Targeted Keyword Advertising, Not Blind Long Tail

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Abstract
Choose key words that will bring buying visitors, not just traffic, to your Web site.

Trusting ad strategy simply to long-tail key words can be a costly mistake. Advertisers should zero in on long tails that actually work, and they should augment references to complementary and substitute items with value-adding text.

What is a "long tail"?
The phrase started life in the October 2004 issue of *Wired*[1], where Chris Anderson used it to describe sales patterns experienced by online businesses like Nextflix and Amazon.com. It refers to the distribution of an event's outcomes, the likelihood of the occurence of certain outcomes. When distributed along a "normal" tail, outcomes that are not close to the average are highly unlikely to occur—i.e., very rare. With a "long tail" distribution we find the reverse, namely a long string of unlikely events. For purposes of our discussion, the events in question are sales.

If book sales were to exhibit a long-tail behavior, then money could be generated from them. Moreover, with a large number of available book titles that exhibit such behavior, the sum of all these sales would be considerable, and thus, the resulting revenue could be considerable instead of being negligible, as under the normal tail.[2] Hence, the availability of these titles for sale is a necessary condition for the success of a long-tail book strategy. However, a viable long-tail strategy for a large e-tailer is not necessarily viable for a competitor in a subsegment of the market.

When should advertisers include long-tail key words in their campaigns?
Basically, a long-tail strategy goes beyond the popular forms of a given key word to include its less-used alternatives. For example, you might include "URL registration" along with the more frequently searched "domain registration."

Using a high number of variants can attract considerable traffic to a site. However, they should be included in an ad campaign only when they bring in more revenue than their cost. A visit does not generate revenue unless the visitor, either then or later, buys

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[1] Chris Anderson, "The Long Tail,"*Wired,* October 2004.
[2] The widely referenced 80-20 rule states that, for many events, 80 percent of the effects comes from 20 percent of the causes. A business rule of thumb applicaton of this rule suggests that "80 percent of your sales comes from 20 percent of your clients."

products or services from the site. A visitor will be much less likely to do so if they find themselves getting dragged to your site for no good reason.[3]

Impulse shoppers are one thing, buyers looking to make a particular purchase are another. They call for different strategies.

"But even if visitors aren't trying to find us, they get exposed to our brand and may buy on impulse." Doutbful. Remember, if you're not selling items related to the key word, visitors' chief impulse will be irritation. That doesn't generate a lot of sales—or help brand awareness. Meanwhile, you pay the cost per click, the costs involved in deploying all those irrelevant key words, and the damage to your brand name.

Beware of fad concepts and buzz. Chasing the long tail makes precious little sense next to the fundamentals of revenue generation.

Process of selecting intent-motivated key words

1. Compile a list of ad key words using all the sources outlined below:
   a. Filtered searches of key words used by visitors. You'll find the words on your Web logs, but screen out those with weak relevance to what you're selling. Remember, even if you don't sell a product its name may show up on your site and drag you in front of uninterested buyers.[4]
   b. For the same reason, filter key words that your competitors use in their meta tags or elsewhere.
   c. Augment the above with key words associated with exclusive items you sell, and if applicable, geographical references, seasonal key words, such as holidays, and operating hours for local markets. Also use key words referring to complementary and substitute items. However, to be effective, such key words require extra work, as they must be accompanied by text[5] to raise awareness of the value of substitutes and explain the value of complementary items offered. Thus, just having these key words in ads and/or Web sites, as a search engine optimization (SEO) technique, can lead to self-inflicted brand dilution.

2. Evaluate performance.
   Effective advertising does not end with selecting and running an ad campaign. It is an ongoing process that requires monitoring performance using measures such as ROI,[6] shifting budget allocations, and adding new key words. ■

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[3] The visitor's trust in the site is imperative.

[4] Results can be triggered b key words in the domain name and relevant site content.

[5] Obviously, use text references to key words. Do not use images or Flash, which machines cannot read.

[6] Alex Tajirian, "Pitfalls In Measuring And Implementing PPC ROI," DomainMart.