The Experts' Guide to Keyword Research for Social Media

A WordStream Guide
The foundation of search marketing is built on keywords. Search marketers know that conducting continuous keyword research and keyword analysis is critical to achieving success with organic and paid search advertising. But conducting and implementing keyword research is also highly effective for social media marketing. Whether your target audience is sharing content on YouTube or Flickr, or they’re Tweeting on Twitter, your social media marketing efforts should start with determining which keywords your audience is using.

To be more specific, conducting keyword research for social media enables you to discover the needs and wants of social communities by:

- Tracking popular and trending topics
- Determining search/query frequency
- Gauging market interest for products or services
- Identifying demand for keywords
- Better understanding user intent
- Discovering relevant points of engagement

By researching and identifying social media keywords, you gain a much clearer picture of how to construct and communicate your message effectively. Applying this level of keyword insight to all your social media optimization efforts (from optimized video, to image tagging, to social bookmarking, to targeted Tweets) gives you the maximum “pull” and value out of your social media marketing efforts.

**Social Misconception: Isn’t All Keyword Research the Same?**
Many believe that keyword research is a one-size-fits-all process. They assume that the same keyword data they apply to their pay-per-click advertising or search engine optimization efforts will be just as effective for their social media marketing strategy. This
The most popular queries in Google aren’t the most popular queries in YouTube. There are some major differences between search and social, which include:

- **Query variances:** The most popular queries in Google aren’t the most popular queries in YouTube. Take, for example, the query “YouTube,” which is very popular in Google though not popular at all on YouTube, where Arts and Entertainment (such as music) queries dominate user searches.

- **Behavioral differences across platforms:** Not only do query types and user behavior differ between Google and social media sites, but there are dramatic differences from one social platform to another. The behavior exhibited by users on the photo sharing site Flickr are often dramatically differently than micro-bloggers on Twitter.

- **Query vs Conversation:** Social engagement is more than just punching a query into a search engine. Searchers are looking for an answer to a question or an unmet need, while social media users want to engage in conversation, share ideas and interact with one another. So thinking just in terms of query strings is limited and can lead to completely misunderstanding user intent and expectations.

Given that user behavior differs between search and social and from one platform to another, we see the importance of performing keyword research specific to social media and refining your research across platforms. With that, let’s take a look at four of the most popular social networking websites and different methods for performing keyword research for each one.
Keyword Research for YouTube

Videos are one of the hottest and fastest growing ways to connect with your potential customers online. There are dozens of video sharing websites, but YouTube is the largest video discovery destination. YouTube continues to dominate the search space as the second largest search engine in the U.S. behind Google. For marketers, the goal of researching keywords for YouTube online video marketing is to determine:

- How users are searching
- Which queries are being performed more than others
- How to get your content found

There are two methods for conducting keyword research specific to video marketing in YouTube which are:

- YouTube Suggest
- YouTube Keyword Tool

YouTube Suggest is a video marketing keyword suggestion tool with an enhanced search function that works like the Google suggest feature. YouTube Suggest uses a predictive text model to display popular query suggestions in the YouTube search query box, which is ordered by relative search volume.

YouTube also has created their own YouTube Keyword Tool that marketers can use for video keyword research. The user interface is the same as the Google Keyword Tool, with the objective of mining and discovering the most popular video queries on YouTube.

By using YouTube Suggest and the YouTube Keyword Tool, marketers will gain insight into keyword query popularity and frequency on YouTube. These keyword suggestions can then be integrated into your video keyword optimization efforts in the title of the video, the tags, the video description and any links you build to reinforce semantic rel-
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Keyword Research for Twitter

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Twitter has emerged as a force in the social networking space. Marketers who ignore Twitter do so at their own peril. The amount of content created by Twitter users on an a minute-by-minute basis makes Twitter a powerful tool to aid marketers in performing keyword research for social media. Elements like hashtags are a quick way to qualify the topic of a message and make it easy to discover trending topics, related Tweets and phrases relevant to your marketing efforts. And given Google’s recent move to integrate Tweets into real-time, blended search results, marketers who leverage Twitter for keyword research effectively will gain even more visibility for their websites.

There is an endless assortment of web applications and listening tools that can help marketers conduct keyword research for Twitter by tracking popular hashtags, trending Twitter topics and eaves dropping on conversations. Here are some of my favorite sources for Twitter keyword research.

- Hashtags.org - Provides graphs on Twitter #hashtags and hashtag use; find the most popular and newest hashtags
- Twitter Search - Track the hottest trends on Twitter and click on a stream to pull up a feed of the public conversation
- Trendistic - See the top trending keywords in Twitter
- TwitScoop - Search and follow what’s buzzing on twitter in real-time
- TweetVolume - Enter your keywords and see how often they appear on Twitter
- TweetScan - Incorporate Twitter search and historical search to access more than 220 million Tweets
- TweetGrid - Create a real-time Twitter Search dashboard
- TweetBeep - Save target keywords, receive email alerts you tweets containing

![Realtime results for organic cotton](image)
Targeting potential customers on Facebook is not as easy as with social networking sites like Twitter. Marketers can’t access the profiles of potential customers unless you get permission, but you can promote your business on fan pages, group pages and with paid advertising. Facebook used to offer a tool to perform keyword research and monitor “buzz words,” called Facebook Lexicon. But they’ve removed the Facebook Lexicon feature and are rumored to be creating marketing analytics tools for page owners.

In the meantime, the social networking giant has upgraded their internal search functionality, which allows for advanced keyword research for Facebook. Before this upgrade, you could only monitor the posts of people you were immediately connected with. But now you’re able to view the messages, links and notes of everyone who uses Facebook to see which keywords people are using.

Start your research by running a query for a target keyword in the internal search bar. Then, click on the option “Posts by Everyone.”

Much like Google’s real time search feature, Facebook search updates automatically in real time, offering a fresh and constant stream of new keyword ideas and opportunities. Use this Facebook keyword research data for targeted relationship building. Reach out and connect with potential customers, but make sure you give them a reason to want to connect with you.

Keyword Research for Flickr

As Twitter continues to grow in popularity and relevance, marketers need to pay careful attention to trends and data to find out what people are talking about, what questions they’re asking and to figure out where your brand and business fits into the conversation.
Images from the popular social photo sharing site Flickr show up in the blended results in Google for a variety of search queries. In addition, about 10 percent of Google’s visitors use the image search function, according to a study by Alexa.com. So knowing which keywords searchers use for image discovery and having your website images display prominently and frequently in both the Flickr and Google search results gives you the opportunity to grab more clicks and drive more traffic to your website.

One of my favorite methods to conduct keyword research for Flickr is through Google Insights for Search.

Here, I’ve conducted searches on two popular, trending terms (“American Idol” and “Tiger Woods”) and filtered to show only image search activity. You can also drill down to get even more granular and filter by location, date and category. Using Google Insights for Search to perform keyword analysis for images gives you insights into popular and trending image searches and greater visibility into the marketplace.

Another nice application for gauging popularity and frequency of search terms on Flickr is Flickr Trends, which looks at how many photos have been tagged with a particular keyword over a specified time period. It also presents the relative popularity of one keyword versus another to show you what’s thriving and what’s diving.

Using Flickr Trends to perform keyword research for Flickr is an ideal way to compare the usage of similar keywords side by side. So say I was uploading photos of my hypothetical cold and flu treatment products to Flickr. Given the results from Flickr Trends, I would choose to optimize and tag my images for “H1N1” rather than “Swine Flu” because of the upward trend for H1N1 searches on Flickr. In addition to optimized tags, be sure to include keywords on your Flickr photo page in relevant titles and image descriptions to ensure maximum visibility.
Conclusion

By performing keyword research for social media and analyzing term usage on a site by site basis, you can gain an advantage over your competitors, who likely research keywords only once and with a blanket “one size fits all” approach across all marketing channels. Remember that user behavior varies from search to social and from platform to platform and thus your approach to keyword research must also adapt. By following the steps laid out in this expert guide to researching keywords for social media, you can leverage the domain authority of the Web’s most popular social networking sites to promote your brand, products and services.