedication to precision engineering and focus on continuous innovation are realized in Harry's blades.

Shot in December 2012 at Harry's German Blade Factory

So that's it. Almost all facets of search engine optimization are much easier said than done. While not overly complicated, on page SEO can definitely be quite labor intensive. It's an old adage, but it's one that definitely applies in the world of SEO. SEO is not a sprint it's a marathon. If you can develop good habits all along the way as your online store evolves, then you'll be both saving yourself from a lot of extra work down the road, and also setting yourself up for the maximum amount of organic traffic.