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Search queries – the words and phrases that people type into a search box in order to pull up a list of results – come in different flavors. It is commonly accepted that there are three different types of search queries: In the search marketing world, we tend to talk more about keywords than search queries (news flash: they’re not quite the same thing). But today we’re talking search queries. Let’s go into a little more detail on what these three types of search queries are and how you can target them with your site content. A navigational query is a search query entered with the intent of finding a particular website or webpage. For example, a user might enter “youtube” into Google’s search bar to find the YouTube site rather than entering the URL into a browser’s navigation bar or using a bookmark. In fact, “facebook” and “youtube” are the top two searches on Google, and these are both navigational queries. How Should You Target Navigational Search Queries? The fact is, you don’t stand much of a chance targeting a navigational query unless you happen to own the site that the person is looking for. True navigational queries have very clear intent – the user has an exact site in mind and if you’re not that site, you’re not relevant to their needs. Google, which classifies this type of query as a “go query” according to some reports, has even taken the step of reducing the total number of results on the first page to 7 for navigational brand queries, leading to a 5.5% reduction in overall organic first-page listings. However, some queries that appear to be navigational in nature might not be. For example, someone who googles “facebook” might actually be looking for news or information about the company. Tip: Make sure you own your own brand’s navigational query. Ideally, your site will appear in both the top organic spot and as the top sponsored result in a search for your brand or company name. As Brad Geddes has pointed out, “in many cases, it is worth buying keywords even if you rank organically for them,” because your total profits will end up higher. Branded keywords tend to drive both clicks and conversions. Wikipedia defines informational search queries as “Queries that cover a broad topic (e.g., colorado or trucks) for which there may be thousands of relevant results.” When someone enters an informational search query into Google or another search engine, they’re looking for information – hence the name. They are probably not looking for a specific site, as in a navigational query, and they are not looking to make a commercial transaction. They just want to answer a question or learn how to do something. Run our free Google Ads Performance Grader today and you’ll find out which keywords are burning your budget! How Should You Target Informational Search Queries? Informational queries are hard to monetize. Google knows this, which is why it’s been pushing the Knowledge Graph to address these types of queries. The best way to target informational searches is with high-quality SEO content that genuinely provides helpful information relevant to the query. Wikipedia, for all its flaws, is pretty good at providing basic, reliable-enough info on an extremely broad range of topics, which is why they rank on the first page for about half of all searches (well, that and their enormously powerful link profile). Wikipedia leaves a lot to be desired for a lot of informational searches, though. That’s where you come in! Here are some of the ways you could target informational queries to drive traffic and leads to your site through organic search: There are many ways to approach informational content. Get creative. The goal is to position yourself as a trustworthy, authoritative source of information, not to try to cram your products down the searcher’s throat. This is the time to build awareness of your brand. If you can answer a searcher’s question, they’ll be more likely to think of you positively in the future if they need the kind of offerings you provide. If you’re looking for more direction when it comes to content marketing, check out these related posts: Transactional Search Queries What is a Transactional Search Query? A transactional search query is a query that indicates an intent to complete a transaction, such as making a purchase. Transactional search queries may include exact brand and product names (like “samsung galaxy s3”) or be generic (like “iced coffee maker”) or actually include terms like “buy,” “purchase,” or “order.” In all of these examples, you can infer that the searcher is considering making a purchase in the near future, if they’re not already pulling out their credit card. In other words, they’re at the business end of the conversion funnel. Many local searches (such as “Denver wine shop”) are transactional as well. Vertical searches are a subset of transactional search queries, and they represent people looking to make a transaction in a specific industry. These include local searches, restaurant searches, hotel searches, flight searches, etc. Google’s moves in recent years to directly target vertical searches have led to accusations of antitrust violations. How Should You Target Transactional Search Queries? We recommend a two-pronged approach here. There is no reason not to target transactional queries with organic content, like optimized product pages and local SEO strategies, but you should consider using PPC to target these search terms as well. Here’s why: These are exactly the kinds of queries that are mostly likely to deliver ROI in paid search. If people are looking for a specific type of product to buy, a sponsored ad is just as likely as an organic result to deliver what they need. Sponsored results take up a lot of the available space on the SERP for commercial/transactional queries. If you want visibility above the fold for transactional keywords, you should consider PPC. Google offers lots of bells and whistles for sponsored ads and product listings. For example, you can include a picture of your product. Your options in organic results are more limited and less controllable. In one study, we found that people click on paid results over organic results 2 to 1 for queries with high commercial intent. This is probably because sponsored results take up so much of the above-the-fold real estate on these types of searches, because the new ad formats are so eye-catchingly clickable, and because lots of search engine users can’t tell the difference between ads and non-ads. (NB: Commercial search queries are just a small percentage of total search query volume overall, so organic results still take the lion’s share of overall clicks. More on that here.) These are some of the reasons we recommend using AdWords for transactional search queries. It’s a scalable and cost-effective way to drives leads and sales. However, know that if you want to drive more overall traffic, your best bet is to build out your SEO content as well, since there are more informational queries than transactional ones. Any questions about these search query types and what they mean for search marketers? Let us know in the comments! The different types of keywords for SEO are: informational, navigational, commercial, and transactional. These categories reflect the general purpose behind a user’s search. Informational: Searchers want to gain knowledge about a topic Navigational: Searchers want to find a specific website or page Commercial: Searchers want to research brands, products, or services Transactional: Searchers want to complete an action (for example, make a purchase) There are other types of keywords too, like local or long-tail keywords. Focusing on intent, however, helps you figure out how to rank better in search engine result pages (SERPs). A searcher’s intent shows whether they’re ready to buy, browsing, or just learning.Let’s look at the different types of keywords in more detail below.1. InformationalInformational keywords are search queries used by people who want to learn something. Examples include: “Coffee calories” “National coffee day” “What is the difference between cold brew and iced coffee” Many informational queries take the form of questions, starting with words like “what,” “why,” or “how.” Google often displays articles, videos, or guides for informational searches.Sometimes you’ll see a quick answer pop up—a featured snippet.These keywords are usually at the top of the marketing funnel. People at this stage are less likely to make a purchase. Still, informational content can help build brand awareness and position you as an authority in your niche.2. NavigationalNavigational keywords lead searchers to a specific site or page. Typing a brand or website name into a search engine is often a navigational query. Examples include: “Youtube” “Semrush blog” “Where is angelino’s coffee located” Searchers already know the company or product and want to reach a certain website or locationWhen a brand or site is well-known, ranking for navigational keywords should come naturally. For example, when users Google “Youtube,” the top result is YouTube’s website with relevant sitelinks.3. CommercialCommercial keywords help people research specific products or services. They may check reviews, compare options, or look for discounts. Examples include: “Free coffee” “Dunkin iced coffee flavors” “Peet’s cold brew vs starbucks cold brew” Searchers with these queries often plan to buy soon. Content such as comparisons, listicles, reviews, or how-to articles can target these searches. For instance, someone searching “Peet’s cold brew vs starbucks cold brew” will probably see a comparison article that guides their purchase decision.To make the most of commercial keywords, create high-value content. Answer any related questions (like those found in the “People Also Ask” section) to offer a more complete resource.4. TransactionalTransactional keywords show the strongest intent to buy or complete an action. Target these with ads and optimized product pages or landing pages where users can act immediately. Examples include: “Buy crypto online” “Sandwich places near me that deliver” “Pickup truck for sale” These searches usually occur after a person has finished researching and is ready to purchase—that’s why they’re also called buyer keywords.For example, “buy crypto online” leads to pages where users can buy cryptocurrency directly.Transaction keywords often include terms like “buy,” “subscribe,” or “for sale,” which can trigger Google Shopping Ads, like these:Because transactional keywords represent the bottom of the funnel, they are highly valuable for SEO and pay-per-click (PPC) strategies. Generally, more precise keywords (e.g., “neon blue unisex watch”) are transactional, while broader ones (e.g., “men’s watches”) are commercial.How to Check Types of KeywordsDetermining intent can be tricky. Sometimes a single keyword, like “apple,” could refer to the fruit—or the brand. One way to check is by analyzing what Google displays on the SERP. In the U.S., for example, typing “apple” into Google gives you information about the tech brand, meaning the search engine recognizes “apple” as a navigational keyword:Some queries, like “coffee beans,” may return both commercial and informational results—indicating mixed intent.Semrush can help you identify a keyword’s intent by labeling each with abbreviations: I (informational), N (navigational), C (commercial), or T (transactional). Semrush considers SERP features, keyword indicators (e.g., “buy,” “how,” “address”), and branding when assigning intent.Below are three ways to use Semrush for search intent insights:1. Check the Intent of Any Keyword (or List of Keywords)Use Semrush’s Keyword Overview tool to check the intent of up to 100 keywords at once. Enter your keywords, choose your country, and click “Search.” The “Intent” column shows each keyword’s type.Look at the “Intent” column in the results to get an overview of the types of keywords.You can also analyze the SERP by clicking the screen-and-magnifying-glass icon under “SERP Features.”Use the Domain Overview tool to see what types of keywords your competitors rank for. Enter their domain, choose your location, and click “Search.” Under “Organic Search Traffic,” hover over the colored bar to see the breakdown of keyword intent.Click the blue number above the bar to open the “Positions” report in the Organic Research tool.Each keyword’s intent is displayed, along with keyword volume and other data.Filter by intent if necessary:Next, check the “Pages” tab to see the top pages and their keyword intent breakdown. Examine which types of keywords drive traffic to those high-value pages. Let this research inspire your own content strategy.Use the Keyword Magic Tool to discover keywords by intent. Enter a seed keyword, choose your location, and click “Search.” You’ll see a table with the keyword’s data, including intent:Transactional and commercial keywords often indicate a higher likelihood of purchase. They’re good targets for paid ads or pages where users can complete transactions. Use the dropdown filters to show only these intent types if you prefer.For more information, consult our Keyword Research for SEO guide.Here’s how to optimize your website content for the different types of keywords.Optimizing for Informational KeywordsOptimizing for informational keywords includes producing high-quality content that demonstrates Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-E-A-T). Check which pages rank for your target query, include detailed explanations, address FAQs, cite expert authors, and link to reputable sources. For example, say you’re trying to target the informational keyword “vegan diet.” See what kind of content Google wants to return for this term. Take a look at the SERP by Googling your term. See which pages are ranking and if there are any relevant SERP features (like “People Also Ask”).To create high-ranking content that demonstrates E-E-A-T: Provide plenty of detail and genuinely helpful information Answer commonly asked questions Use an expert author and cite their qualifications in an author bio Display badges for any industry accreditations you have Include data and stats from reputable sources, with links Provide answers to PAA questions Optimizing for Navigational KeywordsOptimizing for navigational keywords helps searchers find your business more easily. Highlight your brand name on your site, in your homepage’s H1 tag, and across key pages Maintain clear menus and an updated sitemap Create a Google Business Profile to verify your business These measures increase visibility in navigational queries. For example, when you Google “Semrush,” you’ll see that the Semrush website is the first organic search result:Optimizing for Commercial KeywordsOptimizing for commercial keywords can help guide customers toward a purchase. To optimize for commercial keywords, create product or service pages with detailed information and high-quality images. Write the content to address searchers’ needs.For example, Adidas ranks highly for the commercial keyword “running shoes.” Their “women’s running shoes” page includes helpful content alongside a range of running shoes available for purchase.This content answers frequently asked questions and provides information that helps shoppers make informed decisions. It also signals to search engines that the website is reputable and helpful.Optimizing for Transactional KeywordsOptimizing for transactional keywords focuses on providing a direct way to buy or convert. When people search for transactional keywords, they are ready to buy. To optimize for these keywords, make purchasing quick and easy.Place the purchase option near the top of the page that targets your chosen keyword.For example, BitPay ranks highly for the keyword “buy crypto online.” Its high-ranking page is simple and features a form to start buying crypto on the first screen.Include the target keyword in the title tag, H1 tag, and, if possible, the page URL. Reassure customers with reviews, professional certifications, and secure payment badges.How to Track Keyword Rankings with SemrushUse Semrush’s Position Tracking tool to monitor your rankings.Enter your domain and click “Set up tracking.”Or, if you’ve created projects before, click “+ Create project” in the upper right to make a new one.Enter the domain of the website you want to track. Click “Create project.”Next, select your search engine, device type, and location. Add any relevant business name for local map pack tracking.Click “Continue To Keywords.”Enter the keywords to track. Click “Start Tracking.”The tool updates ranking data every 24-48 hours. In the “Overview” tab, scroll to see the “Rankings Overview” with key metrics: Intent: Shows the search intent type Current position: Your current ranking for each keyword Last week’s position: Your ranking from seven days ago Click the arrow next to any keyword to see how a ranking has progressed over a longer period.Click the date range box in the top-right corner. Select a date range option or set a custom range. Click “Apply.”Change the date range in the top-right corner to see ranking progress over time. Use these insights to refine your content and track improvements for different types of keywords. Search terms play a pivotal role in connecting users with relevant content online. For digital marketers, understanding search terms and their nuances can refine strategies, improve ad targeting, and enhance user engagement. But what exactly are search terms, and how do they differ from keywords? This guide unpacks the concept of search terms, their uses, and examples to help you master their application in your SEO and marketing efforts.What is a Search Term?A search term refers to the exact words or phrases that users type into search engines like Google, Bing, or Yahoo to find information. These are the actual queries made by users, reflecting their intent and what they hope to discover. Search Term MeaningIn simple terms, a search term is the bridge between a user’s query and the search engine results. For example, if a user types “best vegan restaurants in NYC,” this entire query is considered a search term.How Do Search Terms Differ From Keywords?While often used interchangeably, search terms and keywords are distinct concepts:1. Search TermsThese are the exact phrases users input into search engines. They represent user intent.Example of search terms: “affordable running shoes for women.”2. KeywordsKeywords are terms marketers or website owners use to target and rank their content in search engines. They are often broader and optimized for search algorithms.Example of keywords: “running shoes,” “affordable shoes.”The key difference lies in specificity: search terms are user-generated, while keywords are marketer-driven. Search terms help marketers understand how users phrase queries, enabling them to refine their keyword strategies.Why Are Search Terms Important?1. Understanding User IntentSearch terms offer a direct insight into what users are searching for, helping you tailor your content or ads to meet their needs.2. Improving SEO StrategiesBy analyzing search terms, marketers can identify trending topics, refine their keyword strategies, and create content that aligns with user behavior.