UNLOCK YOUR
AMAZON KEYWORDS

Learn the easy way to harness the proven power of
search terms to help readers find — and buy — your eBook.

by Steven Spatz, President, BookBaby

A **keyword** is a word or phrase that is associated with your book. BookBaby will transmit five keywords or phrases to Amazon when it distributes your book. The keywords are used by Amazon's search engine, so if someone enters one of your keywords into Amazon's search bar, your book will show up in the search results. No one but you or Amazon knows the keywords. While categories help browsers find your book, keywords help searchers discover it. Amazon search will be the biggest source of traffic to your book page, so it's crucial to get your keywords right.

There are three main criteria for what constitutes a "good" keyword:

1 VOLUME

How often is a keyword searched for? If no one is looking for books with a particular keyword, it won't do you any good to use it.

2 COMPETITION

How many other books use the same keyword, and will they be ranked above you in searches? Of particular importance is whether your book will show up in the first page of results, since this will exponentially increase how many people see it.

3 RELEVANCE

Will your book appeal to people who are searching for this keyword? It's nice to appear in the #1 position in a search for spiritual books, but if your volume is a WW2 era thriller-bloodfest, you're probably not going to see much in the way of revenues from it.

That's the scientific approach. But how does it apply to you? The things that matter about keywords for your book are:

- What keywords will your target audience search for on Amazon frequently?

- What are the prospects for your book showing high up on the list of search results for that keyword?

- How likely is it that people using that keyword will be interested in your book (and then select your book from the search results)?

How do you determine the best keywords for your book? Let's get started.

Let the brainstorm commence

The first thing to do is to make a list of all the words and phrases that are associated with your book. For fiction that will include themes, places, things and anything concrete you can associate with your book. You'll be referring to this list quite often so I suggest you create this in your favorite spreadsheet program.

Create a new spreadsheet. In the first column, start entering all the keywords and phrases you can think of to describe your book. Start with the first words that come to mind and proceed from there. Make it a mind dump — anything and everything that comes to mind. Don't worry if the keyword is good or bad. That will slow you down. Don't worry — you'll be able to filter out the lousy ones with our next few tasks.

Then when you're done with that stream of consciousness, go back and remember what makes your book special. It might be concepts that first led you to want to write it in the first place. Go open your actual book — either the printed version or your digital manuscript — and skim through it, looking for ideas chapter by chapter. It could be settings, characters or plot devices.

Some things to consider:

- Any word in your book title automatically becomes a keyword, without counting against the five keywords transmitted by BookBaby to Amazon. This is why you often see books with titles like "The Oregon Trail Chronicles — Western Historical Romance." This is a clever trick to expand your keyword count. It might make your listing look a little weird but some people do use it successfully.

- While your title is included, your book description is not automatically considered. What can you pull from your description that should be used as one of those important words?

- Some people have found great success with two or three (or more?) word phrases. These so called "long tail" keywords are often under-utilized.

- Some generic words are generally useless because there is too much competition. For instance— Romance. But for now keep it on your list because we'll weed it out later.

Find the herd.

I call it God's gift to marketers. The single best tool for keyword research is the Google Adwords Keyword Lookup Tool. The trick to selecting keywords is remembering that it's not about choosing the words *that you think* describe your book's subject. It's using the words *other people use* when searching. It would be ideal if Amazon had tools to help you understand what people search for but they don't. Fortunately Google keeps track of what people search for and they make this information available for free.

https://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner

This free tool is meant to evaluate and suggest keywords for advertisers who spend billions of dollars on Adwords campaigns. But BookBaby authors have found it enormously useful to see estimated volumes for Amazon keywords as well. Do Google results mirror the results of the Amazon search engines. Not exactly. Book marketers have been comfortable making the assumption that that the number of people searching for a keyword on Google is comparable to that same keyword on Amazon.

And did I mention that it's free? Yet it's very powerful.

Here's how it works:

1. Open up the link above. You'll need to set up an account with Google. Don't worry – it's not going to cost you anything. It takes about 2 minutes to get set up.

bookbaby
PUBLISH • PROMOTE • SELL   **Unlocking Your Amazon Keywords**
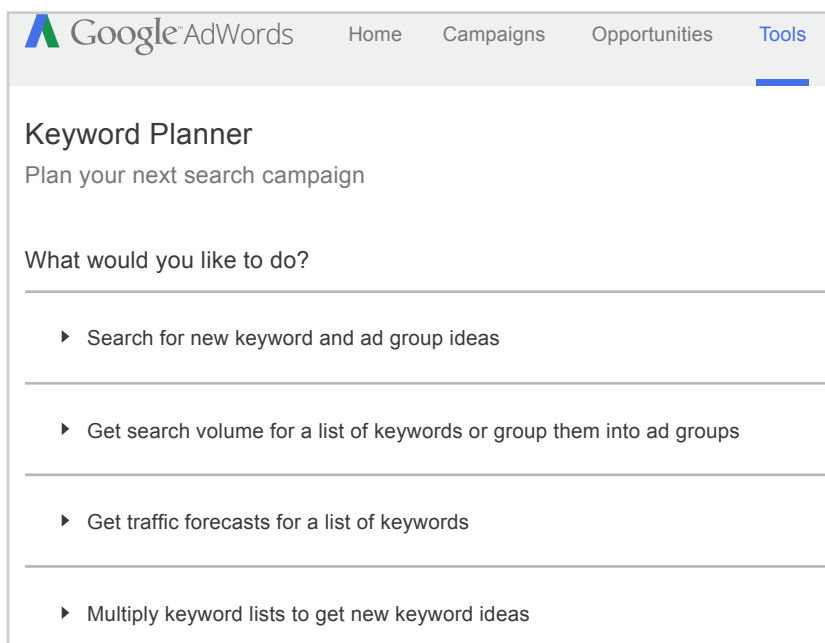
2. Choose the top item — Search for New Keyword and Ad Group Ideas.

3. Here's where it's important that you've put your keyword ideas into a digital file. In the top box where it says "Enter one or more of the following: Your product or service", copy and paste your keywords/phrases, one per line.

▼ Search for new keyword and ad group ideas

Enter one or more of the following:

Your product or service

For example, flowers or used cars

Your landing page

www.example.com/page

Your product category

Enter or select a product category

Targeting ?

United States ✎

English ✎

Google ✎

Negative keywords ✎

Date range ?

Show avg. monthly searches for: Last 12 months ✎

Customize your search ?

Keyword filters ✎

Keyword options ✎
Show broadly related ideas
Hide keywords in my account
Hide keywords in my plan

Keywords to include ✎

Get ideas

4. Leave "Website" blank. Set "Category" to "Books & Literature" to improve the quality of keyword suggestions.

Your product category
Books & Literature
All Categories
News, Media & Publications
Books & Literature
All
Audio Books
Book Retailers

5. Click Search.

You'll be presented with data — and lots of it. The first tab, for date, contains the monthly search volumes for your keywords. The second tab contains additional keyword suggestions, again with volume data. I wouldn't spend much time here — if you've invested some time to fill your spreadsheet with keyword ideas you've got this covered. You can also ignore the "Competition" column; it tells you how many people are bidding on an Adwords keyword and is of no use to you.

Record all of the search numbers for your entire keyword list. Now let's see how this compares with the action on Amazon.

Go find the buyers.

Sort your spreadsheet by volume number, descending. The actual numbers aren't terribly important at this stage. For our research purposes, the absolute value isn't really true. What we care about is the values that are relative to each other — in other words how our keyword ideas stack up against each other. We're looking for large trends here, not small margins. For instance, if one keyword has a volume of 12,000 and another has a volume of 10,000 — you might just as well consider them equal.

Now is when you need roll up your shirtsleeves and invest the time.

1. Open amazon.com and in the dropdown next to the search box, select "Kindle Store."

2. Enter your first keyword and search.

3. On the search results page, change "Sort by" from "Relevance" to "New and Popular"

4. Scroll down to the bottom of the page, and open the last book listed on the first page of results in a new window. Why? Because our immediate goal is for your book to show up on the first page of search results. You need to know what's expected of you in order for you to achieve it within your chosen genre.

5. Scroll to or search for "Amazon Best Sellers Rank." It will say something like "#XXXX Paid in Kindle Store." Why is this number important? It's the rank you need to beat to come up on the first page of global results.

6. Back to your spreadsheet: Note it in your spreadsheet in a new column. If you like, you can also note the number of results of the search (at the top of the result page), but this number is not nearly as important; if a search only returns 300 results, it's still not much good to you if they are the 300 most popular books on Amazon!

7. Back on the result page, under "Departments" on the left hand side, find your book's genre category and click it. Now you'll need to repeat steps 4-5 above. Note the category specific competition rank in yet another spreadsheet column. Then rinse and repeat for category #2, followed by the rest of your keywords with enough volume to consider bothering.

By now you're getting some idea of how relevant your initial keyword list is. Are the books being shown somewhat similar to your own? If yes, you're on the right track.

Another way to check your keywords is to simply use the auto-populate tool on the site. As you type in your keywords or phrases, you can see a drop-down of specific words or phrases. Make sure you're in the Books/Kindle store if you want to narrow the search down.

Go into Amazon and start typing in the word/phrase you want to check. This method can even help you with decide on topics or titles. Obviously you want the most commonly used keywords in your meta-data. You will probably find that some of your keywords from Google don't even show up in the Amazon listing, so discard those and focus on those which appear in both lists.

Pick the winners

So now you've got all your data. You know how many people are searching for each keyword, followed by (approximately) how popular your book has to be to show up in both a global and category-specific search.

Generally speaking, you're looking for keywords that provide "high" numbers in all columns (keeping in mind that books numbered higher on Amazon are lower ranked). This is when your current standing and goals come into play. With a little effort and marketing savvy, any book can break the top 200k. Playing this out, a medium-volume keyword where the first page contains 300k ranked books is gold.

But maybe you have a goal to break into the top 50K or even 10Kwith your book, then you'll want to target higher-volume, more generic and more competitive searches.

Some other things to consider:

Genre plus — Your book can easily get lost in huge genre lists. So be as specific as you can be—the more precise the better. If you write "military history" your book will be competing with a lot of other books. The top spots in the query results list go to the highest-selling books. So if you're not already a best-selling self-published novelist, competing in a smaller arena gives your book a better chance at appearing on the customer's first page of results. To do this, modify the subject with a few focused words, from "military history" to "WW2 English aircraft comparison" or "RAF Spitfire versus Hurricane Hawker Pilots Opinion", or whatever describes your book. Your book will have a better chance of standing out—and you'll attract the people who are seeking your specific niche.

Communicate the tone — Readers like to know the mood of your book. Readers often type in the feelings they want to take away from the experience of reading, so include those words in your metadata. List out all the adjectives that describe the emotions that your readers will feel when they read the books. Will they be on the edge of their seat in suspense? Will they be laughing? Will they wax nostalgic or become edgy? For this keyword, think about your reader's state of mind as they read, not the way how your characters feel in the book.

Beyond the topic — You can list out important and specific details of your book. For the WWII aircraft book above: Are pilots interviewed? How about aircraft mechanics? Those are potential keywords. Does the book discuss any locations or events? Putting in words like "Battle of Britain", "London Blitz" and terms like that might be searched. Think about the other specific yet unique elements of your story,—the city or country it's set in, the time period it takes place. Someone may be looking for those very qualities in a novel.

Reason to buy — Does your book make a great "Anniversary Gift" or "Graduation Present"? People going on vacation might use the term "Beach Reads" in their metadata. Customers seek books that fulfill their needs, so if your book can be used for a specific function, list it.

Play fair — One more tip. Don't try to game the system: Just don't. Don't mention other authors or titles in your metadata—even if everyone tells you your style is reminiscent of Ken Burns or Tom Clancy — do not put their names in your metadata. Online retailers police for cheats like that and they could de-list your book for it. Play fair—describe your book and your book only.

Authors are sometimes intimidated by the entire concept of metadata. If you use some of the ideas I've suggested you can master it in no time. And if you don't succeed the first time – that's fine. You can go into your book listing and modify your metadata any time you like. While you can always tinker with the right words and phrases, pay heed to one more piece of advice. Always be consistent. Don't put one book description on Amazon and change it around for B&N. Use similar wording for the boilerplate on your press release, book flyer, etc. Create a document or spreadsheet documenting the metadata and where you used it. This is especially important if you have several titles and a huge time saver as you expand your marketing.

Are keywords the "key" to your book sales success?

Yes and no.

Keywords work as a form of a marketing investment — of time and your continued attention. If you take the time to research and set them up — and continue to monitor your results — they will continue to pay dividends in the form of user search-generated exposure without you having to do anything. For the writer who is spending his or her time working on the next book, this is vital to your overall marketing strategy. You can't devote much time to active promotional activity. Writers need to write first! Chosen correctly, a good set of keywords can provide a recurring income that grows and grows with each new book you add to the market.

But the greatest keywords can only do so much. All a keyword can do is put your book in a list of search results. That's when the other components of your package must kick in to play. Your cover must be better than any of the other books available in that same search. You've got to have a great blurb to draw the reader in. The same goes with your book sample and reviews. The best keywords in the world won't help you sell your book if the other elements aren't up to the task of selling your work.

As I said earlier it's not about how *you* would search, it's about understanding how *the reader* might search.