# How to Find Keywords:
## 7 Simple Steps to Keyword Research (and SEO) Success

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# Introduction: Keyword Research

Objectives to take away from this guide:

- ✓ Understand the 3 Mistakes Business Owners Make When Choosing Keywords
- ✓ Do Your Keyword Research
- ✓ Marry Keywords to Content Pages

## Steps to Keyword Research

Keyword research is very daunting for small businesses. That's why I've divided the process into seven manageable steps. Don't worry; we'll cover each one in-depth.

1. Understand what keywords really are (and what they *aren't*)
2. Come up with a solid list of keyword ideas (called prospects)
3. Use a keyword tool to test your keyword prospects
4. Select keywords relevant to your business
5. Look at the competition for each keyword
6. Eliminate, cull and prioritize your keywords
7. Match your keywords to each of your website pages

## Step 1: Understand what keywords really are (and what they *aren't*)

In my day job, I'm an SEOconsultant for marketers within small and midsize businesses. I train them to learn, implement, and succeed at online marketing and generating leads through the use of SEO on their website and in their articles, press releases and blogs. One of the first questions I ask when business owners approach me for help with SEO is, "What are your keywords?"

Half of the time, clients will have a list of genuinely good keywords. The other half of the time, clients hand over a list of about 50-100 keywords, mostly related to their business name or tagline. I browse the list with raised eyebrows. "How did you come up with this list?" I ask. "Oh, these are keywords I want to be known for. I want to come up first when someone puts these in." I then have to gently break the news that we're going to have to scrap these words and start from scratch. Simply because these keywords will result in a big fat failure. **They're not words that a prospect would ever use to find them online.**

Many businesses make the mistake of simply listing keywords they think are relevant to their business. They include their company name, brand and proprietary words; they simply optimize their website with no research to back up their findings.

Unless you're a household name, your company name is not a keyword. Neither is your brand. Neither is your tagline.

**So what *are* keyword phrases?**

**They're words that specific people—your target market to be exact—type into a search engine.**

## Keyword Rule

Do not choose keywords that include your company name, company brand, tagline or slogan. Unless you're a household name (like Home Depot or Starbucks), your company name is NOT a keyword.

Before we  move on to Step Two, I think it is important to point out three of the most common mistakes that people make when they first begin doing keyword research. Getting off to a bad start will throw off your SEO efforts overall, so I want to be sure you know what mistakes to afford from the very beginning.

## Keyword Mistake #1:

## Choosing Bad Keywords

This is the biggest mistake I see: clients choosing keywords that *they* want to be known for, not what prospective clients are actually typing into search engines. These are often not the same thing. Let me show you an example:

### Example #1

Let's say that in my business, my tagline is:

> "Jenny Munn: The Marketing Magician Who
>  Will Pull Your Profits Out of Thin Air."

–Would I ever want my keyword to be "marketing *magician?"*

-NO. No one would ever type that into Google. Ever.

### Example #2

A client of mine once had a cool technique for simplifying the business blogging process. He called it Blogification. He said, "I want to be known for Blogification, so make that my keyword." Now, if you're looking for business blogging help, would that *ever* be a word you would type into Google? NO.

## Keyword Mistake #2:

## Choosing 1- and 2-word keywords and keyphrases

Another mistake I see often is that business owners take the word, "keyword," too literally. Your keyword—99.99999999% of the time—is never going to be a single word. Or even two words. That's just too broad. Not to mention, words are extremely difficult to compete for. The key to keyword research is specificity. Think about it. Before I became an SEO consultant, I was an SEO copywriter, in a broad sense, a writer. But I would never use the keyword "writer." The word "writer" applies to everything from magazine writer to novel writer to writer job boards. I would need to be more specific. What about "business writer"? Or better yet, "Atlanta Business Writer"? Or "Business writer in Atlanta?" "SEO website copywriter?"

**Don't make the mistake of thinking your keywords are going to only consist of one or two words.**

## Keyword Rule

The word "keyword" is very misleading. A keyword is rarely just a "word." It is really a keyword "phrase" as it includes 2-3+ words.

## Keyword Mistake #3:

## Not Balancing Geo Terms

In the past, getting geographically specific with your keywords "Atlanta copywriter," "St. Louis web designer," etc. was a smart move to make.

These days, it's not so important due to Google and search engines personalizing your search results. It's a little Big Brother – Google does know where you are and will skew the results it provides to where you're located, making complete geo specification unnecessary.

However, I always recommend a balance of using geo terms where you can naturally. The last thing you want to do is get too keyword-y where you'll turn off both Google and your users.



The list above is a screenshot of my Google Analytics page, and those are keywords people have actually typed in while searching on Google. Currently, I get a mix of people finding

me using "Atlanta" based searches, as well as non-geographic specific searches.

**If you've made any of these keyword research mistakes in the past, don't worry. They are common problems that I see on a regular basis. The good news is that now you know better and can avoid these pitfalls in the future. Now, on to Step Two!**

## Step 2: Come up with a solid list of keyword ideas (called keyword prospects)

Now that you know not to list your company name, website, brand or tagline as a keyword, how do you come up with the right list of keywords for your website? Here are four ways to get started developing a list of keyword prospects.

**1** Yourself: jot down as many words and phrases as you can think of in 2 minutes. WORDS THAT YOU THINK SOMEONE WOULD TYPE INTO GOOGLE to find your products or services.

Right now, take two minutes and jot down words and phrases:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

*Tip:* Feel free to use the space I've provided, but it's also a good idea to open up an Excel spreadsheet. This is where you will keep track of your research.

**2** Brainstorm with others: ask a friend, colleague (or whomever happens to be sitting next to you at the moment) what they would type into Google if they were looking for your services. **Think about your customers:** what words do they use to describe you, your business, your title and the services or products you provide?

Jot down their answers below:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

**3** Google Autocomplete: you've probably noticed while using Google that a list of related search terms displays below the search box as you are typing. This is called Autocomplete, and it's basically a reflection of common searches done by users that are similar to what you are looking for.

You can use this feature to help you find more keywords, just start by typing the list you already have into Google. Pay close attention to the related terms that Google displays as you type, and write down the relevant keywords on the lines below:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Competitor URL #2:**

_____

Possible keywords:

_____

_____

_____

_____

**4** Competition: go to a few of your competitors' websites. <u>Do they use any words or phrases that you hadn't considered?</u>

Competitor URL #1:

_____

**Competitor URL #3:**

_____

Possible keywords:

_____

Possible keywords:

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Do you have a solid list of keyword prospects? Good! Then it's time for the third step.**

## Step 3: Use a keyword tool to test your keyword prospects

SEO is about DATA. You use a keyword tool not only to verify the keywords you thought of, but to discover additional words and phrases you would never have thought of.

**Do not skip this step. Seriously.**

Checking your keywords first against a keyword tool (and then later against the competition) is critical to successful SEO.

Let's say that these are a few of the keyword prospects I came up with for my former copywriting business:

Content Maven                    Freelance Copywriter

E-marketing Specialist        Marketing Consultant

Business Writer
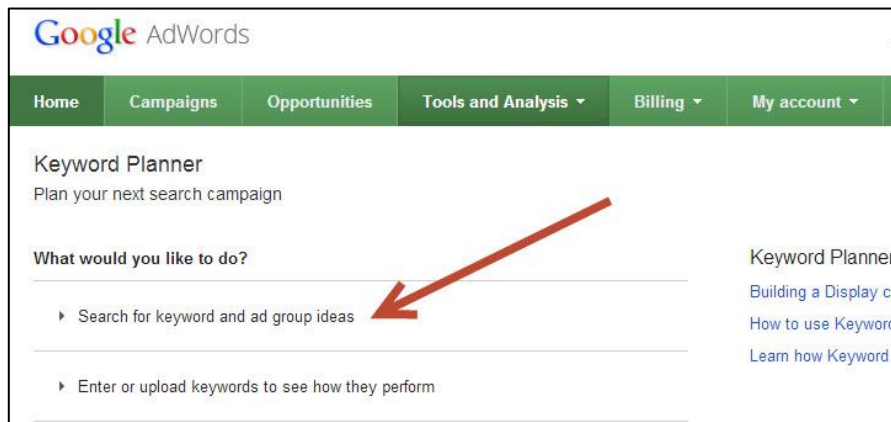


It's time to put those keywords to the test. Let's see if people have been proven to type these into the search engines. We test our keyword prospects with Google's free Keyword Planner tool (FYI you will need a free Adwords account).

*Tip:* There are three critical steps to using the Keyword Planner properly, you can find them here: http://jennymunn.com/goodbye-google-seo-keyword-research-tool/.
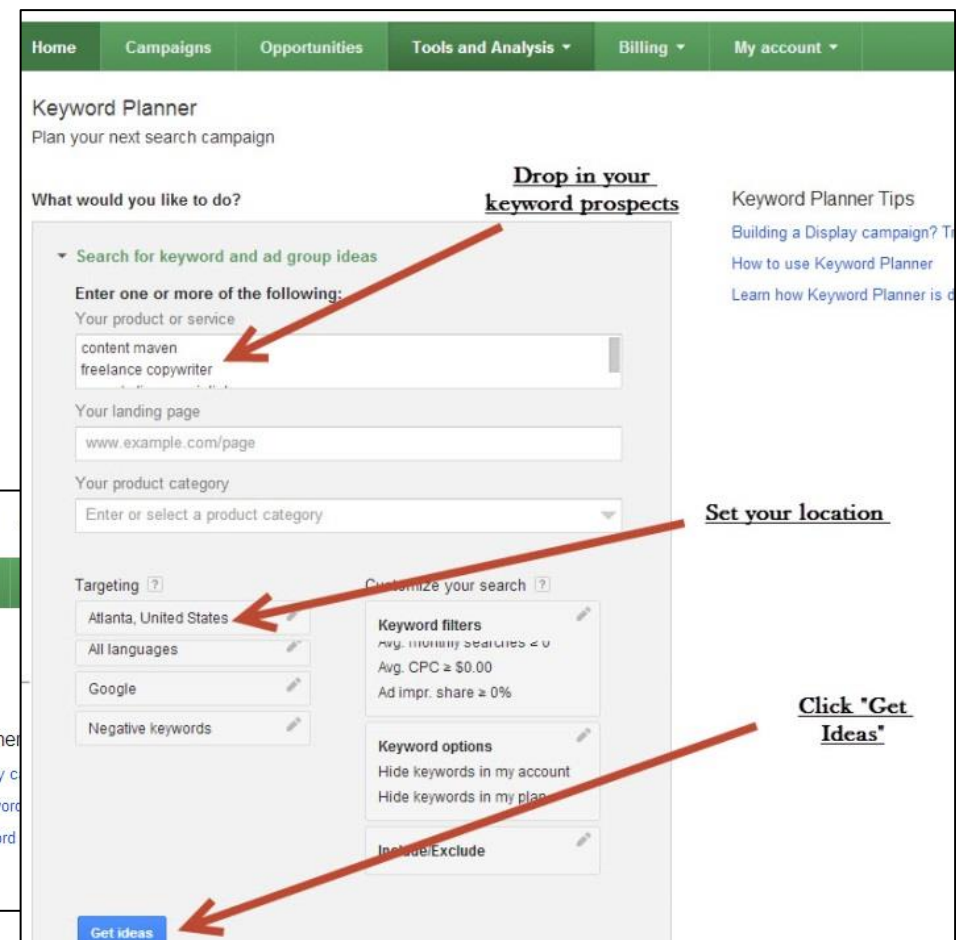
There are 2 very important things I want to point out—pay attention:

1. Choosing common sense keywords                2. Finding the hidden gems



**1. Choosing Common Sense Keywords**

Don't be intimidated by the list of words you'll see. Just go down, one by one to see if these words are actually relevant to your business.

**2. Finding the hidden gems**

Pay close attention to the "Competition" column. A "High" competition rating means that obviously, the competition is going to be high. It's going to be difficult (but not impossible) and will take work to rank well for this keyword.

What I want you to do, when possible, is look for the HIDDEN GEMS. These are words that fit these two criteria:

1) Medium to Low Competition and 2) higher monthly search count.

Plurals: One more thing I want to point out….

I did the same search using another keyword tool called Wordtracker (Wordtracker is a paid tool that costs a few hundred dollars a year).

Look how many searches there are for *plural words.* Yes, searchers more often than not will use plurals when they're trying to come up with a list of companies in their search.

There is a difference between singular and plural keywords. "Atlanta Copywriters" is a much different keyword than "Atlanta Copywriter." Take plural keyword combinations into account.

YES, most keyphrases are awkward…

Take a look at these search results for the phrase, "Atlanta Marketing Agency."

Many more searchers typed "marketing agency Atlanta" than "atlanta marketing agency." When searching in Google, we just don't use complete sentences. Many users just string together words.

Although awkward, the order of words matters. You have to get creative with your keyword usage (but never sacrifice readability for a keyword)

| Keyword (?) (301) | Searches (?) (N/A) | Competition (IAAT) (?) | KEI (?) | KEI3 (?) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 atlanta agencies (search) | 60,500 | 147 | 24,700,000 | 412 |
| 2 social marketing companies (search) | 5,400 | 79 | 810,000 | 68.4 |
| 3 social marketing agencies (search) | 2,400 | 53 | 103,000 | 45.3 |
| 4 top marketing companies (search) | 18,100 | 402 | 1,580,000 | 45.0 |
| 5 marketing companies in atlanta (search) | 2,900 | 68 | 162,000 | 42.6 |
| 6 atlanta ad agencies (search) | 2,400 | 96 | 48,000 | 25.0 |
| 7 integrated marketing agencies (search) | 590 | 24 | 4,970 | 24.6 |
| 8 atlanta marketing firms (search) | 2,400 | 106 | 64,700 | 22.6 |
| 9 advertising and marketing agencies (search) | 14,800 | 894 | 387,000 | 16.6 |
| 10 marketing and advertising companies (search) | 6,600 | 457 | 107,000 | 14.4 |
| 11 advertising and marketing companies (search) | 6,600 | 477 | 130,000 | 13.8 |
| 12 website marketing companies (search) | 14,800 | 1,120 | 836,000 | 13.2 |
| 13 long island advertising agencies (search) | 1,600 | 131 | 49,200 | 12.2 |
| 14 insurance marketing agency (search) | 1,900 | 175 | 21,600 | 10.9 |
| 15 top digital marketing agencies (search) | 110 | 11 | 403 | 10.0 |

| Keyword | Competition |
|---|---|
| ☆ "atlanta marketing agency" | High |

| ⊟ Keyword ideas (4) | |
|---|---|
| Keyword | Competition |
| ☆ "marketing agency atlanta" | High |
| ☆ "atlanta marketing agency" | High |
| ☆ "digital marketing agency atlanta" | High |
| ☆ "atlanta internet marketing agency" | High |

Do not get hung up on the exact search count numbers. No keyword tool (especially the free Google Planner tool) provides accurate search numbers. Just use these numbers to get a general sense of each word's ranking and how it compares to the others. Also, I don't get too hung up on choosing words with thousands of searches. I often help clients choose words that seem low (0-50 searches per month) that are very conversion-oriented if they are in a small niche. It's important to have a diversified blend of high competition and low competition words, and high traffic count and low traffic count words.

Also, the data you'll find in keyword research tools is not perfect. Far from it actually. Take the numbers with a grain of salt as they are in no way 100% accurate. But they give you a solid a start. And the most important thing is to get started. Refine later.

## Step 4: Select keywords relevant to your business

Allow me to give you just one small tip; do NOT get stuck on this step for days and days and days. Do however many searches it takes to come up with a pretty good list of keywords. Stop and move on. This step really shouldn't take more than an hour or two (at least initially) depending upon how complex your business is. You can always come back to it. Do the research and move on.

Compile a list of common-sense keywords (words that are actually relevant to your business, your products and services) and stick them in your Excel spreadsheet.

## Step 5: Look at the competition for each keyword

Remember how I said to use common sense when looking at the keywords generated from your searches? Now, you need to do this very important step: check out the competition. See what your chances realistically are of getting on the first page of Google.

It's important to note that when I say "competition," I'm not referring to that competitor who you always run up against during bidding. Or even that competitor who keeps following you around to the same networking events. I'm referring to businesses and people who are competing for your keywords. That's an important distinction you'll need to remember throughout this workbook.

Remember when I previously mentioned not to choose 1- or 2-word keywords? It's because of the competition. As a small business, I am NEVER going to beat out Wikipedia, OpenOffice.org or Writers Digest for the coveted top few spots. It's just not going to happen (I'll explain why in a moment). That's why it's important to get specific with your keywords. This concept is called "niching it down."

For example, look at this keyword competition screenshot:
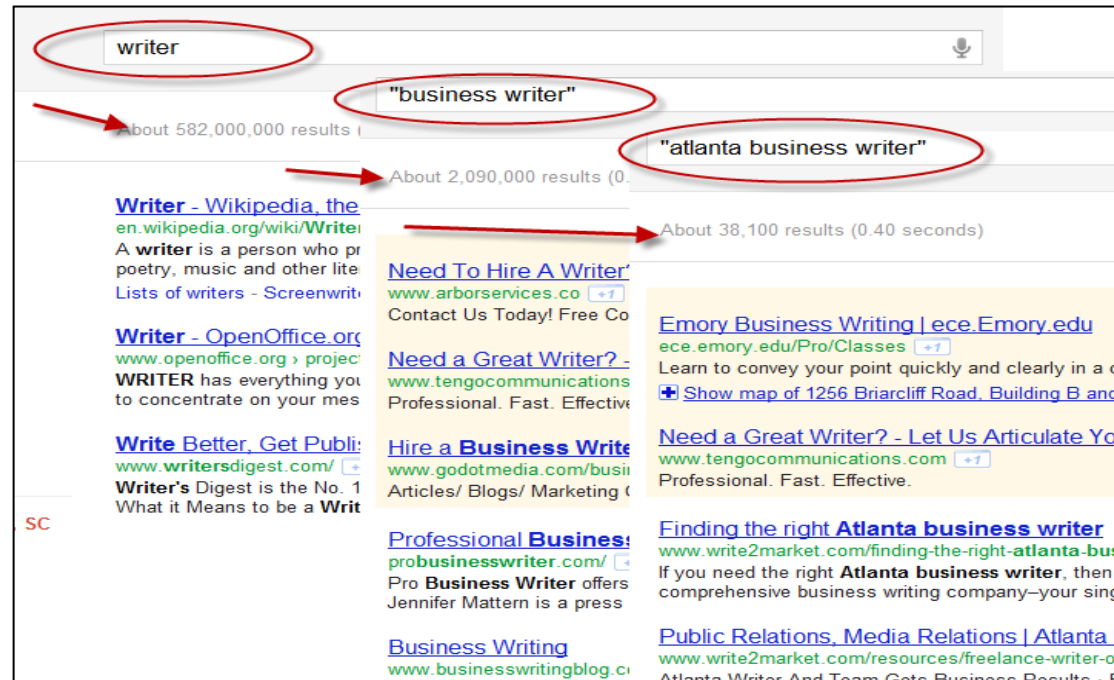


- The keyword "writer" has 582 million pages trying to compete for that term. And with my limited resources? No thanks!

- The keyword "business writer" has more than 2 million pages trying to compete. Better, but still way too many.

The keyword "atlanta business writer" has only 38,100 pages trying to rank. Although that still seems like a lot, that's much better.

Even though a competition of 38,000 website pages still seems stiff, trust me when I say you want *some* competition. If only 5 website pages show up when you run a competitive keyword search, then you should run far away from that keyword. That tells you that no one will ever be searching

for that term. And really, aren't you only trying to compete against the sites showing up in the first few pages?

A little healthy competition is good. If I wanted to niche it down even further, I could add "atlanta annual report writer" or "atlanta grant report writer" to my keyword spreadsheet.

**One last note about competitive research:** many businesses skip this step, to their peril. Because if they choose to optimize for a keyword that big corporations are also optimizing for, they're going to lose out. Here's why.

Large corporations have huge budgets to spend on SEO strategy. Usually, their SEO department looks something like this:

Or this:

Big companies have teams who are very good at their specific jobs. I know this because as an SEO consultant, I'm often working with a much larger team helping companies learn how to rank high in search engines. So if you're trying to outrank the big guns with a team of SEO specialists, you have your work cut out for you.

I don't say this to discourage you. I just want you to be realistic about your resources, your SEO strategy and your chance of ranking on the first page. If you're going to dedicate resources (time, energy and possibly some money) to SEO, you want it to be worth your while. Right? Right!

## Step 6: Eliminate, cull and prioritize your keywords

Now that you have a list of *relevant* keywords you know people have historically *typed into the search engine*s, you need to go to your trusty Excel spreadsheet. Transfer over all the keywords you've chosen (include competition and local search count columns). Now take a look at what you have.

| Keyword | Avg. Monthly Se | Competition |
|---|---|---|
| looking for seo expert | 50 | 0.27 |
| professional seo expert | 50 | 0.28 |
| atlanta seo consultant | 110 | 0.5 |
| seo trainer in atlanta | 0 | 0 |
| seo consultant | 6600 | 0.74 |
| seo training | 8100 | 0.75 |

These are the actual words that you are going to use on your website pages. If any of the words: don't really fit your business, are too general, offer too much competition or you can't imagine actually using them in your copy, cut them out or move them down the list. There are two ways of categorizing keywords:

1. **Put the best keywords at the top** and list them in descending order.

2. **Organize your keywords** from the most broad and general at the top of the page and work your way down to the more specific keywords.

This step is all about culling and prioritizing your keywords so you have a nice list of about 5-20 keywords to begin working with.

## Step 7: Match your keywords to each of your website pages

Hurrah! You've made it to the last step of keyword research. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. Promise.

This final step involves assigning your keywords to specific web pages. **This step is very important—and one of the most overlooked steps of SEO.** And again, it just takes a healthy dose of common sense.

Although the number of keywords you can use on a page varies (you can select one, two or three keywords), let's play it safe and stick with two. Why is that? Because it's actually pretty difficult trying to work these keyword phrases into your copy. Trust me (I do this for a living, remember?) The more keywords you have, the harder it is.

Remember: You don't optimize a WEBSITE. You optimize PAGES. Each page is its own entity.

Of course, this really depends on the number of words and the quality of content on your page.

Let's get started matching two keywords to each of your website pages.

1.  **Start pairing your keywords so you have similar keywords together.** For example:

    Atlanta Copywriter

    Copywriter in Atlanta

    Copywriting rates

    Freelance copywriter rates

    B2B copywriting samples

    Copywriting portfolio

    And so on.

2.  **List each of your website pages.** For example, my website pages may include:

    Home, About, Portfolio, Services, Rates, What Is Copywriting, The Copywriting Process and FAQs.

3.  **Assign your keyword groupings to a specific web page. This is also called "marrying your keywords to a website page," or matching them up.** See example on the next page:
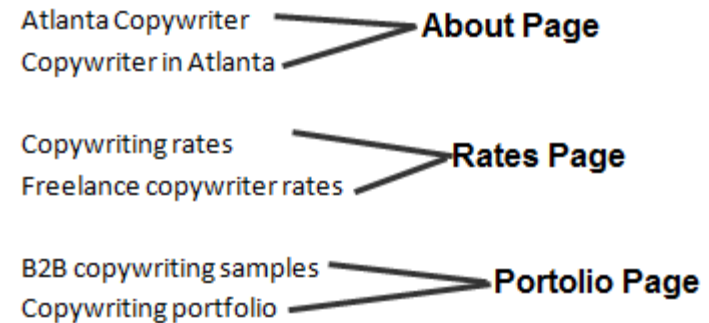


You don't have to get fancy. Just try and match up the keywords as best as possible. While they won't always fit perfectly, do your best.

Tip: When implementing an SEO strategy, don't get too hung up on perfection. While you want to be strategic and (of course) do things correctly, you can get stalled out by too much analysis.

One last word I'll put in about keywords—search engines are like babies. You *literally* must spoon-feed them these keywords and keyphrases by using them strategically and judiciously in your copy.

Using keywords in copy is the art and science of SEO copywriting. While we won't get into that here, know that there are certain places you should sprinkle in the keyword…and that you must do so without going overboard. Use the keyword too much and you risk turning off your readers, and incurring the wrath of Google.

## Keyword Research Tips

- **Look for the hidden gems.** Remember, competition matters because there are only so many spots on the first page of Google. Make sure you've chosen a mix of words that are both high and low competition, and that you realistically think you can rank for.

- **Prioritize your list.** Assign specific keywords to specific website pages. Remember: you optimize website *pages*, NOT a website. If you can only fit 1 keyword in per page, so be it. That's great.

## Keyword Research Mistakes

- **Trying to rank for 100 keywords**. The more keywords you have, the more you'll spread your efforts too thin. Pick 2-3 primary keywords and 5-15 overall.

- **Selecting 5 keywords per page**. It's a big mistake to try and get overly ambitious. Start out with 1-2 keywords per page. You'll see what I mean when you actually try to work these keywords into your copy.

- **Not knowing your competition**. I can't emphasize enough how futile your SEO efforts will be if you're trying to unseat an organization that has tons of resources dedicated to SEO.  Know who your competition is for the keywords that you're trying to rank for. You have to do at

least as much work (if not more) than the companies in the top spots.

- **Choosing a keyword that's not relevant to your site**. Just because "Tiger Woods" and "Kim Kardashian" are highly searched keywords, this does NOT mean you should use them on your website. For example, "Atlanta advertising copywriter" is a hidden gem (low competition, high search count), but I have no business using it on my website because I do not provide any services related to ads or advertising.

Are you still with me? Then congratulations! You've mastered keyword research, the bane of SEO attempts by small business owners and solopreneurs everywhere.

**If you're still struggling with this, here are a few more ideas:**

1. Pick up another resource to read about keywords. I recommend checking out these two resources from Moz and CopyBlogger:

   http://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo/keyword-research

   http://www.copyblogger.com/keyword-research/

2. Re-read this workbook chapter.

3. Outsource keyword research. One caveat: even if you hire someone to help you, I recommend at least trying to

do the process by yourself the first time. You'll get a
much clearer picture and will be able to collaborate more
effectively with your SEO professional.

Remember…

The most important thing is
to get started. A half decent
keyword is better than NO
keyword.

# Did you like this report?

This keyword research guide is part of my ebook, *How to SEO Your Site: A DIY Guide for Small Business Owners*. This ebook will teach you:

- The 8 places to incorporate your keywords on each and every website page (p. 39)
- The #1 SEO activity that will bring you 55% more visitors, 97% more inbound links and 434% more indexed pages (p. 47)
- When and how to use long tail keywords (p. 50)
- What exactly backlinks are and how to get them (p. 56)
- 9 tactics for successful off-page SEO (p. 59)
- One of the most important rules you must remember when tracking your progress (p. 67)

Find out more about the ebook here or at www.jennymunn.com.

To your SEO success!

# Questions? Comments? Stay In Touch!

Take the next step. If you'd like ongoing SEO information *designed specifically for small businesses*, sign up for my monthly enewsletter at www.jennymunn.com where I'll provide tips, advice and case studies.

**Drop me a line anytime**:

Email: Jenny@JennyMunn.com | Twitter: @jennymunn

# About Jenny Munn

Jenny Munn is a freelance Atlanta SEO Consultant who specializes in keyword research and SEO strategy. As a former SEO copywriter, Jenny had the privilege of working with The Home Depot, Georgia Pacific, The Real Chow Baby, SunGard, and many others. Today she focuses on teaching marketers, digital agencies and business owners how to create and implement an SEO strategy for online marketing and lead gen success. Using her own DIY SEO strategy, Jenny has generated 50% of her business through a well-optimized WordPress website.

For more information visit her blog at www.JennyMunn.com/blog