

THE COMPLETE KEYWORD RESEARCH GUIDE

WORDTRACKER.COM

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When is a word a keyword?

Keywords are technically any word or combination of words you use to search with. However there is a lot more to them than just what you type in Google.

Just what makes a word ‘key’ anyway?

All search engines are there to connect a person searching with the content which they are looking for. Within SEO a ‘keyword’ is a word or phrase which is especially good at connecting searchers with content.

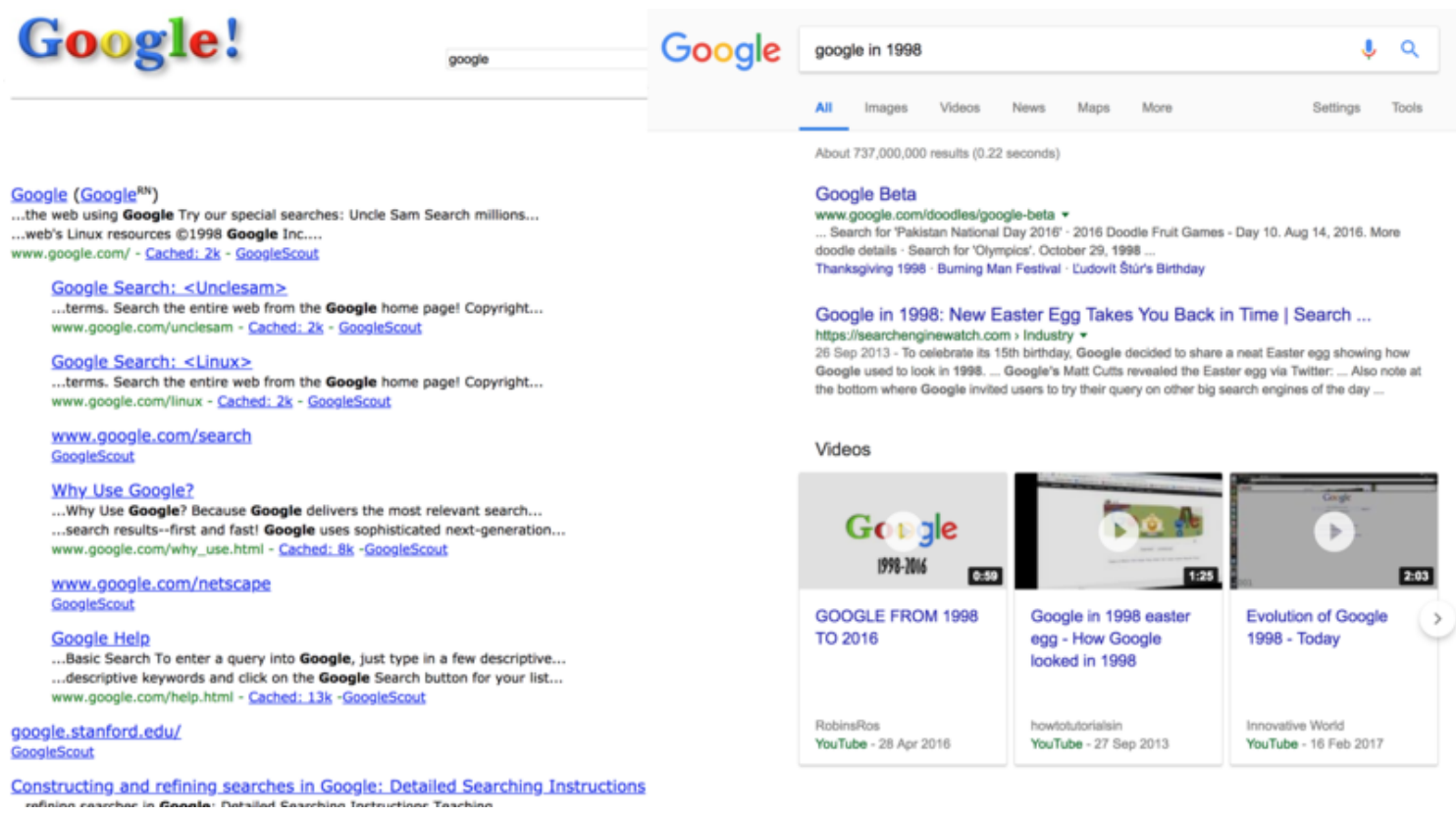
Google has been using keywords since its very beginning and 22 years later, an eon in terms of .com companies, Google is still doing the exact same thing. Using keywords to connect searchers with content.

... you can search for 'google in 1998' in Google to see the results as they were.

Why should you care about keywords anyway?

Choosing the right keywords is essential for success. Even if you are getting lots of traffic, what's the point *if that traffic does not convert to sales?*

Traffic arriving via the wrong keywords means you'll see a high bounce rate and low conversions. Sounds familiar right? It's one of the most common issues webmasters experience. If you change the keywords you are using to drive traffic to your site, you can better target customers with higher



purchasing intent, who are also more relevant to your offering. *Choosing the right keywords means choosing the right traffic.*

When you use keywords properly you can not only ensure the right people get to your content, but also match the different stages of purchasing intent to the different parts of your website. So you get *the right people at the right time, d*irecting potential customers to content which captures them whether they are just casually browsing or ready to take action.

Keywords have evolved over time

Although the mechanisms we use to search have remained by and large the same, some things have changed - for example the number of keywords used or the form of the search query, and the devices we use to search.



Google Home, Desktop & Mobile

Results are displayed differently, adapting to new mediums and rich content such as video. The way in which keywords trigger connections to content has also changed significantly over the years, with technologies such as LaMDA and MUM used to better understand the intent behind a search. Google is not only matching keywords to content based on their literal meaning but also what it thinks the searcher is looking for.

As we see more advances in the devices we use and the technology which drives search engines, keywords will continue to evolve. However the way in which search engines connect content to searches has remained the exact same, through the words we use.



Keyword anatomy

Keywords tend to follow similar forms and whilst there will always be exceptions, understanding these forms is invaluable for quick and efficient keyword research.

Head, modifier, tail

A little analysis can tell us a lot about what a searcher is really looking for. Once you know what the searcher wants, you can provide relevant content on your site.

Let's take a look at a longer search phrase, restaurant discount online. The keyword consists of three terms:

restaurant + discount + online

This can be broken down into three core elements: head | modifier | tail

restaurant | *discount* | *online*

The head

Restaurant is the head of the keyword. This is the focal point of the user's search and what the rest of the keyword relates to. Whether the user searches for *restaurant discount online* or *luxury restaurant* we know they're searching for a restaurant.

The modifier

The modifier is a term which can be interchanged with other words in order to change a single aspect of the keyword's meaning. Unlike the head of the keyword it will not alter the subject of the search.

Typical keyword modifiers are things like:

- locations
- brands
- styles

In this example, *discount* is the modifier:

restaurant | *discount* | *online*
head | modifier | tail

So, how do we distinguish between the head term and the modifier? Changing the modifier will change the meaning *in relation to* the head term.

The tail

The tail of the keyword clarifies or adds further detail to the search. It doesn't change the searcher's intent, but adds detail to what they are looking for.

The tail is an additional parameter that narrows down the scope of the search.

In our *restaurant discount online* example, the use of '*online*' suggests that the searcher is looking for discount codes that can be found online.

A keyword where these three elements - head | modifier | tail - are used is often referred to as a 'long tail' keyword. Some examples of long tail keywords include:

restaurant | *discount* | *online*
best | *dog training* | *Chicago*
modifier | head | tail

A keyword may also be referred to as long tail where only the head and tail of the term are used. Here's another long tail keyword that contains no modifier:

air conditioning | *bargains*
head | tail

Order doesn’t matter

The head, modifier and tail of a keyword are named according to their properties, not according to the order in the keyword they occur in. The head of the keyword may not be at the start and the tail may not be at the end.

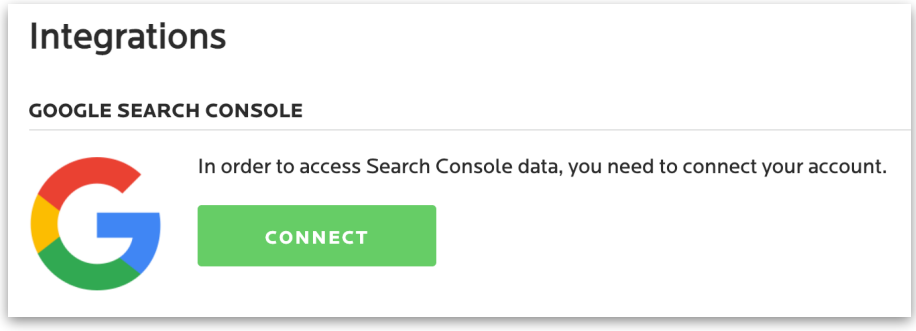
So, a searcher might type:

online restaurant discount
tail | head | modifier

Your keyword research will tell you which combination of words has the most potential in your industry.

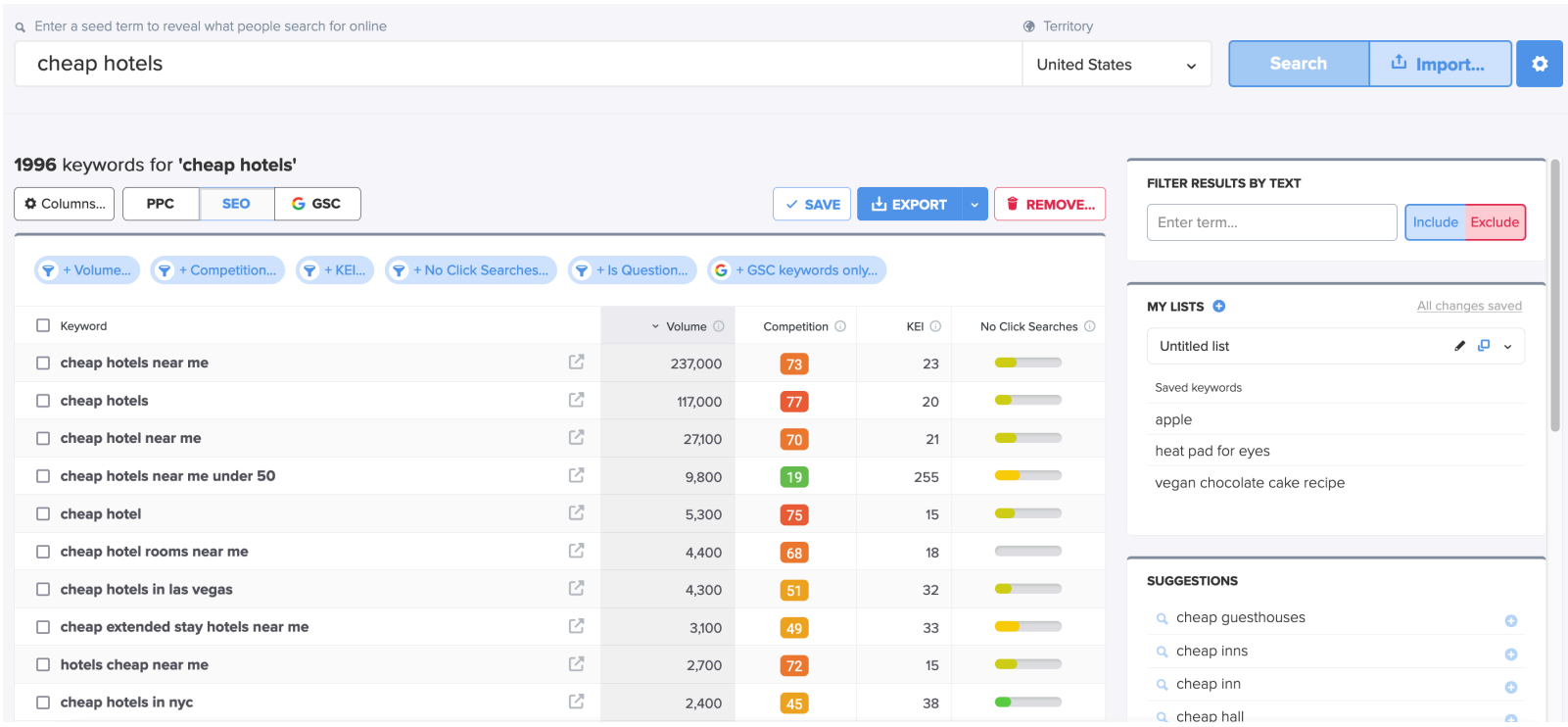
If you already have a website that attracts traffic you can use Google Search Console to find the keywords that already bring you traffic and sales.

Within your Wordtracker account navigate to the Integrations page to connect your Google Search Console account directly.



Search for keywords in your niche and look for modifiers which have a higher Click Through Rate (the number of times a result is clicked on from that search).

Using Wordtracker



If you want to find keywords, your best bet is to use Wordtracker to do exactly that. You can sign up for free and get searching right away.

Using Wordtracker to find the best keywords

The best way to learn how to use the tool is just to get started searching and that's really easy to do. Enter your keyword, hit the search button and you're off.

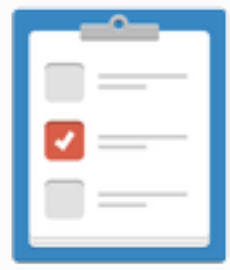
Click on any of these terms to start a search with them:

Chocolate

Air Conditioning

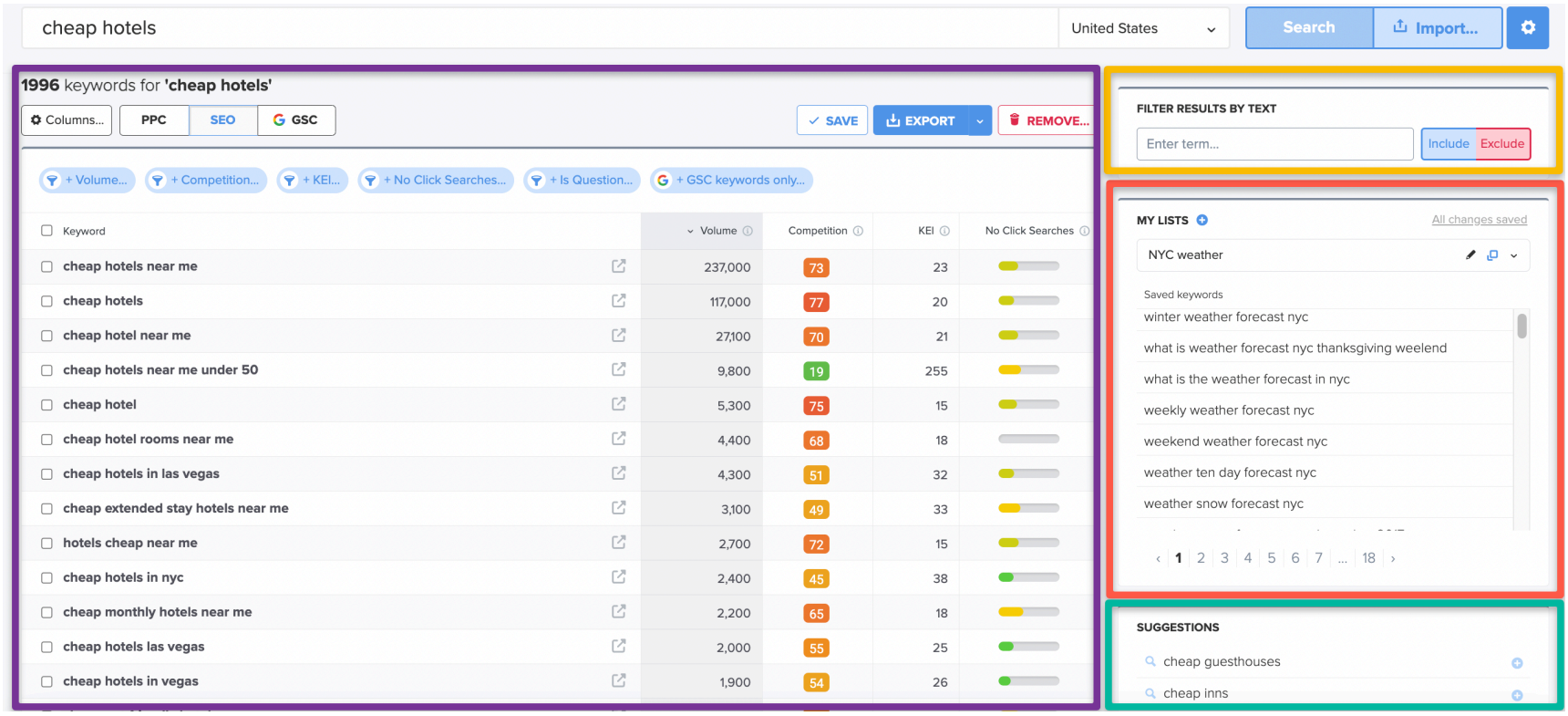
Car Insurance

Or click here for a fresh search and enter your own keyword.

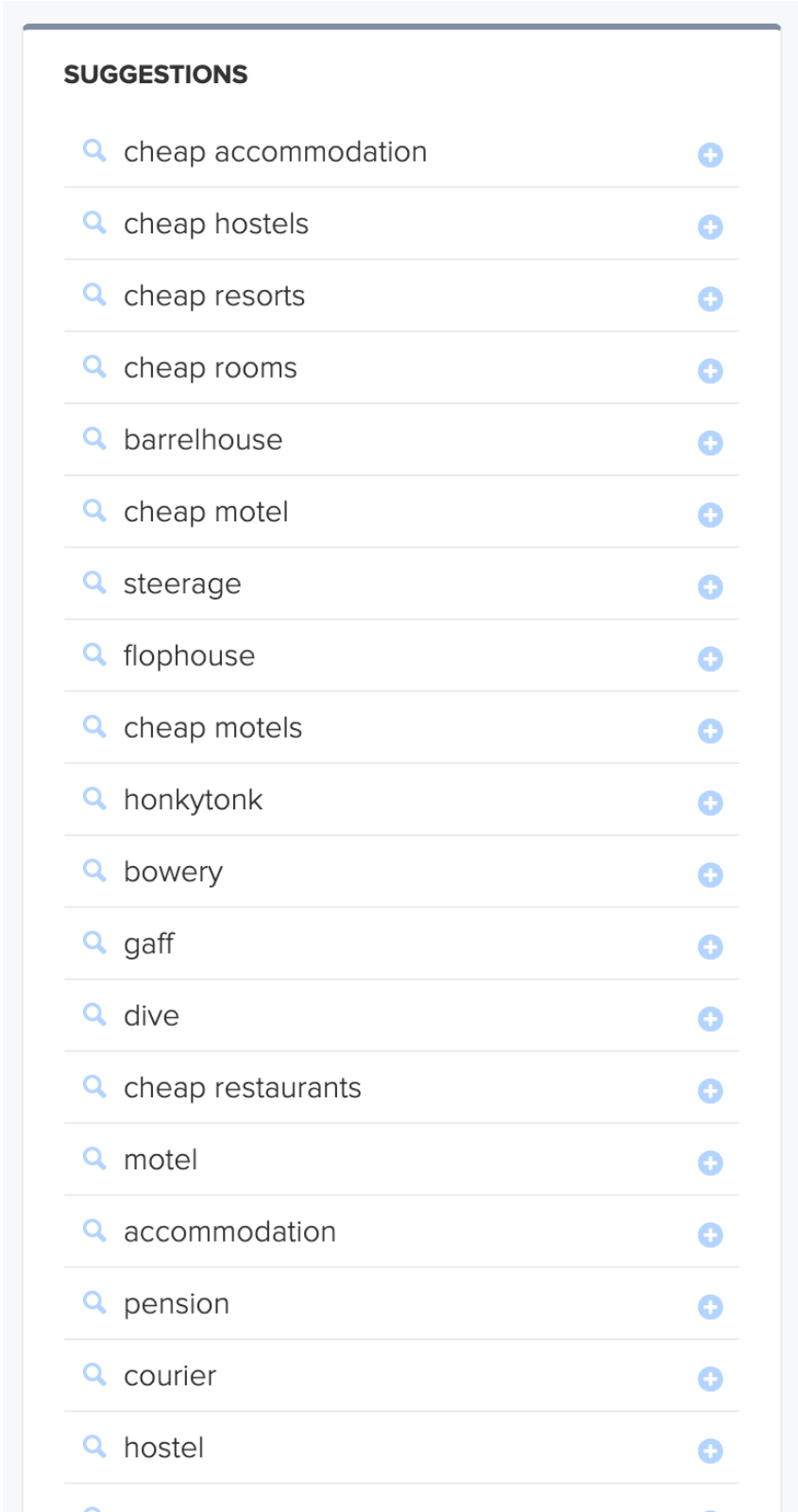


Great, you've just done your first bit of research, and you should have the latest Google data right in front of you.

We've broken down the results into different sections, so let's go through these individually.



Suggestions



As well as generating results which are closely related to the search term, we also generate results which are much more loosely related. This allows you to expand your keyword research using terms which you may not have initially thought of. This is especially useful for words which have multiple meanings.

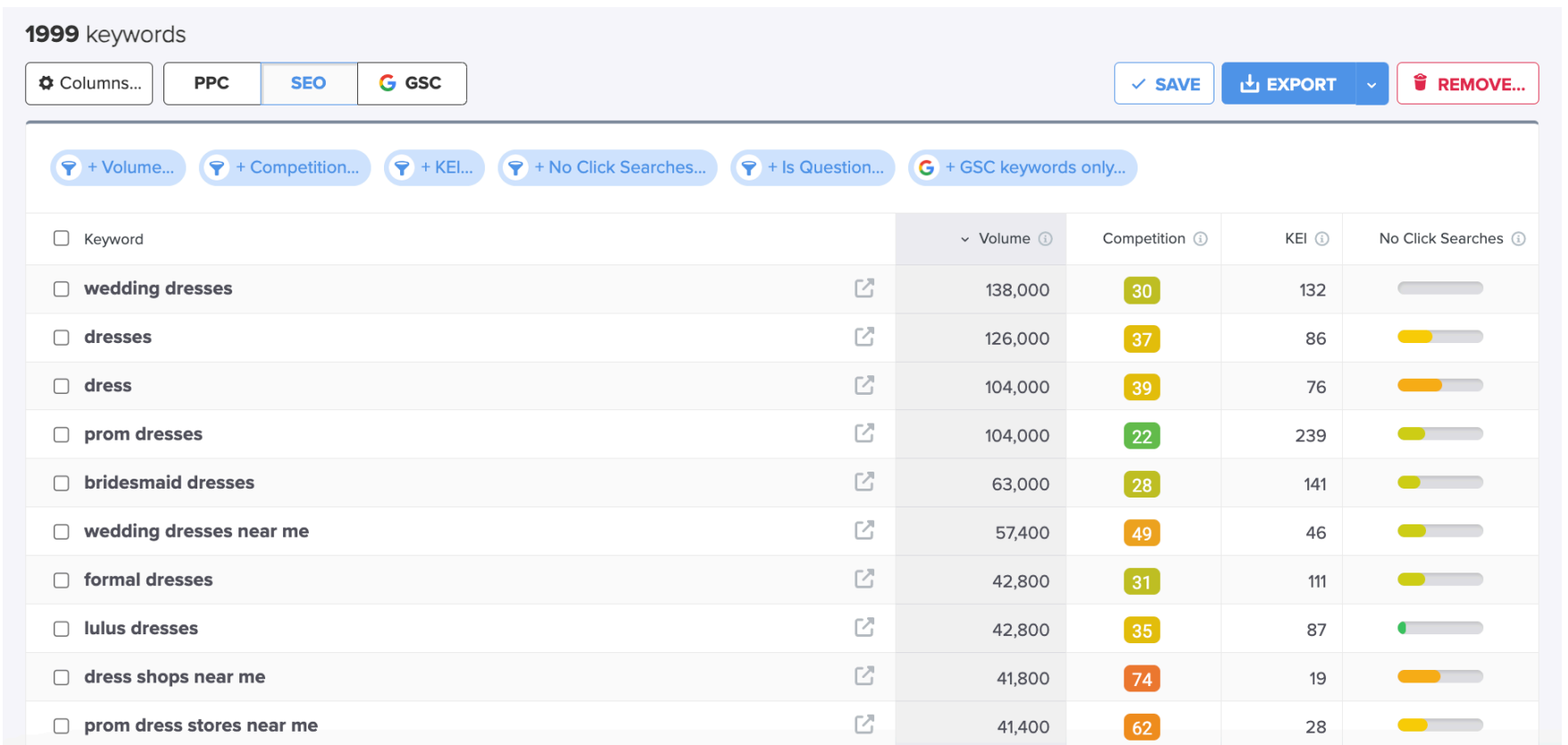
In this search for *cheap hotel* there are suggestions for both the different types of cheap hotel (motel, hostel, etc) but also colloquial terms like ‘flophouse’.

These suggestions are generated automatically and aim to give a broad range of possible terms to help expand out keyword lists laterally.

You have two options with the keywords: you can click on them directly which will perform a new search with that term, or click the icon to the suggestion's right to add that keyword to your list. Results will display according to any existing filters you already have selected.

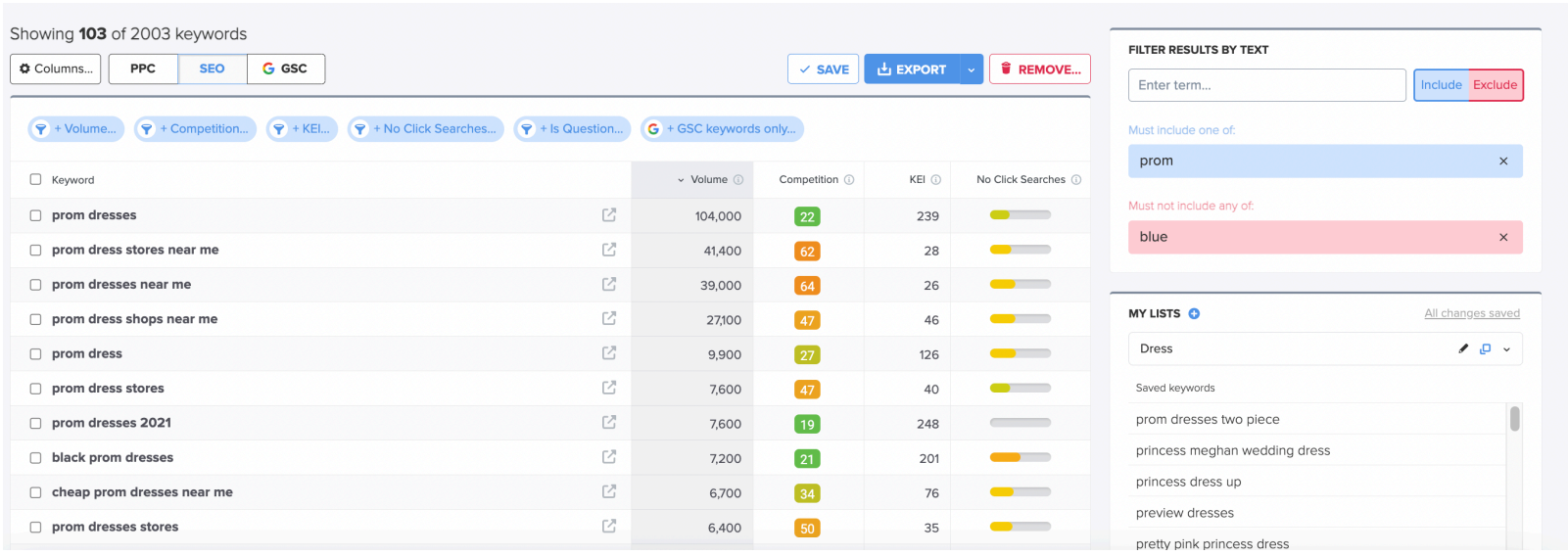
Suggestions are one of the most powerful ways of rapidly expanding your results and building keyword lists, which is a far better fit for how Google now works. Simply repeating closely related terms just doesn't cut it any more. You need to build a keyword universe right there on the page, understanding how terms are related and using them effectively.

Main results



This is where the keywords are returned alongside key metrics which help you decide which terms you want to use. From here you can choose to filter the keywords (which we'll go through in a moment), or you can add them directly to your active list, to the right of the results, by clicking on the keyword.

Filtering keywords

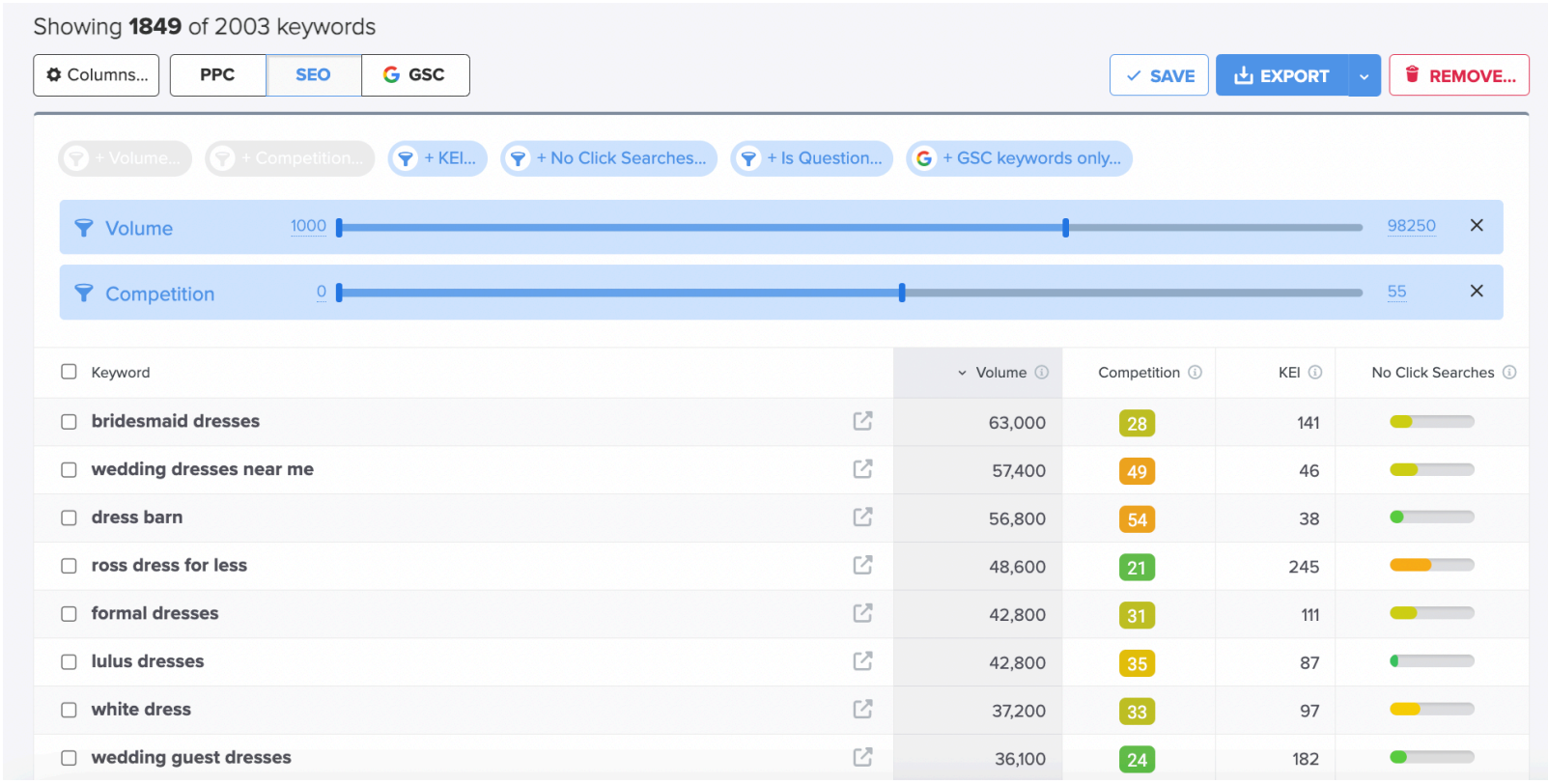


Filtering keywords is a great way to quickly refine down large sets of results, especially where your search term may have multiple meanings.

Adding a term to include is simple, just type it in and hit enter. If you want to add multiple terms you can - the filter is an OR filter, meaning it will show any results that include any of the terms you add.

If you want to exclude words, then you just need to enter them and press the ‘exclude’ button. You can both include and exclude as many terms as you wish.

Refining your search



Wordtracker has several powerful tools to help you refine a broad list of potential keywords into an actionable list.

Depending what metrics you have available (connecting your Google Search Console account will open up additional metrics) different filters will be available to you.

Using the sliders you can quickly refine down the given results to, for example, focus on those keywords with high volume and low competition.

Metrics

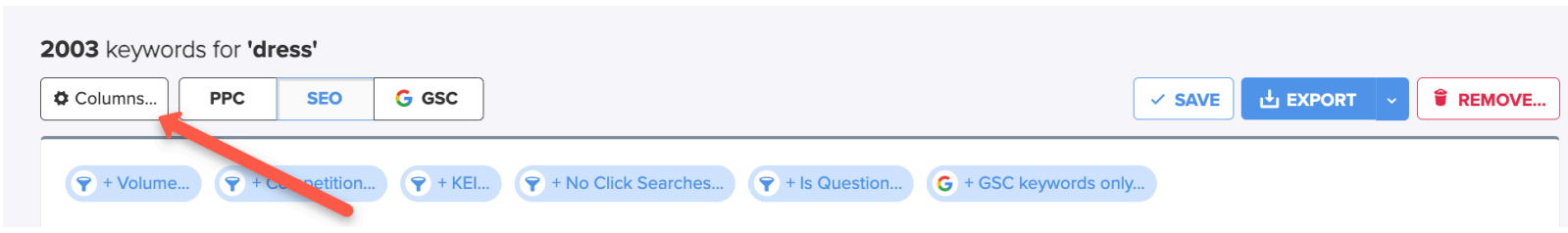
These are the data points which help you qualify keywords, knowing which ones are the right balance of effort vs reward. The bigger and better

performing your website, the higher volume and competition keywords will be targetable.

Smaller or new websites will need to be more imaginative, looking for those keywords which are often more niche terms with less competition. The good news is those keywords are often more actionable, with higher levels of intent.

Different metrics will appeal to different users depending on what they are using Wordtracker for. If in doubt, Volume, KEI and Intent make for a very powerful set of metrics.

You can change these by clicking on the Metrics button within the tool:



Volume: the number of times a search for each keyword appears in our database.

Competition: An SEO focused metric, showing how hard it is to rank for that keyword.

KEI: The Keyword Effectiveness Index is a score based on the ratio between volume and competition - the higher the better.

CPC: Cost per click is the average cost of the keyword within the Google pay per click model.

Intent: The purchase intent behind a search. The higher the intent the more likely to result in a purchase.

Mobile%: The percentage of clicks for this keyword that were performed on mobile.

Desktop%: The percentage of clicks for this keyword that were performed on desktop.

Organic Clicks: The percentage of clicks for this keyword that were for organic search results.

Paid Clicks: The percentage of clicks for this keyword that were for paid search results.

No Click Searches: The percentage of clicks for this keyword where no result was clicked on.

Clicks*: The number of visits that keyword has driven to your website.

Impressions*: The number of times a result for your site was shown for this keyword search.

Click Through Rate*: The ratio of clicks to impressions.

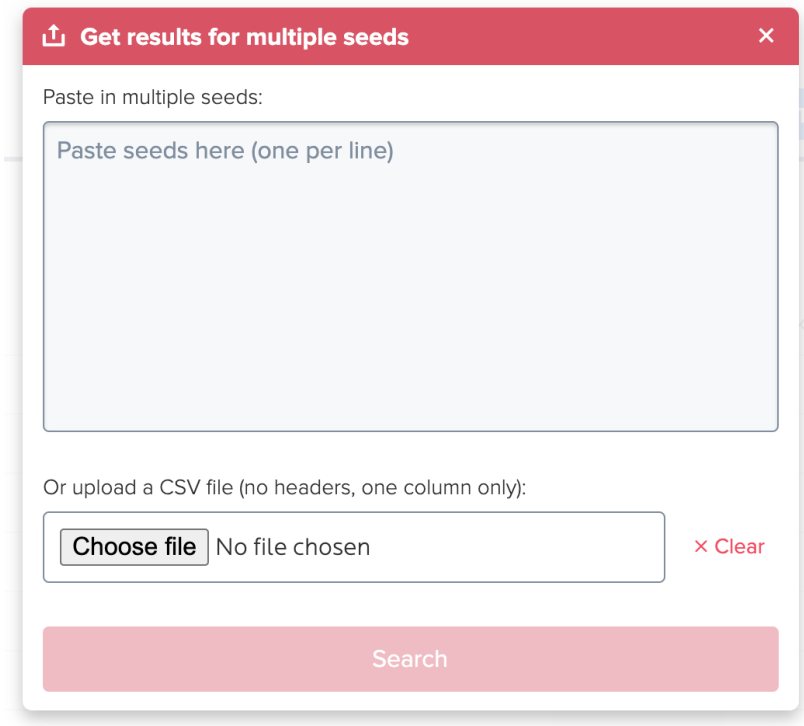
Position*: The average position the keyword is shown in.

* *Only available with connected Google Search Console accounts*

Import / Export

Sometimes you have the keywords, you just want to know the metrics. Well that's where Import comes in. This is a really powerful feature which allows you to add keywords in bulk and Wordtracker will then fetch the metrics for them.

You can do this by uploading a CSV (make sure it is a CSV and not an Excel format such as XLSX as this won't work), or by simply copy / pasting keywords in.



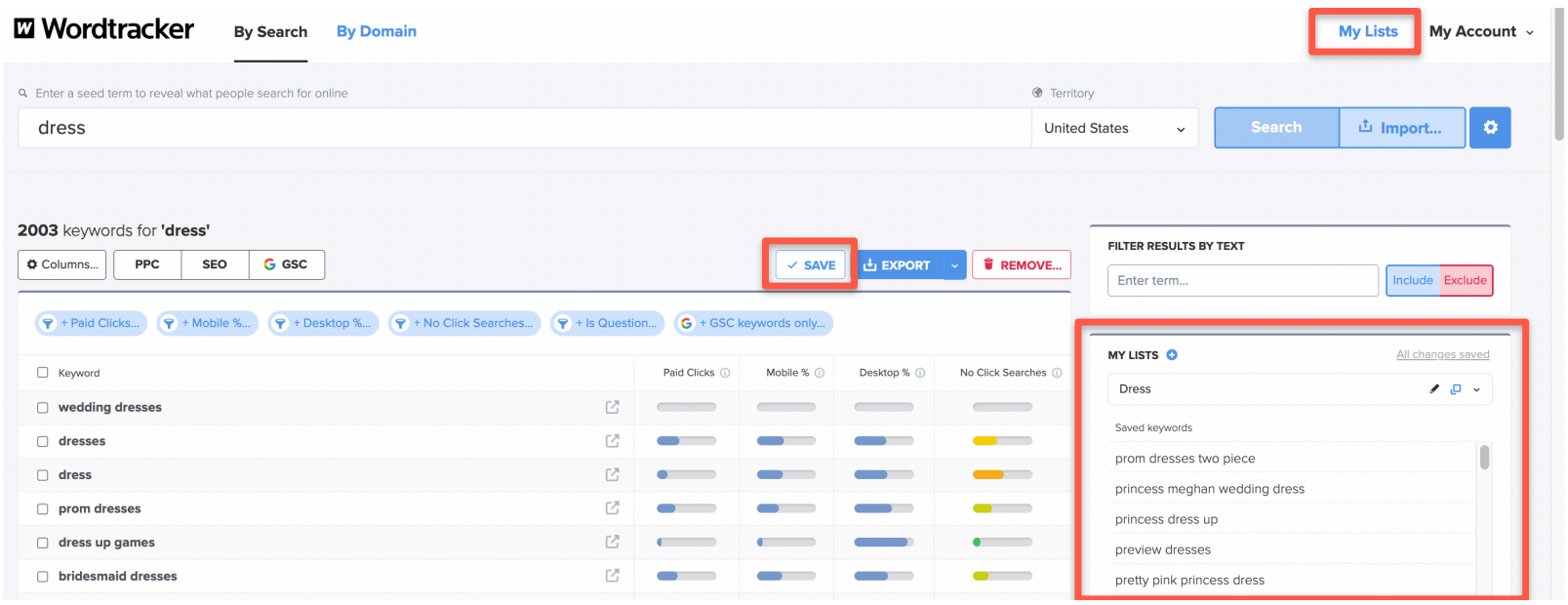
You can also export your entire set of results by just hitting the Export button. This will instantly (yes it really is instant, it's stupid fast!) generate a CSV for you. You can also hit the little drop down by the Export button and choose to copy the keywords to clipboard.



Lists

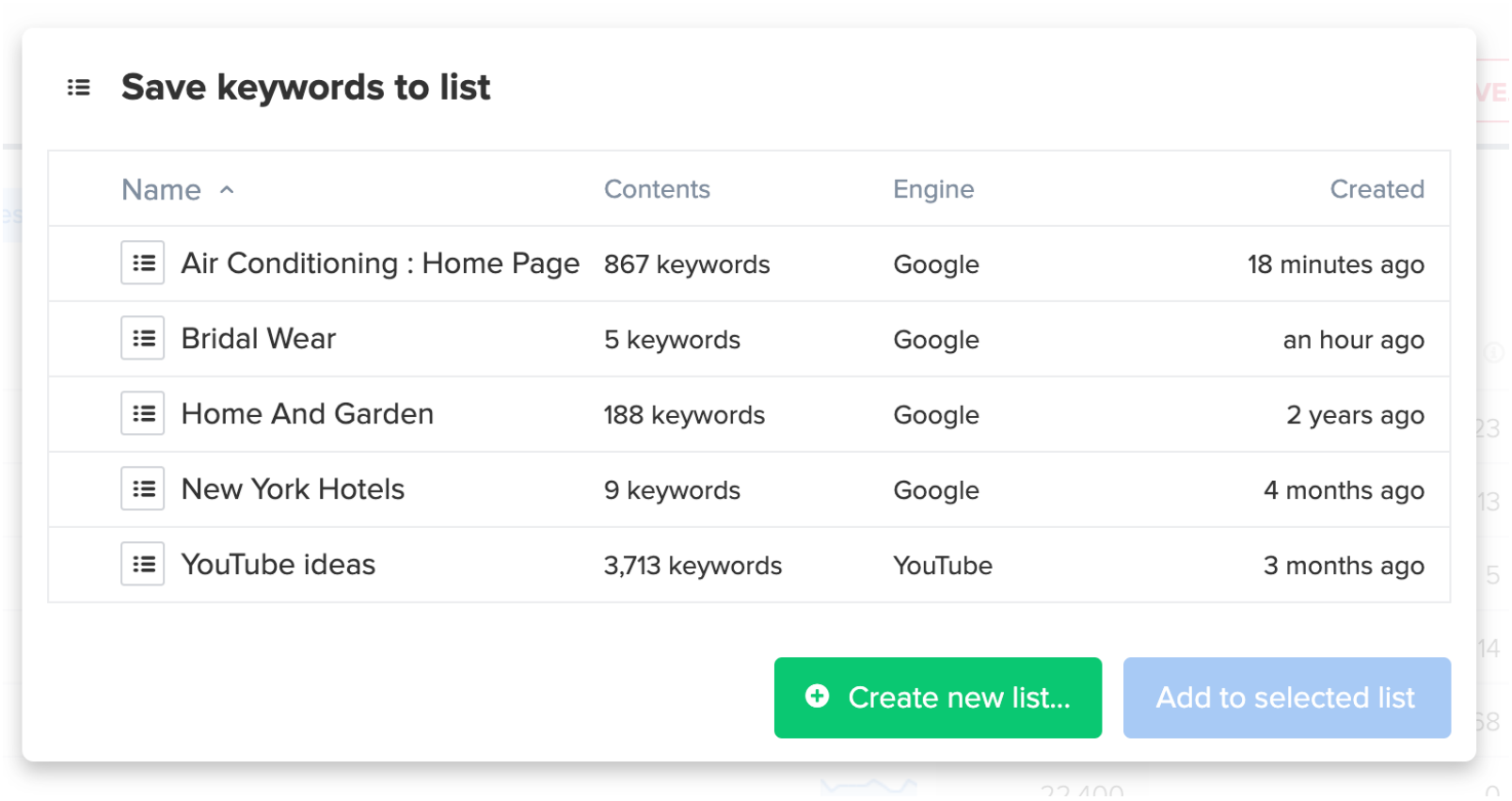
An immensely powerful feature that allows you to save and manage your keyword research all in one tool. With lists you can save and manage your keyword data and come back to it whenever you want.

Lists can be accessed in three ways, so they can fit into your workflow at a number of different points.



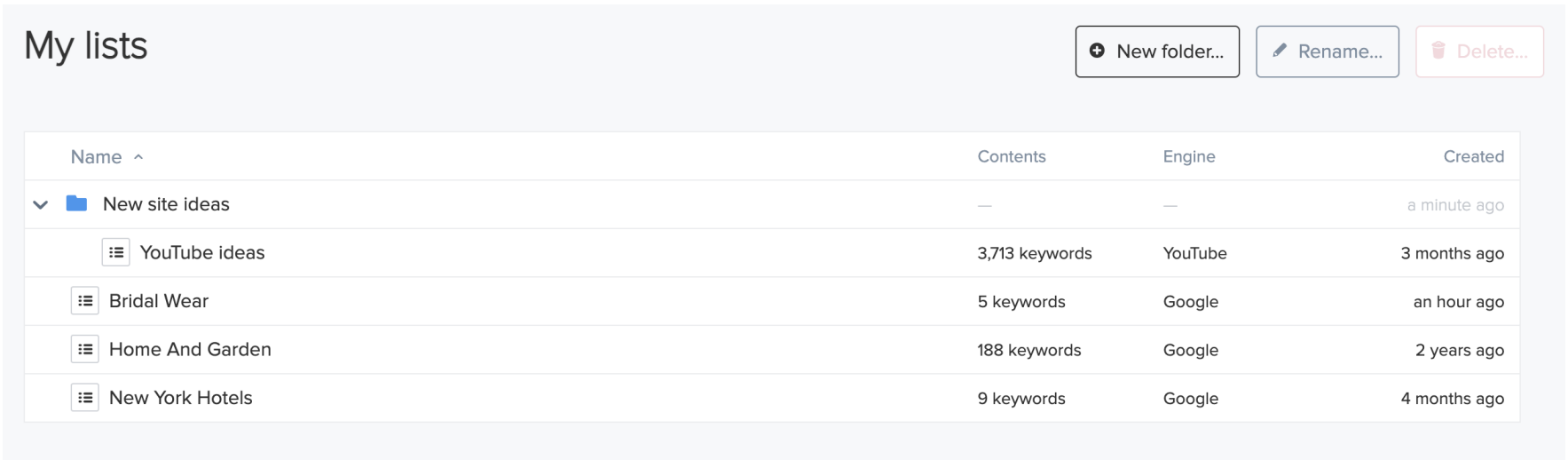
To the right is the ‘My Lists’ box. This allows you to quickly create, access and edit your lists. Sometimes it’s really useful to be able to see the results and your list in one place.

You can also select keywords with the checkbox to their left or select all of them with the box at the top of the results list next to ‘Keyword’. Then click on the SAVE button, which will open the lists menu.



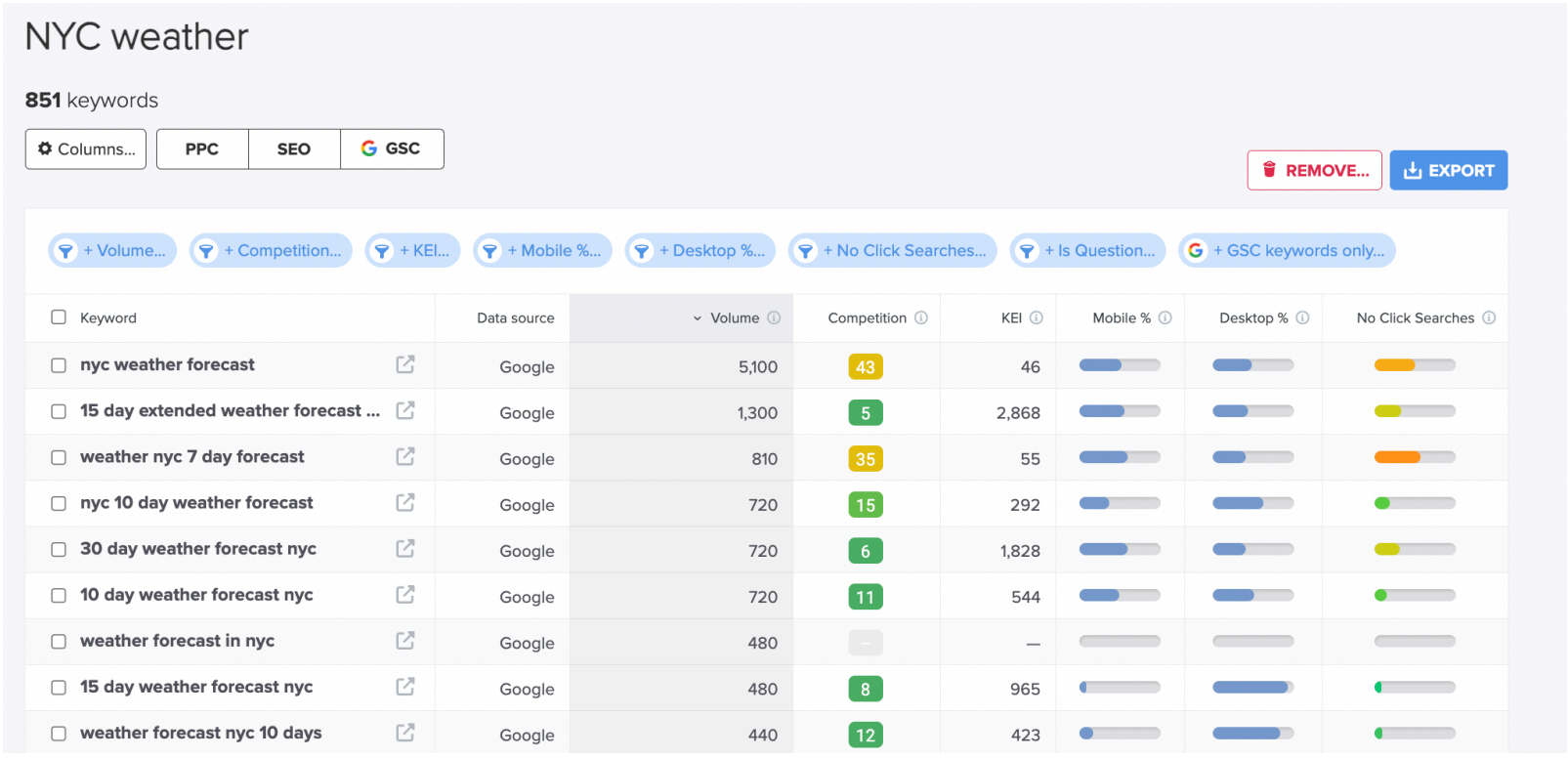
From here you can add the selected keywords to an existing list, or create a new one.

If you want to view and manage your lists, click on the Lists option at the top of the page. This opens the Lists menu in its own page, from where you can open up your list folders.



Using Folders is a great way to organise your lists. Especially if you are working on more than one website.

Clicking on a list will open it in a focused view and again, you can select the metrics you need to see.

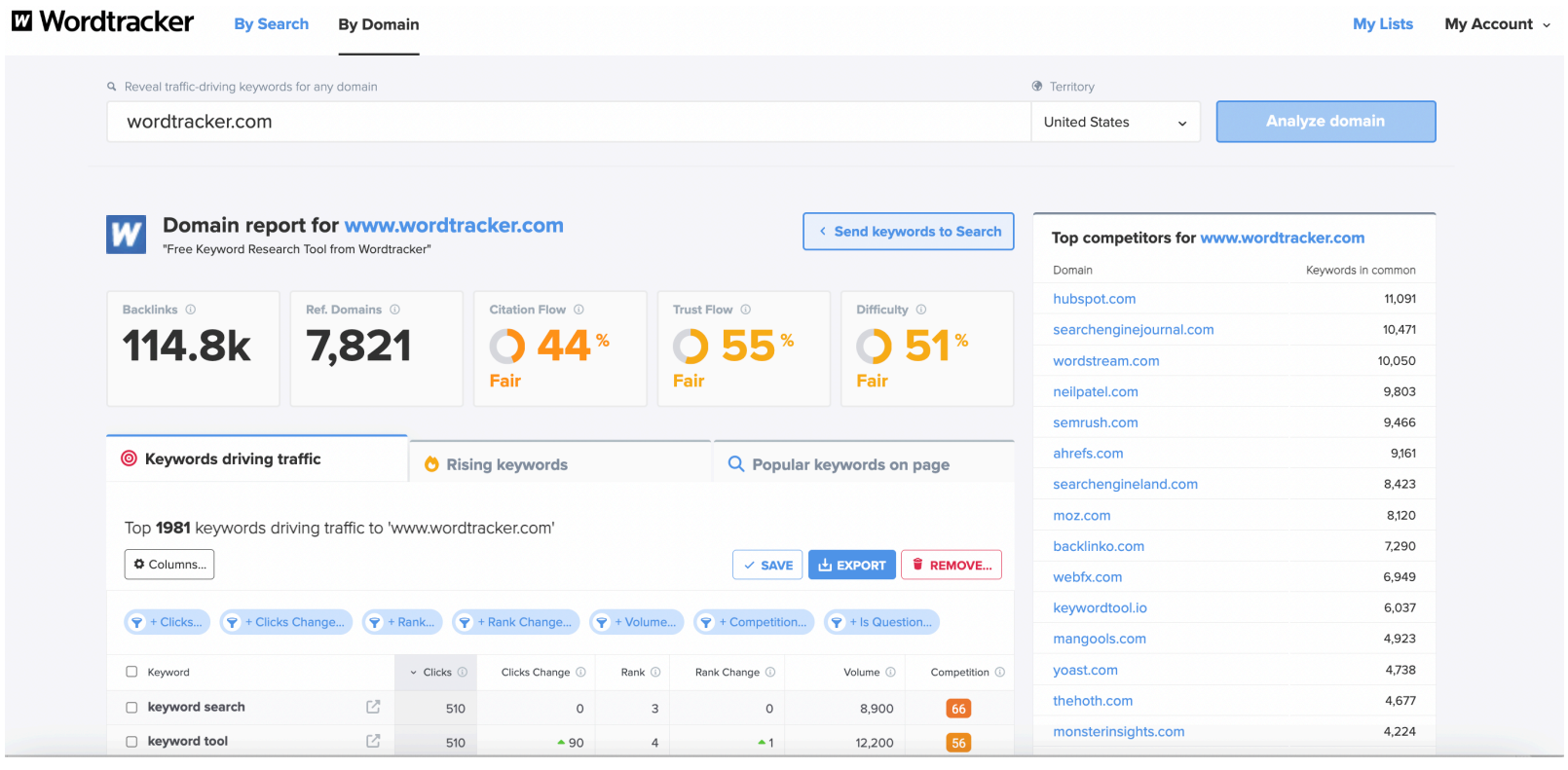


Keyword Questions

One of the most useful individual filters, this can be added in both the Lists and Results view. It will isolate keywords in a question within your list. These are powerful terms and can work exceptionally well in blogs.

Find the questions that are being asked within your niche and create articles that answer them for a shortcut to ranking in that area.

Domain Search



Enter any website and we will analyse it for you. So not only can you see how well your own site is performing and the keywords it's using, you can also see what your competitors are doing.

Clicks shows you how many clicks this site received.

Rank shows you exactly where they rank for that term on the SERPs.

The **Rising Keywords** tab shows you the keywords which brought more traffic to this site than last month.

You can export all your results or save them to a list and continue working on them there.



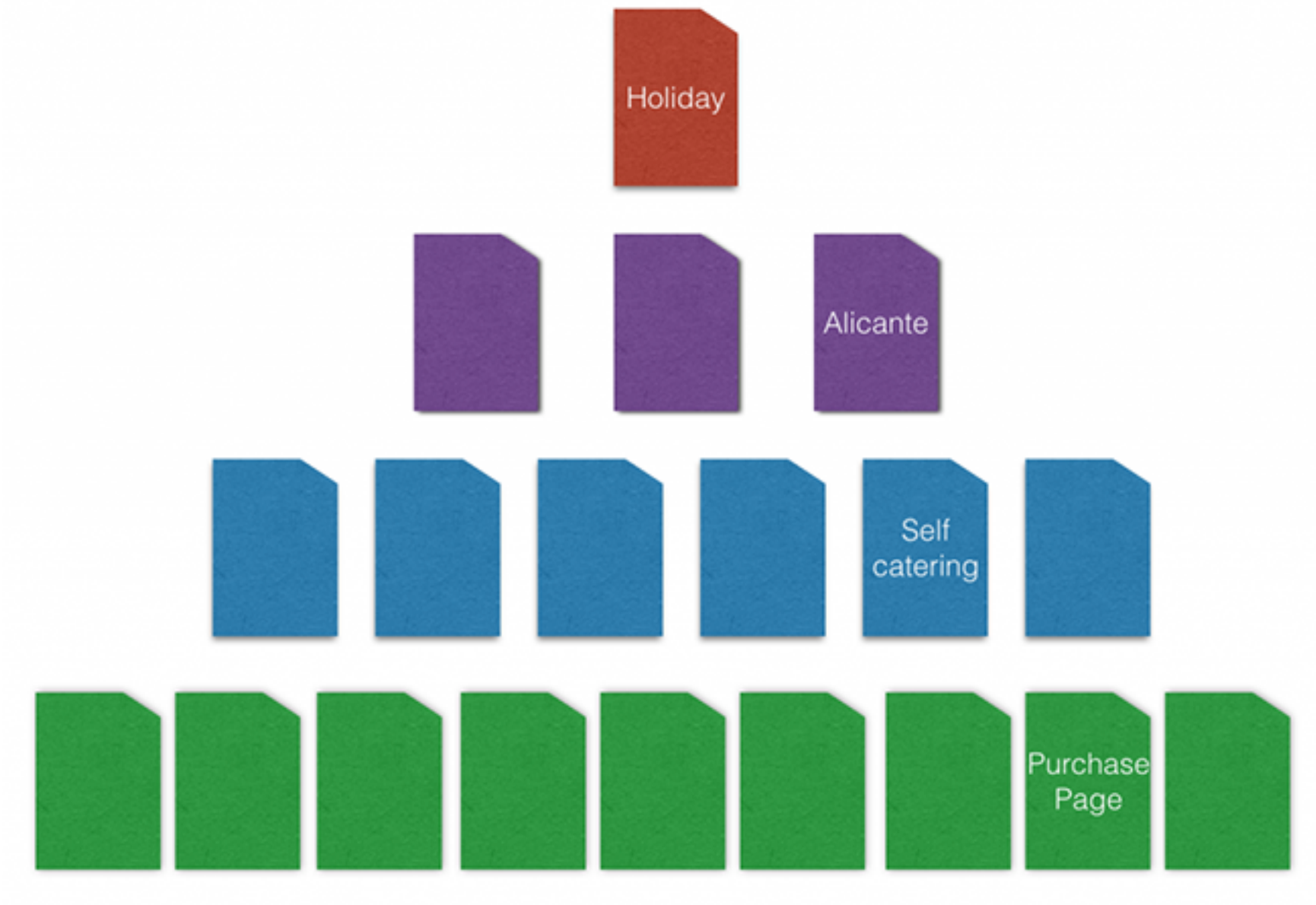
Mapping keywords

What’s the use of having great keywords if you don’t use them effectively... and this includes knowing how to distribute them within your site structure.

Site structure and keywords

Your site structure should look like a pyramid when mapped out. Your homepage is at the top with each level down having an increasing number of pages. Typically this would look something like this:

Homepage : Category : Sub Category : Product



The homepage is the least focused page. It’s not tied to any specific product or service and will tend to attract the broadest audience. As you go down the site structure the pages become more focused.

The buying cycle

The way that your site is structured and the keywords you use is also tightly tied into the buying cycle. This relates to the 'intent' of the searcher when using those keywords.

Research: At this point people are looking for a broad solution to fit their need. So they will be searching for broad terms, like *holiday*.

Refine: At this point people are starting to get an idea of the market and what they want exactly, so are searching with more exact terms such as *all inclusive holidays*

Purchase: By this stage the customer knows pretty much what they want and are ready to buy, so they will be using very exact, or long tail keywords like *all inclusive holidays in alicante*

Use the 'Intent' metric to help differentiate keywords from different parts of the buying cycle. High intent keywords are closer to purchase.

Intent is an additional metric available from within the 'view columns' section.



Homepage

The homepage is the top level page on your site. It's usually the most powerful page with the ability to rank for the highest volume and broadest (least focused) keywords. Those terms will be great at driving traffic, but not so good at converting directly to sales.

This is because of where those broader terms sit at the top of the buying cycle, where the user is furthest away from making a purchase.

This doesn't mean they won't buy anything from you; just that they will have to travel through the rest of the buying cycle to do so. They may well do this in a few clicks on your website, or they may go away and come back at a later stage.

Category Pages

This is where people are refining their choices; looking for something more exact. So rather than looking for a specific product, they are likely to be using keywords which could relate to a group of products. Within the buying cycle this would be the 'refining phase'.

So while your homepage might target a very broad term, like *holiday,* the category pages would target groups within this such as:

- *all inclusive holidays*
- *self catering holidays*
- *half board holidays*

At this level you have moved down the buying cycle. There will be less traffic for these terms, but people who use them will be closer to making a purchase. So you'll have a better conversion rate from these terms.

Product pages

At this stage, the customer has decided on the product they want. They are now searching for something very specific, often using a metric such as price as a differentiator. This is the valuable ‘buying phase’. As these are tied to a specific product the keywords are more exact. They are long tail keywords.

Long tail keywords have fewer searches because there are fewer people looking for each specific product. However, they do convert more effectively, as the people who are searching with them have a greater intent to buy.

They're inclined to be very specific, and really reflect the journey that the searcher has been on with their research:

- *all inclusive holidays in alicante*
- *barbados self-catering holidays*
- *half board holidays in the UK*



Optimizing with keywords

Here’s the really important bit - just how to use those keywords you’ve found on site for maximum impact.

Optimizing URLs

The URL can be a bit of an underrated asset for a page. Not only does it provide additional value to your keywords, it also appears within the search results. Using keywords within your URL is one of the oldest SEO tactics. It shows a clear indication that the page contains content which is highly relevant to the term.

Note that Google shortens longer URLs to make them display neatly. The middle section is hopped over, leaving the most important parts for the user - the domain and the page.

Let's take a look at this example URL:
https://www.wordtracker.com/academy/learn-seo/on-page-optimization/how-to-optimize-web-page

It can be broken down into the following sections:

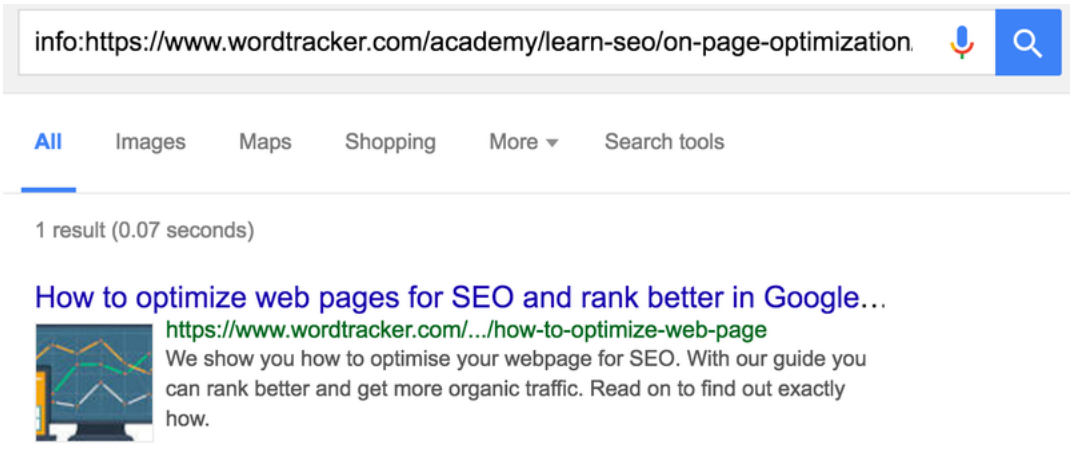
https://www.wordtracker.com	→	Domain
/academy	→	Category
/learn-seo	→	Sub Category
/on-page-optimization	→	Sub Category
/how-to-optimize-web-page	→	Page

Try and keep your page URL concise, balancing the URL length against the included keywords. The URL of any page should be like a breadcrumb trail showing a logical path through the site.

Optimizing page titles

Next down from the URL it’s time to take a look at the page title - probably the most abused and one of the longest serving core on-page SEO factors. Your page title is the element on the page where it is most important to strike a balance between readability and SEO.

Let’s start off by taking a look at how Google is displaying your page title. Simply search for the page in Google so it shows up in the results. Using the 'info' command in Google, then putting in the page URL, will show the result without any personalisation:



We can see there are a few things going on here, so we'll go through them in turn.

What page title length will Google display?

You can see how the final part of the title is truncated, so cut off and followed by a couple of dots. This is because there is a maximum character limit to what Google can display in the results. This varies depending on the result type and the actual characters you use, because it’s actually a pixel

limit. So the space Google has to play with is determined in pixels (512 if you're interested). Use wider letters and you'll fit fewer characters.

Unless you're a web designer you're unlikely to think in pixels and it's much easier to think in characters. You should be able to fit 69 of all but the fattest characters into your 512 pixels.

How to use keywords in the page title

The page title is the single most important on-page element for your keywords (unless you count the body copy as one element). You need to make sure your core terms are placed within your title with the most important terms at the front. Let's take a look at the title for an example page:

How to optimize web pages for SEO and rank better in Google | Wordtracker Academy

You can see that we have our CMS set up so our brand is added at the end of the page title. This is a good tactic as it means the part most likely to be truncated off matters the least. Some systems place the brand at the front of the page title. I would advise against this as you're using up valuable space with repeated, low value keywords. Keywords placed at the front of the title also carry more value than those at the end.

We've used a 'How to' format for the title as these searches are popular and a great way to capture organic traffic for your site. If you want to pull new visits in, this is an effective way to do it. You can actually filter on Keyword Questions in the Wordtracker Keyword Tool to see which are the

most popular questions people are asking in your niche. It's a really powerful way of generating content that ranks well and captures fresh traffic.

This page title is a good combination of SEO factors, making sure we get in the main keyphrase we want to rank for - 'How to optimize web pages for SEO' - while also utilising the additional characters to help with capturing further long tail keyword traffic.

Always remember your page title is the advert that users will see for your page in the search results. Keywords will only get you so far, users also need to want to click on it when they see it. You want to maximise the confidence the user has that your page holds the information they need.

How to optimize page descriptions for a better Click Through Rate

Page descriptions are another key element. Whilst they don't directly affect rankings, they can make your search result more attractive - and more clicks means more traffic.

Google will rewrite your page descriptions (and titles sometimes) if they are deemed to be low quality. Some of the reasons for this include:

Repetitive (used across multiple pages)
Not relevant to the page content
Poorly written

If you want to stay in control of how Google displays your website, you need to make sure that you have unique, good quality page descriptions that searchers will find genuinely useful.

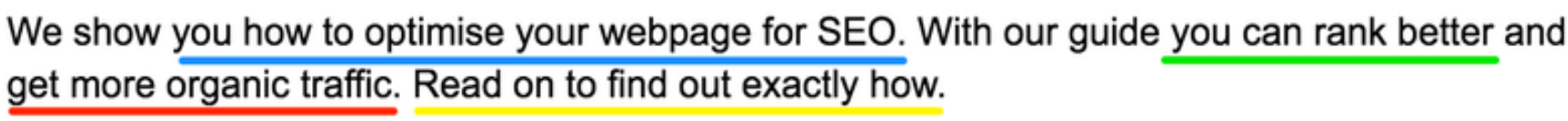
The FAB principle is a good one to follow here. This is a classic sales copy technique where you state:

Feature : What it is
Advantage : Specifically what it can do
Benefit : Why that's a good thing

Here's an example of the FAB technique in action:

Feature: This canoe is made out of hardened fibreglass
Benefit: So it won't ever leak or break
Advantage : Meaning you can take on more extreme rapids than ever before

Then after this, include a Call To Action, or CTA. Here's a page description with all those elements:



Notice the keywords used within this 'how to optimize a webpage'. Length is once again restricted, much like page titles. Here we have a little more room, with around 156 characters to play with.

Optimizing page headings

Page headings are used both as a styling element and as an SEO element. They are still relevant and an active ranking factor. However their importance has diminished. Once again it's an element that I wouldn't recommend going to great lengths to change, but if you're creating content from scratch then it's definitely worth looking at.

The heading tag is an element that can be added in the page code and it denotes the text as a heading within the content. Styling is then automatically applied according to the heading type, so these are often a larger font than the normal body copy.

The code used is a heading tag. This is a piece of html that wraps around the content. You open a heading tag like this <h1> and close it like this </h1>. You can have as many different heading types as you want, although between 3 and 6 is most common. A secondary heading or h2 would be displayed with the <h2> tag and <h3> and so on.

Google knows that headings are used to denote a summary of the section that follows, like mini titles for each section within the content. It makes sense that Google would place extra weight on the words used within those headings, so keywords become more important here. Headings carry more meaning than words used elsewhere on the page and have been thought about more carefully.

As they aren't displayed in the results, headings don't carry any restrictions so it's up to you how you use them. I use them as they are intended, as clear concise titles for each of the sections within the page. Higher

numbered headings denote the main sections and the lower numbered headings are for subsections within these.

The readability of the content on page will have a much bigger impact than any SEO benefit derived from headings, so make sure they read well. However, you can still create them thinking about the search terms that you want the page to rank for.

Keywords within content

Make sure that the primary and secondary keywords are within your body copy and feature prominently. However, don't fall into the trap of sacrificing the quality of the copy to over-include your keywords. If you find you're having to try and shoehorn your keywords into the page, you probably have the wrong keywords for the copy. Google looks at the overall meaning of the page. Including keywords which don't really fit isn't going to do much for you.

Keyword variance

The way Google assesses keywords is down to not only where they appear, but also how they relate to each other. Previously, it was the frequency with which a keyword was repeated which mattered. This made for substandard content and ultimately a poor experience for the reader. Google has since moved away from this and got a bit cleverer. Now it breaks the content down and looks at the relationship between the words that are used, rather than just the number of times they are repeated. So it looks at how those words fit into the overall content of the information on-page.

By keeping your content on topic and focused around a single topic per page you should find that you naturally create content where the keywords have a strong relationship. This gives a strong indication to Google what the page is about and therefore what it should rank for.

Content length

Ideally you would have at least 500 words of focused content on a page, but the reality is that this is not always possible, especially when you have design or CRO considerations. A single page has to serve many purposes, and ranking in the search engines is just one of the things you need to consider. Think about what purpose the page serves and how important it is that it ranks for non-brand terms or long tail searches.

The more important it is that the page ranks for a broader spread of terms, the more you're going to want to place increased focus on the content. If it's a homepage this is probably less important as you're likely focused on your absolute most important generic keywords. If it's an informational page like this one, then the content becomes much more important.

Optimizing images with keywords

Images have a couple of elements to them that should be properly optimized. The first is the image file name. Make this descriptive and unique and include your core terms for the page. I've found getting into the habit of naming images properly has come in pretty handy when looking through my laptop or on a CMS to dig out an image to use for an article.

Images also have a written description, through the image title and alt tag. These are two HTML elements which provide written information about the image. Technically the title is there to give the image name and the alt tag is meant to describe the image. The alt tag is most important from an accessibility and SEO viewpoint so should be prioritised (screen readers will read the alt tag to describe the image to the user).

Make sure the image alt tag uses keywords related to the information on-page. Google also uses the content surrounding an image to try and determine its purpose. You want to make sure that this all ties together and focuses on the same topic.

Link optimization

Outbound links

It's not just who links to you that's important, but where you link to. This can affect both relevance and trust. If you're linking out to on-topic sites from your content that's a good indication that the content is relevant to the terms in question. So linking to sites and pages with core terms which are similar to your own for that page helps to improve the relevance of your content to those pages.

External link anchor text

This is one of the most important ranking factors. Relevant anchor text shows that other sites also deem the content relevant. Beware of over optimizing anchor text, as this will create a negative ranking signal and certainly damage your rankings.

Internal link anchor text

It’s not just the anchor text from external links, internal ones also count. Use your keywords within internal links, especially those that appear in your site's navigation.

Linking domain relevance

A domain that links to you is obviously important from a link value perspective, but also from the point of view of relevance. If the domain is relevant to your keywords then that's going to increase the relevance of the

linked page to those terms. So, for example, getting a guest post placed on a site with content that doesn't match the rest of the site may not pass as much value or relevance.

Linking page relevance

The relevance of the page as a whole and the text which surrounds the links is really important. This shows the links are in context, making them pass more relevance to the target page. Having the right keywords on the page that links to you is crucial.

Co-occurrence

This is the correlation between a page and the targeted keywords from content across the web. Where a site is frequently mentioned alongside a set of keywords, even if it's not linked, this indicates a connection between the two, and provides a signal to Google that your page is relevant to the topic.