

The importance of accurate keyword difficulty scores

30-second summary:

- Keyword difficulty (KD) scores help digital marketers understand potential search engine performance
- KD scores are useful in building SEO strategies, filtering out ineffective keywords
- Low competition keywords give an advantage in attracting traffic
- Some KD calculating tools may be inaccurate due to the use of limited parameters
- Semrush has developed a new formula for KD score calculations that it says has improved accuracy

With countless companies competing for the same audience, digital marketers need to develop a highly effective and targeted content strategy to find a way through the crowded market and connect with potential customers. Keyword difficulty (KD) is an essential metric to assist marketers in formulating an effective SEO strategy for reaching the top of search engine results pages (SERP).

Focusing on a keyword with a low KD score can achieve faster results with traffic from search engines as there is less competition. Whereas keywords with a higher KD score will typically have far more competition in search results, making it much harder to appear near the top of SERPs in the short term. Long-term improvements are achievable but will take time and require multiple SEO measures to be implemented.

KD calculation tools can determine how effective a keyword may

be in search results. However, a lot can depend on the SEO tools that digital marketers are using. Such tools are not always accurate due to the limited parameters that can vary from developer to developer. The result is that the KD calculation may be inaccurate and even lead a digital marketer to believe that their keywords will perform better in practice than in reality.

Content created in partnership with Semrush.

Semrush, an online visibility management platform provider, has developed what it says is a proven formula to achieve an accurate KD percentage score based on in-depth research into SEO patterns and client feedback.

How Semrush's Keyword Difficulty platform works

This year, Semrush released an updated version of its KD metric. The new formula was the result of extensive lab testing by the company's team of data scientists and engineers. They studied patterns of SERP activity for approximately 120,000 keywords, covering more than 100 parameters and varying contexts to determine an accurate KD value. Alongside this, the teams analyzed the data to determine the difficulty that keywords would face in using SEO to appear on the first page of search results.

The three steps to decode your SERP standing and opportunities

Semrush's platform has three steps to calculate the formula.

1. SERP analysis

The first involves SERP analysis, where the median value is identified for three metrics throughout URLs on the first page

of search results. The three median values are:

- The number of referring domains pointing to the ranking URLs
- The authority score of the ranking domains
- The ratio of follow/no-follow links to the ranking URLs

2. Keyword parameter analysis

The second step is an analysis of keyword parameters. This considers the above SERP factors, alongside a closer inspection of individual keywords. All factors are weighted differently in Semrush's formula regarding the likelihood of influencing the first-page ranking.

The parameter weighted the highest by some way is the median number of referring domains for ranking URLs, totaling 41.22 percent. While the second-largest weighted share is the median authority score for ranking domains at 16.99 percent. Search volume is third with 9.47 percent, and the median follow/no-follow ratio for ranking URLs is a fraction lower in the fourth position at 9.17 percent.

Other parameters include featured snippets, branded keywords, and site links, with the weighted share becoming progressively smaller. Factors that can harm the KD score are keywords with a high word count and no SERP features.

3. The calculations

The third step is the calculation itself. The formula also adapts for each country, taking a nation's population size and the number of websites into account when calculating the KD score based on Semrush's regional database.

What KD scores mean for your SEO

performance

On Semrush's KD platform, the user can enter up to 100 keywords at a time to check the KD score. Crucially, the platform can help the user find valuable low-competition keywords. KD scores can also be calculated for both long-tail and local keywords. In addition, the tool allows the user to compare their SEO strategy with competitors to see what is performing well and identify any keyword gaps.

The results provide the user with the KD rating and advice on what they need to do next to gain hits. At the lower end of the scale, scores of 0-14 percent are classed "very easy" with the strongest likelihood of new pages appearing near the top of Google rankings without the need for backlinks.

The next step up is 15-29 percent, which is considered "easy". While there may be some competition, it remains possible to achieve a high ranking for new web pages. However, this will require quality content based on the keywords.

Things get progressively harder as the KD scores get higher. A score of 85-100 percent, for example, is classified "very hard", where keywords face the strongest competition and the odds are stacked against new websites breaking through. A ranking is still possible through features such as on-page SEO, link building, and campaigns to promote content. In this instance, pay-per-click advertising may prove more beneficial.

To find out more about Semrush and its Keyword Difficulty platform download its recent whitepaper.

More about:

<https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2021/07/16/the-importance-of-accurate-keyword-difficulty-scores/>