Long tail keywords: Why they matter so much in content strategy

If you work in digital marketing, you've probably heard the phrase "longtail keyword". You might also know there's some debate around what it actually means.

Many believe keywords that are longtail mean they have a lot of words in them. It's the difference between "swimming pools" and "swimming pool installation in Boca Raton, FL", the latter being considered the longtail.

However, the length of the keyword isn't necessarily what we're referring to when we say "longtail". In reality, long tail keywords just have to be extremely specific – it just so happens that longer keywords tend to also be more specific (hence the confusion around the definition).

But why do we care?

Because longtail keywords are so specific, fewer people tend to search for those particular keywords, which might deter some people from trying to rank for them, because they consider it a waste of time.

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But, this is where the opportunity lies. Longtail keywords tend to not be as competitive because of their low volume, so if you're able to create content that ranks for a variety of longtail keywords relevant to your business, the traffic you do get is much more qualified.

Take the pool example that was shared above. If someone is searching for "swimming pools", we have no idea what it is they're looking for. It's so top-level that they could be looking for anything – The number of swimming pools in America? Nearby swimming pools? The cost of above-ground swimming pools? Who knows. What we do know is that they're still in a very information-based part of their searching journey.

Now, if someone is searching, "swimming pool installation in Boca Raton, FL," it certainly sounds like they're looking for help installing a swimming pool. And if that's a service you offer and you're ranking for that keyword, chances are the searcher is going to see your website.

So, longtail keywords might not be searched often, but they're also not as competitive to rank for, and people searching for those terms are usually much further down the funnel and more likely to convert.

Finding long tail keywords to rank for

Now that we know what longtail is it seems easy enough, but how do we find these terms? There's not enough search volume to appear in the majority of keyword tools. And, if you're working for a client you might not know all the ins and outs of the industry they're in.

This is where content creation becomes a mixture of art and science.

Look at places where your target audience spends time in order to research what they care about and how that matches your brand. I also recommend you explore the following for inspiration on what topics to cover:

- Forums (like Reddit, Quora, and Yahoo Answers)
- Comments on related news articles
- Online courses (here’s a guide)
- Google Autocomplete and related searches

No matter where you look, as yourself: What questions are my audience asking, and how can I answer them?

Implementing a long tail content strategy

You may want to target each longtail keyword with a unique page, but that probably isn’t the best way to go.

You could end up creating many thin articles targeting hyper-specific terms, which makes for a sprawling and ineffective content strategy.

Fortunately, a single page can rank for several terms. Mapping out various H2s and FAQs on the page is going to be all that you need to do to get a couple of similar topical terms on one page.

So, take a look at all of the longtail keyword ideas you came up with, and see which ones are similar enough to be nested under a slightly broader post.

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Admittedly, it’s not as “sexy” to rank for something like “swimming pool installation in Boca Raton, FL” than it is to rank for the general and very common term “swimming pools.”

Sometimes management or clients get fixated on ranking for those top-level terms because it feels like a win, but remind them about this stat from Ahrefs – 60.67% of all “search demand” is created by 0.16% of the most popular keywords.

Source: Ahrefs

So, nearly 40% of that search demand is generated by the other 99%+ longtail queries.

Ranking for longtail keywords means you’re reaching your target audience when they’re nearly ready to buy, and if you can illustrate that, suddenly it becomes a proposal that’s difficult to halt.

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