

Multilingual keyword research

This lesson covers multilingual keyword research. Keyword research is vital in any SEO strategy, including a multilingual SEO strategy. Let's explore why it is important, how it works, and how you can apply it to a multilingual strategy.

Why is keyword research important?

Your audience uses certain terms to find what they are looking for. You need to know which words they use so you can use these terms on your site. This will improve your chances of ranking. Proper keyword research will help you discover this. At Yoast, we regularly encounter clients who have a specific set of terms they use when referring to their products, while their target group uses a different set of words. Potential customers don't find our clients because they search for keywords that are not present on our clients' sites.

It doesn't make sense to optimize for words that people don't use. Good keyword research helps you to use the same words as your target audience. A good keyword research sheet can also serve as the basis for your content strategy: you can write blog posts around the keywords you want users to find you on.

What is keyword research?

Before we start explaining the process of keyword research, we'll explain the most important concepts of keyword research below.

Keyword research: the activity you undertake to come up with an extensive list of keywords you would like to rank for.

Keyword strategy: all the decisions you make based on your keyword research.



Key phrases: keywords which consist of multiple words. We tend to use the word keyword for key phrases as well; a keyword isn't necessarily only one word. 'WordPress SEO' is a keyword, as is 'Google Analytics plugin'. Keywords can contain multiple words! We will refer to key phrases as keywords throughout this module.

Head keywords: head keywords are your most important keywords. They form the basis of your keyword research sheet and keyword strategy. You should start by identifying your head keywords. Then, you can start coming up with longer tail keywords. They tie into the same topic, to improve your chances of ranking. Note: head keywords can consist of several words.

Mid tail keywords: more specific and longer keywords, derived from the head keyword they tie into. The length of mid tail keywords is relative: they may be very short for big companies, they may be quite long for smaller companies.

Long tail keywords: even more specific and less common keywords. They often focus on a niche. The longer (and more specific) search terms are, the easier it will be to rank for the term. More specific (and often longer) keywords are usually referred to as long tail keywords. The length of long tail keywords is also relative: they may consist of three or four words for big companies, they may consist of six or more words for smaller companies.

Head keyword	Mid tail keyword	Long tail keyword
vest		
	women's vest	
	men's vest	
		men's vest designs for weddings
		luxury men's vest for hire New York
		vest under a black suit
	vest buttons	

Image 1: Head keyword, mid tail keyword, long tail keyword

“ You need to know which words your audience uses so you can use these terms on your site. ”

Head, mid and long tail keywords

Most sites have one main topic. Mom blogs are usually about children and family life, food blogs are about eating, restaurants and recipes. The Yoast blog is about SEO. The main topic or theme of your site is the number one keyword (or key phrase) you want people to use to find you. Imagine having a food blog about homemade Italian food. In that case, you would like to be found on a search term like ‘*homemade Italian food*’. That would be the keyword you center your keyword research strategy around.

You cannot, however, optimize all your blog posts for the term ‘*homemade Italian food*’. Even if all your blog posts will be about homemade Italian food. Instead, you should write a whole number of blog posts about all kinds of longer tail variants of your number one search term. In the example of the food blog, you could write about several subcategories of delicious homemade Italian food: homemade Italian pasta, homemade Italian salads, homemade Italian pie. These could be your main categories.

Then, you can start thinking about even more specific longer tail keywords. You can use these as the keywords you write your blog posts around. You could, for example, write about: homemade Italian spaghetti bolognese, homemade Italian lasagna, homemade Italian penne carbonara and so on.

Lastly, you can use even longer tail keywords to target an even more specific audience. You can funnel in people searching for recipes that kids would like, for example. Or write a blog post about how healthy or unhealthy spaghetti bolognese is.

Group	Head keyword	Mid tail keyword	Long tail keyword
Homemade Italian food	<u>Homemade Italian pasta</u>	Homemade Italian spaghetti bolognese	
			Homemade Italian spaghetti bolognese recipe for kids
			Homemade Italian spaghetti bolognese calories nutritives
			Homemade Italian spaghetti bolognese easy recipe for dinner party
		Homemade Italian lasagna	
			...
			...
			...
		Homemade Italian penne carbonara	
		<u>Homemade Italian salads</u>	
			...
			...
			...
			...

Image 2: Fragment of keyword research sheet 'homemade Italian food'

In our view, there are two important reasons why a website should focus on long tail keywords: they make it easier to rank and they lead to higher conversions.

1. Ranking easily

It is much easier to rank for long tail keywords than for more common keywords because fewer websites compete for high rankings in the result pages of Google. The longer (and more specific) search terms are, the easier it is to rank for the term. Because of the vastness of the internet, it is easier to find your audience for your particular niche. This is especially important if you are in a competitive market or if you're a small company trying to build its name. Focusing on a group of long tail keywords will result in more traffic altogether.

2. Higher conversions

Another benefit of concentrating on long tail keywords is that visitors that find your website are more likely to become regular visitors of your page. Maybe they will even subscribe to your newsletter. The longer and more precise the search terms are, the higher your chances of conversion. People who use a very particular term have a more specific idea of what they are looking for. In addition, individuals who know what they're looking for are much more likely to become frequent visitors! In other words, long tail keywords target a specific audience. The more specific your audience, the more motivated they are to buy products or visit your site again. Thus, targeting a specific audience is a very, very profitable SEO-tactic.

How to come up with keywords

When executing your keyword research, you should create a list of keywords. With your mission in mind, you should try to get into the heads of your potential buyers. What will these people be looking for? What kind of search terms could they be using while looking for your amazing service or product? Ask yourself these questions and write down as many answers as you possibly can.

If the mission of your website is clear, you will have a clear image of your niche and your unique selling points (the things that set your business apart from others). These will be the terms you want users to find you for.

There are a couple of things you can do to get a better idea of what your audience is like. You can ask your customers what they were looking for when they came to your website. You can ask them in a survey. If you encounter visitors face-to-face, you can ask them face-to-face. Looking through comments is also a great way of finding inspiration as to which words your audience is using.

Keyword research tools to use

Making a keyword list is always hard. It's not easy to discover what terms people use in search engines to end up at your website. Luckily, there are some tools which can make your keyword research a bit easier, and could help you [speed up the process a bit](#):

Google Adwords Keyword Planner

Use the [Google Adwords Keyword Planner](#) to find new and related keywords, but ignore the search volume data! The search volume data in the planner is only useful for keywords that you're spending money to advertise on. Otherwise, these volumes are not reliable. Google Adwords Keyword Planner is not really helpful to decide which keyword is most used by your potential audience. However, it is a useful tool in coming up with ideas for potential keywords.

Yoast Suggests

Joost developed his own keyword research tool to come up with keywords as well! [Yoast Suggests](#) uses the Google Suggest functionality you know from searching in Google. It finds the keyword expansions Google gives and then requests more of them. So if you type 'example', it'll also give you the expansions for 'example a...' till 'example z...' etc. Just try it and fill out some of your potential keywords. It's a great way to quickly find more long tail keywords you can focus on.

Google Trends

[Google Trends](#) allows you to compare the traffic for sets of keywords. You can even see the difference for numerous geographical regions. It's very important to check Google Trends if you expect some of your keywords to be seasonal, for instance due to regulations, holiday seasons etc.

Your internal search engine

What are people looking for on your site? These terms reflect the keyword vocabulary of your actual audience. You should definitely add them to your keyword list. Do not forget to look at the keywords people filled in that didn't get any results. They are a potential gold mine! These keywords show what people expected to find but couldn't. If you analyze them carefully, you will discover potential ways of catering to your audience. You can look into the results of your [internal search](#) in Google Analytics at Behavior → Site Search → Search Terms.

End result of your keyword research

You should end up with a long list of keywords you would like to rank for. Then, you should divide those into head, mid tail and long tail. Make sure to take into account your chances to rank for certain keywords as well. This depends on the size of your company and the competitiveness of your market.

“The longer (and more specific) search terms are, the easier it is to rank for the term.”

Multilingual sites and SEO

Keyword research is a challenge in our native language as it is. If you have a multilingual site, however, keyword research can quickly become a minefield.

We've already established that you should be aware of the terms people use to find your products in your native language. If you have a multilingual site, you should expand your keyword research efforts to include users around the world. The most important difference is that you shouldn't create just one keyword research sheet. You should carefully consider what audiences you can distinguish. Then, you should make keyword research sheet tabs for every language or regional variation you want to target. This allows you to optimize your keyword strategy and copy for any audience. Doing so will increase your number of potential customers. Moreover, you may just be able to snag an advantage over competitors by targeting audiences more specifically. French users, for example, are probably going to search in French, so you need to be findable for those French search terms.

Multi-regional sites and SEO

Striking differences also exist between regions. Just because you speak the same language, doesn't mean you use the same vocabulary. It is important to note that Google is improving at identifying synonyms. There is still a lot of work to be done, though. Less common languages and their variations are still a work in progress. This presents a great opportunity to gain an edge!

Of course, you can't target every variation. The UK and US, however, may be different and sizable enough to target separately. The same goes for some varieties of Spanish and other common languages. Plainly put, not taking variations into account can lead to missed opportunities.

So, what's the worst that could happen?

Sure, that all sounds great, but how should you go about this? What are the risks you need to take into account, when doing multilingual keyword research? Well, if you use the wrong term, potential customers

will not find what they are looking for. Hence, your bounce rate will increase. Obviously, your conversion rates will suffer as a consequence.

It's an easy trap to fall into. Years ago, Joost helped a company to rank number one in Belgium for the Dutch word koelkast (refrigerator). One of Belgium's official languages is Flemish, a variation of Dutch. Surprisingly, the company hardly converted. Turns out, the word koelkast is mostly used in the Netherlands. In Belgium, many consumers searched for the word frigo, which Flemish borrows from French!

Multilingual and multi-regional sites: example case

Let's revisit the example we discussed in the video: the word vest.

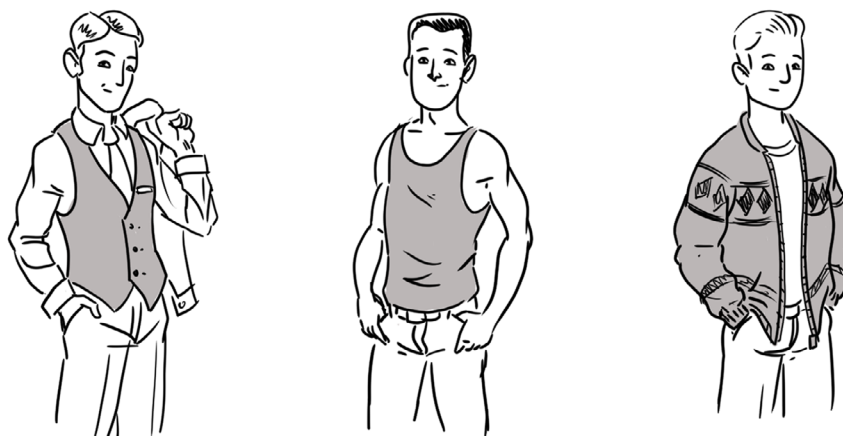


Image 3: US vest, UK vest, Dutch vest

Remember, an American vest is a British waistcoat. A British vest is called a tank-top or a-shirt in America. Incidentally, a tank-top is also a piece of clothing in the UK. Americans, however, call that a sweater vest. The Dutch vest is either a cardigan or a hoodie with a zipper. This example illustrates the importance of creating a separate keyword research sheet for every language and region you target. If you don't know what terms users from this country or region use, do keyword research to learn more.

Keyword research for multilingual sites: what can I do?

Researching your field and the potential risks it presents is crucial. An international clothing company will encounter more difficulties than a bookstore. Make sure you have a clear strategy. What audiences do you want to target and what vocabulary do they use? Invest time in researching terms you're unsure about. Similarly to regular keyword research, you can use [Google Trends](#) to compare the frequency of search terms. It even gives you an overview of how popular each term is by region.



Image 4: As we saw in the video, most of the world prefers the term sneaker for sporty footwear. The UK, however, is an obvious exception, as Google Trends shows

It's probably a good idea to create a synonym list for your more important products. In addition, you should create separate keyword research sheets which include these terms for every language and region you're targeting. If you own or manage a bigger organization that has some money to spend, consider consulting a specialist. If you want to be cost-effective, you can also reach out to native speakers in your network.

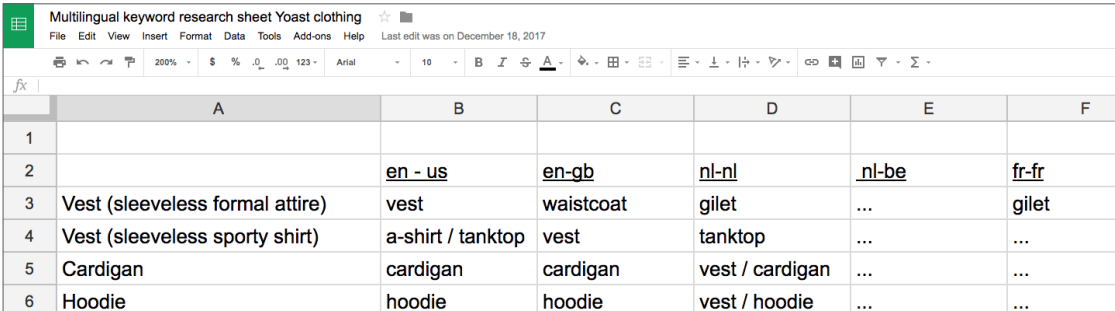
“If the mission of your website is clear, you will have a clear image of your niche and your unique selling points.”

Multilingual keyword research sheet

We're up to speed on the theory. However, how should you go about doing multilingual keyword research? As we mentioned before, it may be a good idea to create a sheet in which you incorporate your keyword research.

Master vocab tab

First of all, it's a good idea to make a master vocab tab in which you collect translations for the term you want to optimize for. This master vocab tab will most likely consist of hundreds of words for a sizable site.



	A	B	C	D	E	F
1						
2		<u>en - us</u>	<u>en-gb</u>	<u>nl-nl</u>	<u>nl-be</u>	<u>fr-fr</u>
3	Vest (sleeveless formal attire)	vest	waistcoat	gilet	...	gilet
4	Vest (sleeveless sporty shirt)	a-shirt / tanktop	vest	tanktop
5	Cardigan	cardigan	cardigan	vest / cardigan
6	Hoodie	hoodie	hoodie	vest / hoodie

Image 5: Example of a master vocab tab

Please note that these may not always be literal translations! You should always be on the lookout for the terms people would use in a similar situation. The translation may not be directly the same. For example, if you say 'business casual cardigan' in English, you may say 'net vest' in Dutch, which is not the same at all word-for-word. However, if Dutch people are looking for a business casual cardigan, that is one of the keywords they would most likely use. This also means that there may be several viable alternatives. If so, incorporate all of them in your master vocab sheet.

Language variation tabs

In addition to the master vocab tab, you make a separate tab for each language variation you want to produce content for. Each tab will feature a keyword strategy for that specific region.

English - US			
Group	Head keyword	Mid tail keyword	Long tail keyword
Clothing products	vest	women's vest	
		men's vest	
			men's vest designs for weddings
			luxury men's vest for hire New York
			vest under a black suit
		vest buttons	
	a-shirt / tank top	women's workout tank top	
		women's workout tank top	
			men's sports compression tank top
	cardigan		
cardigan wool			
		cardigan business casual	

Image 6: en-us tab of multilingual keyword research sheet

Dutch - Netherlands			
Group	Head keyword	Mid tail keyword	Long tail keyword
Clothing products	gilet	gilet vrouw	
		gilet man	
			gilet man ontwerp voor bruiloft
			luxe gilet man te huur Amsterdam
			gilet onder een zwart pak
		gilet met knopen	
	tank top	sportshirt zonder mouwen man	
		sportshirt zonder mouwen vrouw	
			mannen compressie shirt zonder mouwen
	vest		
gebreid vest			
		net vest / netjes vest / sjiek vest	

Image 7: nl-nl tab of multilingual keyword research sheet

The content of these tabs will often be very similar, apart from the fact that they are translated. However, it's also possible that each tab is radically different. Imagine you have a site with recipes. You may want to focus on completely different cuisines for each region you are targeting. In that case, you have to devise a completely different keyword and content strategy for each region, so many of the keywords will be completely different!

Consider what each audience needs and create your keyword strategy separately and accordingly. If keywords are the same across languages, translate them. Remember, the optimal translation may well not be literal!

Module 1.1	Module 1.2	Module 2.1	Module 2.2	Module 3.1	Module 3.2
Module 3.3	Module 4.1	Module 4.2	Module 4.3	Module 4.4	