

The Great „Competition Research” Myth

**Why Most “Rules” (even of the “of thumb”
type) And Automated Competition Research
Software Cannot Compete With A Bit Of
Solid Head-Scratching And Use Of Good
Old Common Sense**

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Ever done "competition analysis" and wondered

- how many "competing pages" are too many?
- What an acceptable "allintitle"/"allinurl" competition value is?
- What the maximum "page-rank" of your competition on page 1 should be? Etc, etc, etc?

If that's you, you'll love this report! (because it'll remove all your headaches in one go!;-)I

Hi there,

my name is Veit Schenk, and in this report I'll share with you what I've found out about keyword and competition research "playing" with many tools like Market Samurai, SENUke, Micronichefinder, Keyword Corral, and looking at courses like George Brown's Sniper course, bum-marketing etc.

All of these tools and courses have one thing in common:

they attempt to take **some sort of measure** like e.g. the number of competing pages for a certain keyword and then **give you an indication whether it is easy to compete for the keyword**.

And by "compete" I mean of course that you have a fighting chance to get your own website, optimized for that keyword into the top 3-5 of Google (because that's where the traffic is).

So, what you'll see here is what I found in the process of getting plenty of websites, articles, hubpages, squidoo lenses etc to rank in various niches (and many more *never* to appear anywhere near the top of Google, Bing or Yahoo).

Wherever possible, I'll give you examples or counter-examples that illustrate why most of these "rules (of thumb)" are flawed and why you should always use common sense when looking at the competition.

And that should go a long way to answer questions like:

1. What about how many competing pages?
2. What about the page rank of the top ten sites?
3. What about the number of back links the top ten sites have?

Just as a "disclaimer": I'm not an SEO guru by any means. I know a few things

about SEO, but certainly not everything there is to know.

Could I get even better results if I did? Probably!

But, guess what?

I've got a bunch of little affiliates sites sitting pretty in Google and doing exactly what they're supposed to do: make money on auto-pilot.

And frankly, that's all I care about.

So, what you're seeing here is based on about 3 years worth of trial and (lots of) error and a bunch of common sense.

Which incidentally has a great upshot: it's all super-simple;-)

Ok, let's go!

Myth #1: Using number of "competing pages" as an indication of how competitive the landscape is

Right, under this heading I'll put everything that says you need to look at

- the number of results shown in Google
- the use of allintitle, allinanchor
- the number of results shown when entering your search query in quotes
- ...

The underlying assumption is of course that the more competing pages there are, the higher the competition.

And although there is *some truth* to this, there are just too many counter-examples that show you that **you simply cannot use a fixed number and make an informed decision based on this.**

Here's reason #1 why there isn't a straight correlation between number of pages returned and the level of real competition:

Let me give you a very simple (artificial example):

let's assume you are looking for a "best webhosting".

Google returns around 269.000 results when you enter the term without quotes (meaning: somewhere on the sites Google returns, you'll find the words "best" and "webhosting", in some sort of order).

When you enter the term with quotes (meaning the term "best webhosting" has to appear just like that somewhere on the pages Google returns), then you get around 88.700 results.

Without quotes under 300.000, with quotes under 100.000, so not necessarily "easy", but certainly doable.

So, on the surface, that should be easy(ish).

The "problem" is this: there is only a very limited number of hosting companies out there, and they all really, **really, REALLY** want to be at the top for the term "best webhosting".

And because there are only a few of them there, there is only a limited number of webpages (and hence results in Google) for the term "best webhosting".

Ok, in practice, there are a lot of affiliates trying to sell hosting deals, so you'll find quite a few pages, but you get the idea: if there are only a handful of competitors but they really know what they're doing, then it's going to be tough to break in there.

Here's another a real-world example you can use to remember the concept:

the "cola" market is dominated by 2 big players and a handful of small(ish) competitors.

And they all want to be at the top of their customers' and prospects' minds.

I mean really, **really, REALLY** want to be right up there.

So, they spend something like gazillions of dollars every year to make sure they're at the top.

Very few players (mental translation: very few results pages) but fierce competition.



Here's reason #2 why there isn't a straight correlation between number of pages returned and the level of real competition:

Google (I'm using Google as the representative of all search-engines) tries to show relevant information.

And when you look up how Google works, you'll find that they simply compute some measure of relevance and when you enter your search query, ONE of their servers tells you roughly how many relevant results might be in their index, and another one serves up the most relevant of those results.

Take as an example the search term "led grow lights"

Type this into Google, without and with quotes and you'll get these results:

1) without quotes, you'll get around 536.000 results:

Web [Images](#) [Videos](#) [Maps](#) [News](#) [Shopping](#) [Mail](#) [more](#) ▼



led grow lights

About 536,000 results (0.15)



Everything

Images

Videos

Shopping

Discussions

More

Any time

Past 2 days

[LED Grow Lights, Reviews, & Articles](#) ☆ 🔍

LED grow lights reviews & articles. Review & compare LED grow lights. 90W & 350W LED grow light. Information for survivalists & medical cannabis ...
[www.myhydroponicgardening.com/](#) - Cached - Similar

[Top LED Grow Lights](#) ☆ 🔍

All About LED Grow Lights & Organic Garden How Tos For The Beginning Gardener
[topledgrowlights.com/](#) - Cached

[Led Grow Lights | Top LED Grow Lights](#) ☆ 🔍

There are a lot of things to consider when you are building your own LED grow light system.
[topledgrowlights.com/category/grow-lights/led-grow-lights/](#) - Cached

[Led Grow Light Systems | Top LED Grow Lights](#) ☆ 🔍

and

2) with quotes you'll get 1.410.000 results.



"led grow lights"

Page 9 of about 1,410,000 results (0.54 seconds)

Adv

Everything

Images

Videos

Shopping

Discussions

More

Any time

Past 3 months

All results

Related searches

Led Grow Lights

Leading LED Lights Online Shop Factory Direct Price, 7/24 Support!
LEDLights.LightInTheBox.com

led grow lights ☆ 🔍

LED Grow Lights. Two R220SB red grow lights, one B60XB blue grow light, one 2-foot track, three track light fixtures, power cord. 24 watts, 120 volt AC.

ledgrowlights.geqczlqupo.staticcling.org/

Fan of Baseball ☆ 🔍

... Indoor Go Karting Los Angles, California · ira gold · italy tours · Kids Current Events · Kraftwerk k9 · lake management · **LED Grow Lights ...**
www.fanofbaseball.com/

Interesting Articles ☆ 🔍

First question: WHAT? More with quotes than without?

Normally, it is "supposed" to be the other way around, right?

Well, that's just the way Google works.

One of the server-twins thinks that for the query in quotes (you want exactly that text to appear somewhere) it can serve up MORE relevant pages than for the query that's loosely based around "led grow lights".

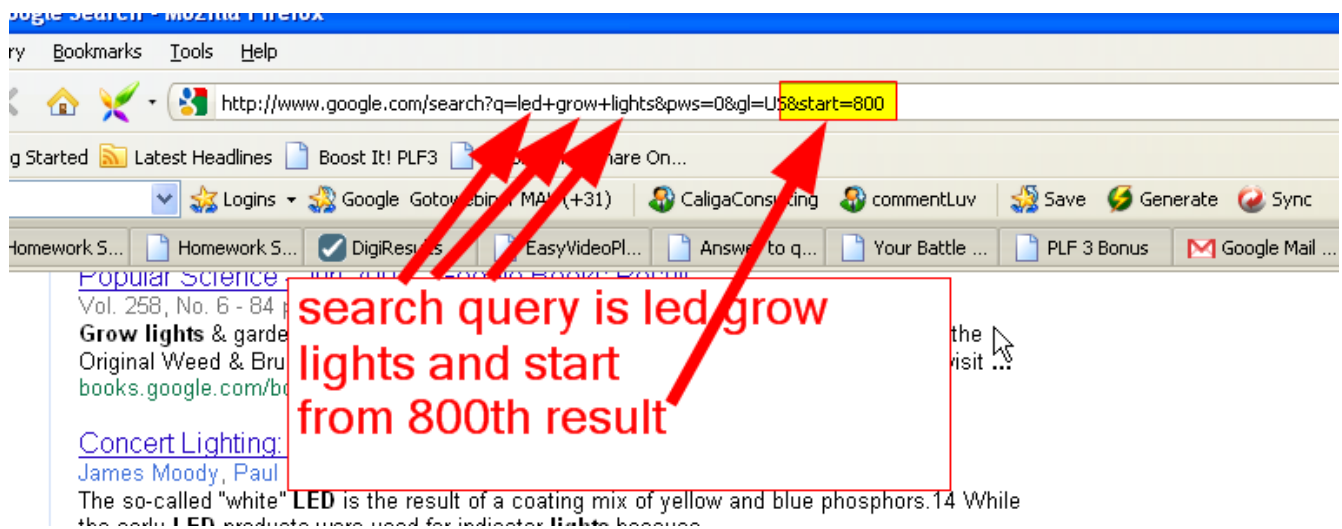
Second question: are there really close to half a million results pages or even 1.4 million results pages?

So, I scroll down to the bottom and jump to the last page. Incidentally, I've set the number of search results to 100 instead of 10, so if you only get 10 results in one go, you're going to have to scroll through a bunch of pages.

Alternatively, you can add this string to the end of the URL of your Google search-query:

`&start=xxx`

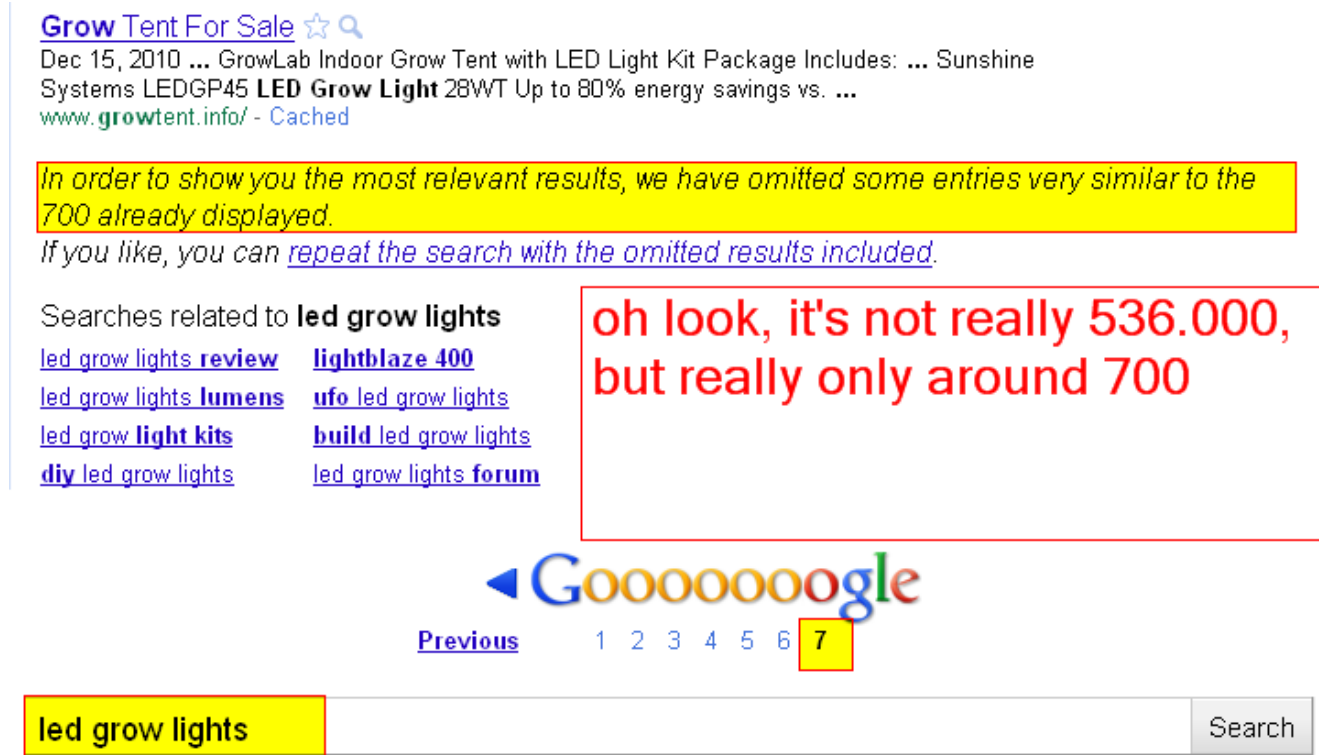
(where xxx is the number of the result from where you want to see results).



So, when we do this, it turns out that instead of 536.000 results, we only have around 700 that are truly relevant.

(remember: Google only wants to show **relevant** results!)

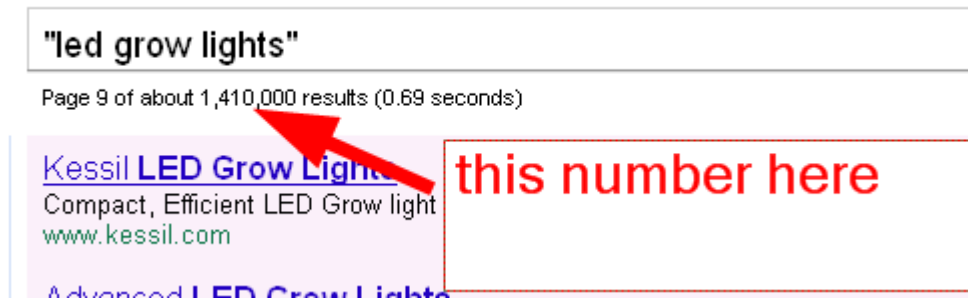
And that's of course what the second Google twin-server decides:



For the exact match the case is very similar, instead of 1.4 million it turns out there are only really about 800 or so relevant results (821 last time I checked).

So, what does that mean?

First of all, the numbers alone tell you that the number of pages returned at the top of Google



is isn't even in any sort of correlation with what Google itself thinks is really relevant.

In this case: 536.000 translates to 700 relevant pages, and 1.410.000 translates to 821 relevant pages. Errr, and now?

Ok, now you might think: awesome, all I need to check is how many "real" relevant pages are out there and that should give me an indication as to what the real level of competition is.

Unfortunately, as this thread (which starts with the promising title that 70% of all "allintitle" results are plain wrong, which they are...)

<http://www.warriorforum.com/warrior-special-offers-forum/252539-search-engine-optimization-do-you-know-allintitle-wrong-70-time-keyword-quantifier-true-count-unfolds-4.html>

shows, it ain't so easy.

Using fixed thresholds in practice gone wrong examples

But, before we get there, here a few more examples from practice WHY/HOW

using fixed thresholds (rules) simply doesn't work in practice:

Just to give you a few specific examples (I'm blurring the actual keywords, as they're all sites of mine apart from one).

When you use the "golden rules" as suggested by Ed Dale of the 30 day challenge, then you should only consider keywords that have

- at most 30.000 webpages globally that mention the keyword in that exact order (i.e. phrase match)

Ok, just taking 6 of my sites which all ranked on page 1 of Google within at most 3 weeks with me doing very little in terms of getting backlinks (the "body building tips" site isn't mine, it's there to illustrate a particular point on on-page optimization later on).

In this screen-shot from inside Market Samurai, you'll see the results for 7 keywords without any filters set: (if you don't have Market Samurai and would like to follow along, you can get a completely free trial at <http://www.bizionaire.com/marketsamuraifreetrial>)

Keyword Research StomperNet

Organic: Total Searches + SEO Traffic (SEOT) + Phrase-to-Broad (PBR) + Trends

Adwords: Adwords Traffic (AWT) + Adwords CTR (AWCTR) + Adwords CPC (AWCPC) +

Competition: SEO Comp (SEOC) + Title Comp (SEOTC) + Title/Comp (SEOTCR) + Adwords Comp (AWC) +

Commerciality: OCI + Adwords Value (AWV) + SEO Value (SEOV) +

Match Type: Broad | Period: Daily | Preset: **No Filters** ← Analyze Keywords Hide

	Keyword (7 active, 0 removed, 0 filtered)	SEOT	PBR	SEOC	Trends	AWCPC	AWV	SEOV -		
<input type="checkbox"/>	[blurred]	137	82%	134,000	[bar chart]	€7.45	€0.00	€1018.43	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	[blurred]	75	67%	128,000	[bar chart]	€2.22	€2.22	€165.53	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	[blurred]	167	100%	109,000	[bar chart]	€0.85	€2.55	€142.02	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	body building tips	457	16%	60,900	[bar chart]	€0.27	€1.08	€123.40	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	[blurred]	559	55%	245,000	[bar chart]	€0.21	€4.20	€117.44	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	[blurred]	559	100%	158,000	[bar chart]	€0.05	€0.00	€27.96	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	[blurred]	18	100%	9,260	[bar chart]	€1.43	€0.00	€25.67	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

apart from one all have decent traffic (the last one is one that right now in winter

has nearly no searches, but really picks up in summer).

And all of them rank on page 1 of Google. Very easily in fact.

Now, let's set the filter to the "Golden rules": in other words the SEO competition field to 30.000:

The screenshot shows a keyword research tool interface. At the top, the keyword is "body building tips". Below it, the "Keyword Research" section has several filter categories: Organic, Adwords, Competition, and Commerciality. The "Competition" filter is set to "SEO Comp (SEOC)" with a maximum value of 30,000. The "Preset" is set to "Golden Rules". Below the filters, a table shows the results for "body building tips". The table has columns for SEOT, PBR, SEOC, Trends, and AWC. The SEOC value is 60,900, which is above the 30,000 filter. A red box highlights the text "see that: 6 FILTERED by the golden rules" with an arrow pointing to the "6 filtered" part of the table header.

Keyword (1 active, 0 removed, 6 filtered)	SEOT	PBR	SEOC	Trends	AWC
body building tips	457	16%	60,900		€0

Result?

All but one are filtered out. According to the rules, ALL of my sites (which took 3 weeks at most to get to the top of page 1 of Google) are too difficult, I should NOT go after them.

Because, well there are just too many competing pages.

This just as another illustration that there really is no such thing as "too many competing pages", there is only competition on page 1:

The only "true" competition is on page 1 in the top 3-5 spots, so page 1 is what you should be analyzing.

So, let's have a look at the page 1 competitors for the keyword

"body building tips" (which according to the "competing pages" rule, SHOULD be the 2nd easiest of the lot above, right?)

As you can see in the next graphic, the guy in #1 spot has a page-rank (PR) of only 1, "only" 459 backlinks to his homepage, no EDU/GOV backlinks, isn't in DMOZ or the Yahoo directory and the site is only 3 years old.

A baby compared to the other guys, right?

And yet, they're at #1 of Google.

Why?

Well, you have to look at their site and you'll quickly see why!

Keyword: body building tips Track Rank

SEO Competition

Off Page On Page

Domain Age (DA) Domain Backlinks (BLD) Keyword in Title? (Title) Google Cache Age (CA)
 PageRank (PR) Domain .edu/.gov Backlinks (BLEG) Keyword in URL? (URL)
 Google Index Count (IC) DMOZ Directory (DMZ) Keyword in Description? (Desc)
 Page Backlinks (BLP) Yahoo Directory (YAH) Keyword in Header Tag? (Head)

Type of Backlink: Max Backlinks:

#	URL	DA	PR	IC	BLP	BLD	BLEG	DMZ	YAH	Title	URL	Desc	Head	CA
1	http://bodybuildingtipsguide.com/	3	1	4,000	459	4,589	0	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	3
2	http://www.google.com/images?q	12	0	29,800,000	-	1,290,581,712	84,067,146	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	-
3	http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/	12	3	93,600	19	277,758	7,257	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4
4	http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/	12	2	93,600	25	277,758	7,257	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	3
5	http://www.gain-weight-muscle-fa	8	3	361	28	5,067	0	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	3
6	http://www.man-health-fitness-sol	7	3	213	20	449	0	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	2
7	http://bodybuildingtips.com/	9	1	9	13	27	0	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	3
8	http://www.bodybuildingtipsandtri	4	2	171	26	30	0	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	3
9	http://www.bodybuilding2000.com	9	2	80	9,548	76,763	1,384	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	3
10	http://www.bodybuildingforyou.co	-	1	44,000	10	9,690	341	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	4

They site <http://bodybuildingtipsguide.com/> is at the top of page 1 of Google for "body building tips" because a) I imagine they're providing a good user-experience (please let me know if you're into body building and find this site useful) and b)

they know a thing or two about search-engine-optimization.

Just look at the front-page and you'll quickly see tons of related keywords, with headers, sub-headers, tons of internal linking around their site etc.

Just for kicks, I've put red arrows to some of the keywords they're using on their home-page:

The screenshot shows the homepage of 'BODY BUILDING Tips Guide.com'. At the top, there are navigation links: 'Stretching Exercises', 'WeightLifting Exercises', 'Weight Loss Tips', 'Fitness Equipments', and 'Strength Training'. Below these is a banner with a bodybuilder silhouette and the site logo. To the right of the banner is an advertisement for 'Get The Best On This Year Winning Product' featuring various supplement bottles. Below the banner is another set of navigation links: 'Body Building Tips', 'Body Building Supplements', 'Fitness', 'Body Building Exercises', and 'Diet and Nutrition'. A search bar with a 'Search' button is located below these links. The main content area features an article titled 'How to Build Muscle Fast' with a photo of a bodybuilder and a text block. To the right of the article is a 'GET STARTED TODAY' banner. Below the article are two columns of links: 'Weightlifting Exercises' (with sub-links: Weight Lifting Exercise, Olympic, Weight Lifting Belts, Weight Lifting Bench, Weight Lifting Diet) and 'Bodybuilding Exercises' (with sub-links: Body Building Exercise, Brabell Squat, Body Building Routine, Dead Lift, Exercise Addiction). Below these are two more columns: 'Bodybuilding Supplements' (with sub-links: Alpha Lipoic Acid, Choosing Supplements) and 'Strength Training' (with sub-links: Strength Training, Baseball Strength Training). On the right side of the page, there is an email subscription form and an RSS feed link labeled 'Subscribe to Rss'. At the bottom right, there are two promotional boxes: '50 Extreme Workout! Get lean & ripped fast workouts www.MaxWorkouts.com' and 'Easy Exercise Program! Build Your Dream Bod Exercise Program. 10'. Red arrows are drawn across the page pointing to various text elements, including the navigation links, the search bar, the article title, the sub-links, and the promotional boxes.

A similar example is Eben Pagan's <http://www.doubleyourdating.com/>.

They know a thing about SEO and it shows on their homepage

(they also know a thing about testing, so whenever you go there, you'll find a new version, sometimes totally stripped down without any extra keywords, sometimes, like today from my computer, again with lots of content around related keywords)

So, the big message here (or first HINT of what you need to look at) is:

it's not necessarily the **off-off-page** stuff (i.e. what the competition are doing in terms of off-page factors), but rather what's happening on-page.

Ok, for full disclosure: the example at the bottom of the 7 sites I showed you above, the one which has only 9260 competing pages was the easiest to rank, it shot straight to #1 on Google and hasn't budged since.

However, I've had a good go at sites with fewer competing pages than that and never had any success with them. Why? Because I ignored what's REALLY happening on the top 5 sites....

With that, let's have a look at some of the other "automated" measures for determining whether it's easy to get onto page 1:

Myth #2: Page Rank matters

Ok, I'm by no means an authority on page-rank, I can only share with you what results I've gotten.

Do you want the short version?

Here it is: forget about page-rank, it doesn't mean anything.

Quick example?

One of my little sites sitting pretty in the midst of well-established, high PR sites, getting traffic day in, day out. Oh, after throwing a massive 52 backlinks at it.

Wow....

Off Page
 On Page

Domain Age (DA)
 Domain Backlinks (BLD)
 Keyword in Title? (Title)
 Google Cache Age (CA)

PageRank (PR)
 Domain .edu/.gov Backlinks (BLEG)
 Keyword in URL? (URL)

Google Index Count (IC)
 DMOZ Directory (DMZ)
 Keyword in Description? (Desc)

Page Backlinks (BLP)
 Yahoo Directory (YAH)
 Keyword in Header Tag? (Head)

Type of Backlink:
 Max Backlinks:

#	URL	PR	BLP	BLD	BLEG	DMZ	YAH	Title	URL	Desc	Head	CA
1	http://www.zillow.com/homes/for_sale/Portland-OR/	6	180	3,745,332	173,526	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	0
2	http://www.homes-for-sale-portland.com/	3	174	228	0	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	3
3	http://www.homes.com/Real_Estate/OR/City/PORTLAND/	3	766	670,133	953	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	0
4	http://www.trulia.com/OR/Portland/	3	636	1,305,917	1,829	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	0
5	http://www.maxwellsinclair.com/	2	1,855	1,986	0	N	N	N	N	N	N	3
6	http://www. [redacted] .com/	0	36	52	0	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
7	http://www.rmls.com/	4	1,738	5,007	17	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	4
8	http://realestate.oregonlive.com/	7	5,118	5,413	0	N	N	N	N	N	N	0
9	http://www.ownaportlandhome.com/	4	1,082	1,211	0	Y	N	N	N	N	N	3
10	http://www.portlandhousesforsale.net/	0	75	76	0	N	N	N	Y	N	N	4

The big difference? It's completely on-page optimized!

Had I seen the results page in Market Samurai before and believed in the whole "PR" thing, I would never have gone after that keyword.

Similarly for the backlinks: look at all those big red boxes screaming "stay away", you have NO chance of ever playing with us.

Sure....

Granted, that's just one example, and of course there are plenty of cases where you cannot compete with the guys at the top when they have "only" high PR and you have outstanding on-page optimization.

That's why, a little further down I'm going into more detail on how you can use PR as a "guiding principle" when evaluating competition. Look out for the concept of "competing with the **authority** of an entire site" vs "competing with the PR of a single page"

Ok, if allintitle, number of competing pages, page-rank and number of backlinks all doesn't count (ok, don't get me wrong, they give you an indication of what *may* be going on), then what can we use to check if we have a good chance to quickly rank?

Well, another well-established "myth" is that the number of articles, hubpages etc (generally speaking: so-called "Web2.0 properties") are around, then you have a good chance of ranking.

Let's have a look at competition from Web2.0 properties then:

Myth #3: If the market is full of Web2.0 you can/cannot easily rank

Ok, there is so much conflicting information out there, this is almost funny.

There are some tools out there (including e.g. SENuke) which basically say:

hey, if the first X results of Google have lots of so-called Web2.0 properties (sites like ezinearticles (or any other article directory), hubpages, squidoo lenses, scribd, buzzle etc) in it, then that means that Google is also showing "low quality" (ish) sites, and hence it should be easy to rank.

So, SENuke and other tools then compute a score based on this and tell you to go for it.

Other tools on the other hand compute a "saturation" measure, and they tell you:

hey, if there are plenty of web 2.0 properties in the top X, then that means that tons of affiliates are going after this term and you should stay away from it.

Well, first thing: most affiliates are lazy sh*ts, and they don't really do the work that needs to be done to really push their sites/articles/videos up the rankings.

So that definitely should NOT be a reason to stay away from a nice 'n juicy keyword.

Secondly, and this goes back to the "Google trying to serve up relevant" content theme: it really depends on the niche.

I know it sounds weird, but it really depends on the niche, the keyword etc whether a lot of Web2.0 properties are a good or a "bad" sign.

Sometimes I find an ezinearticle (or articlesbase or findarticles) PLUS a hubpage PLUS a squidoo lens on the first page of Google and I have no chance of getting my own article in there.

And other times it's just the other way round, I just need to mention to Google that I've got a new article and le voila, there it is.

Apparently, I just published just the type of "relevant" content Google wants to serve up.

But of course, the other way it happens too:

no Web2.0 property in sight, I put mine in and yehaa, page one domination is mine. And then in other cases, no Web2.0 property in sight, and mine has just joined all the other ones that will never be shown.

What do you learn from this?

Something beautiful and liberating in fact!

It's the basic principle of direct marketing: you just cannot know (in this case: in what kind of mood Google is) and hence: you need to test.

It really depends on the market, on the keywords, on the web2.0 properties (what's "hot" in the eyes of Google changes on a regular basis, right now Buzzle.com seems to be one of big G's favourites, but I'm sure they'll go out of fashion as soon as something new and fresh comes along)

Right then, let us sum up:

1. Using thresholds on some numbers related to "competing pages" (whether it's in the title, the URL, the body, with quotes or without etc) is pretty much only a very rough indicator of competition levels.
2. Page-rank (PR) can be used as a very rough indication of competition levels, but really only when you publish the exact same type of property (e.g.: you're trying to compete with another youtube video. Well, in that case it make sense to look at their PR to get an idea of what types of backlinks you may need to guarantee success (although you by now know: there are no guarantees in this game)
3. Forget about any measure related to "saturation" of the top X search results with Web2.0 properties. First of all, Google constantly changes what it considers a "worthy" Web2.0 property (apart from of course Youtube, which it owns), and secondly, it really depends on the keyword, on the niche, on a bunch of other factors Google is never going to tell you about.

At the end of the day, it all boils down to this

It turns out, that

really what you need to do is look at the strength of the top 10 sites and see if you can compete with them.

Which kinda makes sense, because ultimately you need to have your site in the top 3 to get any real traffic.

And btw, it really doesn't matter whether you're looking at operators like

- allintitle
- allinanchor
- allinwhatever
- number of competing pages with or without quotes

they only give you a very, very rough guesstimate as to how much "real" competition is out there.

At the end of the day, you'll always have to look at the top 3 (max 5) because they're the ones you're trying to compete with. Check out what they're doing, do it better and beat them. Pretty much every time.

The End

So, if all this stuff doesn't work, what do I do instead?

Ok, although that's pretty much it, **when you're quickly testing a market, you don't want to spend hours analyzing exactly what the top 3 are really doing**, but instead get a quick idea of the "competitiveness" of a market so you can quickly put out some content, see if it starts ranking with minimal effort and then decide whether it's worth your while.

So, here's my process how I evaluate page 1 of Google.

And when I say page 1, I use the top 100 for my evaluation.

(REMEMBER: we're in "hey, I cannot be bothered to critically analyze the top 5 for each keyword, I just want a quick 'n dirty measure of some "chance of success" with a big list of keywords"-mode. Hence: look at top 100, not just top 10)

(if you're still only looking at 10, go to the settings:



and set the number of results to 100:

Chinese (traditional) Greek Per
 Croatian Hebrew Pol
 Czech Hindi Por
 Danish Hungarian Rom
 Dutch Icelandic Rus

SafeSearch Filtering [Google's SafeSearch](#) blocks web pages containing explicit content.

Use strict filtering (Filter both explicit text and explicit images)

Use moderate filtering (Filter explicit images only - display safe search icons)

Do not filter my search results

[Lock SafeSearch](#) This will apply strict filtering to all searches.

Number of Results Google's default (100 results) provides the fastest results.

Display results per page.

Results Window Open search results in a new browser window.

(remember to "save" your settings at the bottom of the page)

I then search for the keyword in Google (without quotes), **completely ignore any number of result pages showing up** and then search for the term "article".

(in Firefox hit "CTRL-f", then type "article")

This will find things like ezinearticles (and pretty much the majority of article directories), buzzle etc.

If it shows up in on page 1 or 2, I mark that down in my trusty spreadsheet.

Also, if there are hubpages and/or squidoo lenses and/or youtube videos, I'll put a tickbox in my trusty excel spreadsheet.

Why? Didn't I just say sometimes it's "good", sometimes "bad"?

Correct!

That's why I take note, simply collect a bunch of candidate keywords and then put them into 2 piles:

- the **"lots of Web2.0 properties in top X"** (the smaller X, the better, in practice I get excited when I see 2 or more Web2.0 properties in the top 30, and I get **really** excited when I see 3 or more Web2.0 properties in the top 15)
- And the **"no Web2.0 properties in the top X"** pile. In this case I'll go for X>50(ish)

For lot 1, I'm usually done, I typically make sure that SOME of the Web2.0 properties have a page-rank below 3 (one of those exceptions where I use PR) (by now it should be clear why I can use PR here: because I'm comparing apples with apples, I want to set up the exact same property, and all I need to do is beat their backlinks and I'm (usually) done)

For the second lot (the "no Web2.0 properties" lot), I'll have a more in-depth look as to what's happening in the top 10:

1. If I find there are mainly root-domains that are being shown by Google, then this sets off some warning bells. If on the other hand I find lots of internal pages, then I'm a little happier. If it's internal pages on .GOV/.EDU sites, that's "bad".
2. If there are web2.0 properties (especially videos) and they have a high page-rank and lots of backlinks, this sets off warning bells too. Web2.0 with low PR is good. (this is one of the few cases where I use PR as an indicator, see above)
3. Lots of .GOV sites/.EDU sites are "BAD".
4. Lots of sites with good on-page optimization (just the basics that Market Samurai is showing) is "BAD". Why? Because competing with them on a "like-by-like" basis is getting more difficult and I don't like difficult. Takes too much time.
5. just as a side-note: ignore all "news" type sites. They're typically only there for a short while and then disappear again. They usually have a really low PR and everything shows up as "green" in Market Samurai, so you get all excited. Don't! Just ignore them completely.

And then I give each keyword marks on roughly how good/bad the competition is.

On page vs off page optimization

Incidentally, in both cases, the most important thing for me is once again, how on-page optimized these results are:

The more they're on-page optimized, the more (in my opinion) Google has already found what they really want to show (i.e. Google thinks they've found something really relevant), and the more I have to make an effort to beat them.

So, whenever possible, I'll give precedence to keywords that are NOT on-page optimized.

Here's my reasoning: (this is the bit I referred to earlier in the "PR is useless (mostly) section")

We know that Google wants to show relevant results.

So, when it shows plenty of root-domains (which are mostly NOT on-page optimized), then this suggests to me that

- Google doesn't have the perfect "relevant page", BUT, at the same time
- Google thinks these sites are so incredibly relevant (or: have such **authority**) that they are a good enough match, whatever they say will satisfy the person who is looking for information.

On the other hand, when it shows mostly internal pages (which are mostly NOT on-page optimized), then this suggests to me that

- Google thinks it has a perfect (or nearly so) "relevant page", so it shows it.

BUT: because these results are NOT (at least in many cases) on-page optimized, it should in practice be relatively easy for me to duplicate what they are doing, (in terms of content and backlinking) and at the same time make sure my on-page optimization blows them out of the water.

In the first case I'm competing with the *authority* (in the eyes of Google) of the entire site, in the second case I'm competing with the *relevance* of a single page. I prefer the latter battle.

Finally, when I've compiled a nice big list, then I simply pick 50% from one pile, 50% from the other pile and I'm done with my keyword and competition research.

The 50-50 rule is simply based on the observation that for any particular niche I cannot tell in advance whether the "web2.0" heavy keywords are easier to rank for than the "clear of all Web2.0" keywords.

So I simply take half-and-half, quickly produce some content and see what happens.

And only when I get the first signs from Google, then I refine and focus on the lot that appears to be working best (for this particular niche).

So, some practical examples:

Case-studies

Let's start with an example of "BAD" according to the rules above:

The keyword is "quit smoking" (which I expect is going to be difficult to compete for)

And yes, the SEO competition results shown in Market Samurai confirm this:

SEO Competition



Google Cache Age (CA) - The number of days since Google last reindexed the page.

Off Page
 On Page

Domain Age (DA)
 Domain Backlinks (BLD)
 Keyword in Title? (Title)
 Google Cache Age (CA)

PageRank (PR)
 Domain .edu/.gov Backlinks (BLEG)
 Keyword in URL? (URL)

Google Index Count (IC)
 DMOZ Directory (DMZ)
 Keyword in Description? (Desc)

Page Backlinks (BLP)
 Yahoo Directory (YAH)
 Keyword in Header Tag? (Head)

Type of Backlink:
 Max Backlinks:

#	URL	PR	BLP	BLD	BLEG	DMZ	YAH	Title	URL	Desc	Head	CA
1	http://www.smokefree.gov/	8	11,600	11,200	2,740	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	2
2	http://whyquit.com/	5	11,000	17,200	18	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	1
3	http://www.quitsmoking.com/	5	4,920	5,460	27	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	3
4	http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm	6	841	1,970,000	123	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	3
5	http://www.quitnet.com/	7	3,590	6,430	344	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	0
6	http://quitsmoking.about.com/	6	1,920	15,100	18	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	1
7	http://www.quitsmokingsupport.com/	5	862	2,640	30	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	0
8	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dn50mTEGnrU	5	172	1,000,000	3	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	0
9	http://www.metacafe.com/watch/756818/quit_smoking/	3	98	20,000	2	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	0
10	http://www.helpguide.org/mental/quit_smoking_cessation.ht	5	158	26,900	7	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	3
11	http://www.hoptechno.com/book43.htm	3	66	3,160	2	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	3
12	http://www.filtrim.com/	3	313	376	1	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	2

Lots of .GOV (root domain and internal page in Pos1 and Pos 4), otherwise mostly root domain, Web2.0 properties (youtube and metacafe) with high PR and a good number of backlinks and quite a few pages with quite a bit of on-page goodness going on.

All in all: "quit smoking" isn't a top priority for me.

Let's take a couple of examples that aren't quite as "hard-core", which have very similar traffic levels ("only" around 150 exact match searches per month) but are in my opinion very different in terms of "competition":

They are "**best stop smoking products**" and "10 ways to stop smoking"

The first one has quite a few root domains (#1 has a category, instead of root domain) in the top 10, whereas the second example has pretty much only real internal pages in the top 10.

SEO Competition



Off Page
 On Page

Domain Age (DA)
 Domain Backlinks (BLD)
 Keyword in Title? (Title)
 Google Cache Age (CA)

PageRank (PR)
 Domain .edu/.gov Backlinks (BLEG)
 Keyword in URL? (URL)

Google Index Count (IC)
 DMOZ Directory (DMZ)
 Keyword in Description? (Desc)

Page Backlinks (BLP)
 Yahoo Directory (YAH)
 Keyword in Header Tag? (Head)

Type of Backlink:
 Max Backlinks:

#	URL	PR	BLP	BLD	BLEG	DMZ	YAH	Title	URL	Desc	Head	CA
1	http://www.topconsumerreviews.com/stop-smoking/	3	22	3,616	0	N	N	N	N	N	N	0
2	http://www.smokingreviews.org/	2	2,128	2,240	0	N	N	N	N	N	N	4
3	http://www.stop-smoking-tips.com/quit-smoking-products.ht	3	1	2,915	0	N	N	N	N	N	N	5
4	http://www.stop-smoking-tips.com/	5	1,598	2,880	0	N	N	N	N	N	N	4
5	http://www.quitsmoking.com/	5	10,122	13,622	288	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	5
6	http://www.filtrim.com/	3	507	568	0	Y	N	N	N	N	N	6
7	http://ezinearticles.com/?Stop-Smoking-Products---What-Are-t	0	-	3,915,009	168,886	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	-
8	http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1793678/how_to_st	2	4	2,164,579	6,342	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	10
9	http://endsmokingtips.com/quit-smoking/best-products-to-qui	0	19	90	0	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	3
10	http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/quit-smoking-products/MY0	4	18	930,658	101,325	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	4

Both have an ezine article in the top 10 (pos 6 and 7) and both are mostly not optimized for the on-page factors (mostly all green or orange on the right hand side of the Market Samurai SEO competition page)

Keyword: 10 ways to stop smoking

Track Rank

SEO Competition



Off Page On Page

Domain Age (DA) Domain Backlinks (BLD) Keyword in Title? (Title) Google Cache Age (CA)

PageRank (PR) Domain .edu/.gov Backlinks (BLEG) Keyword in URL? (URL)

Google Index Count (IC) DMOZ Directory (DMZ) Keyword in Description? (Desc)

Page Backlinks (BLP) Yahoo Directory (YAH) Keyword in Header Tag? (Head)

Type of Backlink: Max Backlinks:

#	URL	PR	BLP	BLD	BLEG	DMZ	YAH	Title	URL	Desc	Head	CA
1	http://www.buzzle.com/articles/10-ways-to-quit-smoking.html	3	-	477,979	2,971	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	5
2	http://www.rd.com/living-healthy/25-ways-to-stop-smoking-cigar	5	110	2,924,098	11,127	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	1
3	http://www.quit-smoking-stop.com/ways-to-quit-smoking.html	3	12	1,068	26	N	N	N	N	N	Y	5
4	http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/nicotine-craving/SK00057	4	54	930,658	101,325	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	4
5	http://helpguide.org/mental/quit_smoking_cessation.htm	5	99	79,237	4,139	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	5
6	http://ezinearticles.com/?10-Ways-To-Stop-Smoking--Which-W	0	-	3,915,009	168,886	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	-
7	http://www.sovouwanna.com/10-ways-stop-smoking-4167.html	0	-	47,034	1,553	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	9
8	http://www.gumauctions.com/article/154/Need_a_quit_smokin	0	-	2,597	0	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	19
9	http://www.quitsmoking.com/books/nonag/10stages.htm	2	2	13,622	288	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	52
10	http://www.webmd.com/smoking-cessation/quit-smoking-10/re	4	11	13,728,636	84,594	Y	N	N	N	N	N	5

In this case I'm much happier with "10 ways to stop smoking" as it's all about internal pages, the top 5 aren't really optimized at all (in terms of on-page factors), so "10 ways to stop smoking" is added to my list.

Conclusion

In my experience it's simply not worth looking at measures such as "number of competing pages", "allintitle", "allinurl" etc, and really I only need to look at the top 3-5 on page of Google to figure out what the "real" competition is.

But, when putting out lots of content, it's often not practical to do an in-depth analysis of the top 3 pages, so, you need a few rules of thumb, so you can quickly compile lists of candidate keywords where you have a "fighting chance":

[this is the page to print out and stick next to your computer next time you do keyword/competition research]

I tend to go for keywords that

1. either have lots of Web2.0 properties in the results pages or
2. none and then
3. pick 50% from one pile and 50% from the other, simply because you just cannot know in advance which ones are going to work.

Then I make sure I go for keywords that

1. don't return lots of root-domains (so I don't have to compete with the authority of an entire domain),
2. but prefer the ones where I have lots of internal pages (preferably NOT on-page optimized), so I'm only competing with a single page.

I ignore news-sites in my analysis because they're here today, gone tomorrow.

But I don't ignore .gov and .edu sites (and a few of the other heavy-weights like wikipedia).

For the heavyweights, I have a separate rule: if they provide the exact answer people are looking for and they have now found the solution to their problem, then I stay away from it.

If on the other hand the heavies help them at the "information gathering" end of the buying cycle and then they're left hanging (as they're getting closer to the decision making end of the buying cycle), then I'll happily jump in and ignore the fact that I cannot be in the top 3 or 5, simply because people will click links even in position 5 and below, just because they didn't really find what they were looking for in the top 3(-5).

Like I said in the introduction, no rocket science here, just plain common sense and an understanding of what Google is trying to achieve.

Right, I hope this helps clear up some confusion about what "filters" to use.

Filters are a good starting point as they give an "indication" of what the competition "may" be like.

At the end of the day, you're going to have to use your common sense and a bit of an understanding of how Google wants to serve results.

The great news is this: the vast majority of your competitors will continue to use fixed thresholds, filters etc and hence leave a ton of juicy, ripe for the picking keywords untouched.

Go, get them!

Now, if you liked this report, could you do me a favor please?

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<http://www.bizionaire.com/competition-research/>

and hit the Facebook "Like" button or retweet it on Twitter. And of course, if you've got friends who might benefit from this, feel free to share it with them too.

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all the best and to your Online success

Veit