

WEBINAR SERIES

Off Madison Ave



From Keyword Research to Customer Communications

Mike Corak, Interactive Services Director

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Q&A

- **Are misspelled words as company names a bad idea, since there will be no search data for a “Flickr” or “Plurk” before they are created?**

Not necessarily. While we definitely recommend performing Verbal Cue Analysis before naming a product or service, there are other considerations at play when determining your brand strategy. Flickr and Plurk are services that simply didn't exist beforehand, so there was unlikely to be search volume for those services, anyway. And there is still something to be said for a unique and creative name for your product or service.

However, how you talk about that product and service should definitely be influenced by Verbal Cue Analysis or other audience vernacular research. Before launching a service like Flickr, we would recommend researching how people talk about photos. For example, do they tend to say “photo,” “photography,” or “pictures”? We'd also look at how they might talk about the service. Are people interested in an “online photo album”? An “image hosting” service? A “photo sharing” site (which is how Flickr ultimately chose to brand itself)? This data would help us decide what vernacular should be used when describing the service and creating key messages.

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- **How can you tell if a person's search terms really represent how they speak? Isn't a search term used just to find the right information?**

While there are definitely some differences between how people search and how they think or speak, the words they use are not different – because people always search using the words they know and are comfortable with. The difference between search behavior and actual speech is more related to things like word order and phrasing. For example, someone might search for “Michigan shoe recycle,” but say “Where can I recycle shoes in Michigan?” However, you’ll notice that the salient words are the same – Michigan, shoe and recycle.

We are not recommending that you adopt awkward constructions for your content just because that's how people tend to search. Instead, we're looking for the words and phrases themselves – for example, do most people say “movie” or “film”? “Bathing suit” or “swimsuit”? In this sense, search behavior would match how people think, because they'll enter the words they are most comfortable with.

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- **How do can I find out what keywords my target audience is using to find me?**

One limitation of this research method is that it's impossible to separate the keywords your target audience is using from similar keywords that may be used by people outside your target audience. That is, different groups may use the same or similar phrases when looking for different things. That's why we stress that search data is only a piece of the audience puzzle. Ideally, you'll use other research tools to give you a better idea of what your audience looks like. If you want to know what keywords your audience is *already* using to find you online, that's another story. There are many site analytics programs that can tell you how many people are visiting your site from search engines, as well as the keywords they are using to get there. Google Analytics is one free

- **If I have a new business idea. Can I use this for concept validation?**

Yes, you can use this type of research to gain insight into what consumers are interested in currently. For example, if you think there is a need for a new niche product that is not currently on the market, checking to see whether people are looking for that type of product could help validate your assumptions about demand.

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However, keep in mind that if your concept is unfamiliar to consumers, there's unlikely to be search volume specifically for it. For example, let's say you were working on the launch of TiVo. Before TiVo, no one had heard of DVR – so, search volume for “DVR” or “digital video recorder” phrases was likely nonexistent, or at least very low. This data alone could not have shown the incredible interest that consumers had for TiVo. So, in short, you should use this research to help you inform your new business ideas, but it's just one of many research methods to consider.

- **What is the timeframe to complete the research and see results?**

The research can be completed within a couple weeks using the right tools. This will give you a “moment in time” snapshot of trends and priorities. Ideally, however, you would do research like Verbal Cue Analysis regularly – say once per quarter – to see seasonal shifts, confirm that your findings hold true over time and identify changing trends.

The timeframe for seeing results will depend on what you do with the data. Once you've completed the research and analyzed results, your next steps could be anything from rebranding your product to simply reprioritizing your site's navigation. Changes to site navigation and online marketing campaigns usually show results more quickly, while large-scale changes to messaging or brand strategy can take years to reach full implementation and then achieve results.