



The Seasonality of Search

Expose the seasonality of your keywords using freely available tools

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The importance of completing a market assessment prior to SEO implementation is ingrained in Conductor's culture after years of providing search solutions to our customers. Since SEO is really about the gradual expansion of share of search, a crucial first step is to understand market size.

Many search marketers perform a quasi-market assessment by analyzing site analytics before beginning new campaigns. While understanding historical traffic trends is an important part of the planning phase, analytics only show historical metrics for a particular set of keywords driving traffic to your site, but do not take into account search volume that can be an indicator of market potential.

To perform a true market assessment that will provide you with a more accurate market size, a market opportunity model based on search volumes and a click-through curve (CTR) should be used. We've written [before](#) about how to construct such a model. This article will build on that approach by describing how to expose keyword seasonality during the market assessment process. This information can be used both as a guide for seasonal SEO decision making and as an input to your market opportunity model.

GOOGLE ADWORDS DEFAULT VIEW DOES NOT ACCOUNT FOR SEASONALITY

Keyword search volume is one of the major inputs into a market opportunity model. Google's Adword Tool default view shows two metrics for the keyword you are viewing: last month's search volume (Local Search Volume) and a 12 month search volume average (Global Monthly Search Volume). Neither metric takes into account the seasonal dips and spikes occurring in search volume over time. Local Search Volume may give you a skewed view in looking at a particularly high or low month, or in using Global Monthly Search Volume the peaks and valleys may be equally distributed over the 12 months.

Important note: We cannot guarantee that these keywords will improve your campaign performance. We reserve the right to disapprove any keywords you add. You are responsible for the keywords you select and for ensuring that your use of the keywords does not violate any applicable laws.

Want more keyword ideas? Try the [Search-based Keyword Tool](#), a new tool that will generate ideas matched to your website.

Results are tailored to **English, United States** [Edit](#)

How would you like to generate keyword ideas?

☒ Descriptive words or phrases
(e.g. green tea)

☐ Website content
(e.g. www.example.com/product?id=74893)

Enter one keyword or phrase per line:
digital camera

☒ Use synonyms
[Filter my results](#)

[Get keyword ideas](#)

Choose columns to display: [?](#)
Show/hide columns

Keywords	Advertiser Competition	Local Search Volume: April	Global Monthly Search Volume	Match Type: ?
Keywords related to term(s) entered - sort by relevance ?				
[digital cameras]		2,240,000	7,480,000	Add Exact ↵
[digital camera]		1,500,000	2,740,000	Add Exact ↵
[canon digital camera]		90,500	201,000	Add Exact ↵
[camera digital]		74,000	550,000	Add Exact ↵
[digital slr cameras]		74,000	110,000	Add Exact ↵
[olympus digital camera]		74,000	165,000	Add Exact ↵
[waterproof digital camera]		74,000	135,000	Add Exact ↵
[canon digital cameras]		60,500	201,000	Add Exact ↵
[compact digital cameras]		60,500	27,100	Add Exact ↵
[digital camera reviews]		40,500	74,000	Add Exact ↵
[nikon digital camera]		40,500	74,000	Add Exact ↵
[nikon digital cameras]		40,500	110,000	Add Exact ↵
[best digital camera]		33,100	60,500	Add Exact ↵
[digital slr camera]		33,100	246,000	Add Exact ↵
[underwater digital camera]		33,100	60,500	Add Exact ↵
[used digital cameras]		33,100	8,100	Add Exact ↵
[digital camera lens]		27,100	33,100	Add Exact ↵
[cameras digital]		22,200	90,500	Add Exact ↵
[digital camera lenses]		22,200	74,000	Add Exact ↵
[digital camera ratings]		22,200	33,100	Add Exact ↵
[tele digital camera]		22,200	60,500	Add Exact ↵

Selected Keywords:

To advertise with these keywords on Google, export them in TEXT or CSV format. Click 'Sign up for AdWords' to create your AdWords account, then paste the keywords into your new campaign.

No keywords added yet

[+ Add your own keywords](#)

[Sign up for AdWords](#)

Why does this matter?

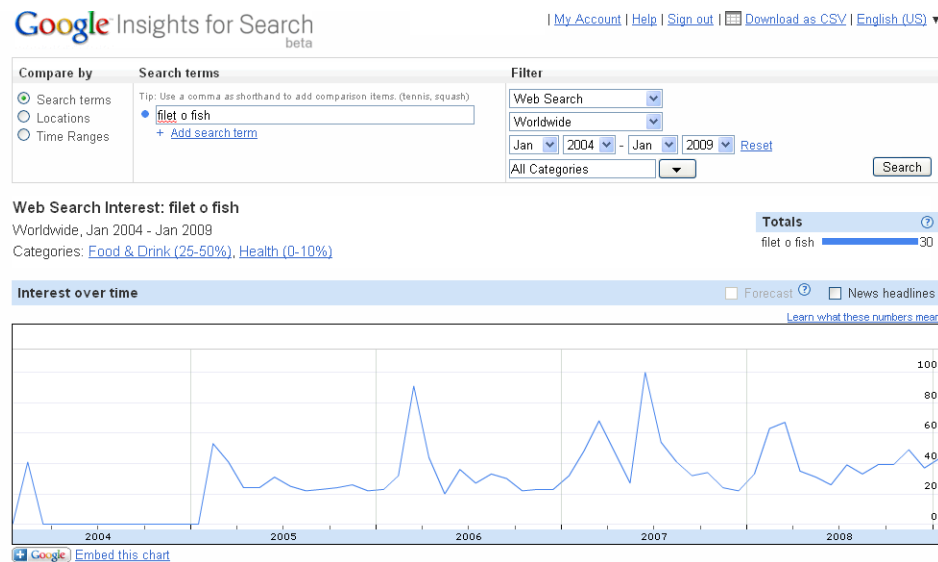
If you are building a long term SEO strategy on which you will base budget, infrastructure, content and resource allocation decisions, you will need to know how seasonal changes will impact your campaigns. Decisions such as prioritizing landing page modifications, content updates and site optimization can all be impacted by the seasonality of keyword searches.

GOOGLE INSIGHTS FOR SEARCH REVEALS HIGH LEVEL TRENDS

One method for exposing seasonality is Google's Insights for Search tool. Although, **it does not provide absolute search volumes**, displaying only searches relative to the total number of searches over time, it can highlight seasonal search trends for high volume keywords. At a recent Google event they highlighted a fun example by graphing the term 'filet o fish', McDonald's fish sandwich. Searches for the term spike significantly around March during Lent when many searchers are looking for alternatives to meat.

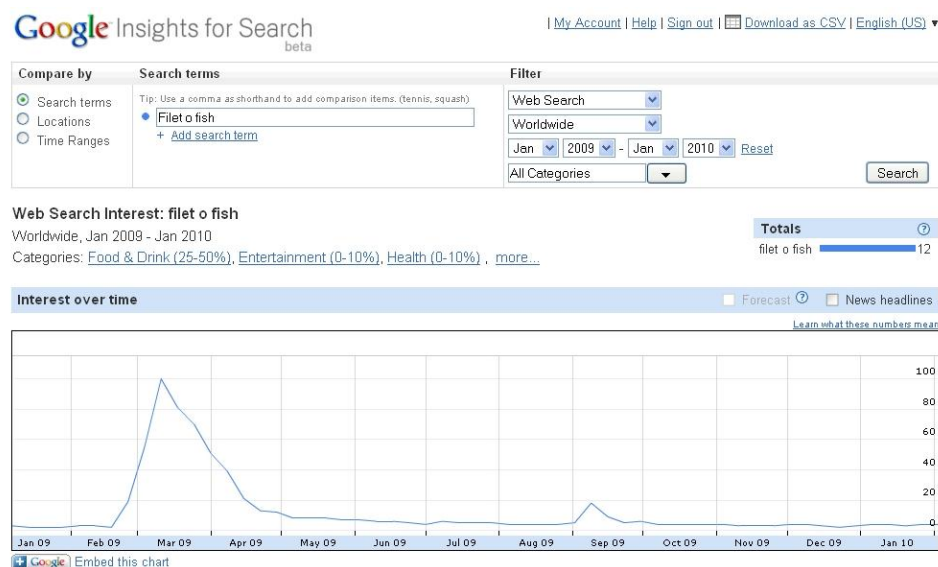
Graph 1: Displaying search trending for the term 'filet o fish' year over year

1



Graph 2: Displaying search trending for the term 'filet o fish' over a 1 year period

2



A FEW CLICKS IN ADWORDS EXPOSES SEASONAL BEHAVIORS

Although the recently released Adwords interface (currently in beta) shows month over month search trends, the previous interface does not. For many users who maintain an allegiance to the previous interface, changing the default view in Google Adwords is another method for exposing keyword seasonality. Set the 'Match Type' dropdown menu to 'Exact' to eliminate extraneous matches, and select 'Show All' from the 'Choose Columns to Display' drop down menu.

The 'Search Volume Trends' column graphs search volume over the last 12 months and, as its name implies, the 'Highest Volume Occurred In' column shows the month with the highest search volume for that particular keyword. This short exercise can expose fresh insight into searcher habits for your targeted keywords. In the example below, searches for 'digital camera' keywords overwhelmingly peak in December but searches for 'digital camera lenses' peak in May.

The screenshot shows the Google AdWords Keyword Tool interface. The search term entered is "digital camera". The interface displays a table of related keywords with columns for Estimated Ad Position, Estimated Avg. CPC, Advertiser Competition, Local Search Volume, Global Monthly Search Volume, Search Volume Trends (May 2009 - Apr 2010), Highest Volume Occurred In, and Match Type. The keywords are sorted by relevance.

Keywords	Estimated Ad Position	Estimated Avg. CPC	Advertiser Competition	Local Search Volume: April	Global Monthly Search Volume	Search Volume Trends (May 2009 - Apr 2010)	Highest Volume Occurred In	Match Type
[digital cameras]	1 - 3	\$2.05		2,240,000	7,480,000		Jul	Add Exact
[digital camera]	1 - 3	\$1.46		1,500,000	2,740,000		Dec	Add Exact
[camera digital]	1 - 3	\$1.46		74,000	550,000		Dec	Add Exact
[digital slr camera]	1 - 3	\$1.25		33,100	246,000		Jun	Add Exact
[canon digital camera]	1 - 3	\$1.20		90,500	201,000		Dec	Add Exact
[canon digital cameras]	1 - 3	\$1.39		60,500	201,000		Dec	Add Exact
[olympus digital camera]	1 - 3	\$0.88		74,000	165,000		Dec	Add Exact
[waterproof digital camera]	1 - 3	\$1.83		74,000	135,000		Dec	Add Exact
[digital slr cameras]	1 - 3	\$1.39		74,000	110,000		Dec	Add Exact
[nikon digital cameras]	1 - 3	\$1.86		40,500	110,000		Nov	Add Exact
[cameras digital]	1 - 3	\$2.05		22,200	90,500		Dec	Add Exact
[digital camera lenses]	1 - 3	\$1.19		22,200	74,000		May	Add Exact
[digital camera reviews]	1 - 3	\$0.58		40,500	74,000		Dec	Add Exact
[nikon digital camera]	1 - 3	\$1.36		40,500	74,000		Dec	Add Exact
[best digital camera]	1 - 3	\$1.01		33,100	60,500		Nov	Add Exact

DIGGING DEEPER

These tools will begin to expose seasonal trends around your keywords, yet in order to make informed search strategy decisions you'll want to dive deeper by calculating absolute monthly search volume for every keyword and chart them month over month to expose seasonal trends.

We created a simple tool that converts the keywords' relative search volume into absolute volume and charts month over month search volumes thus exposing keyword seasonality trends. Download the [keyword seasonality worksheet](#).

Please follow the below steps to use our tool:

1

If you are using the updated Adwords beta interface, click on the 'Previous Interface' link at the top right. Search for your keyword and set the Match Type dropdown to 'Exact' to eliminate extraneous matches, then select 'Show All' from the 'Choose Columns to Display' drop down.

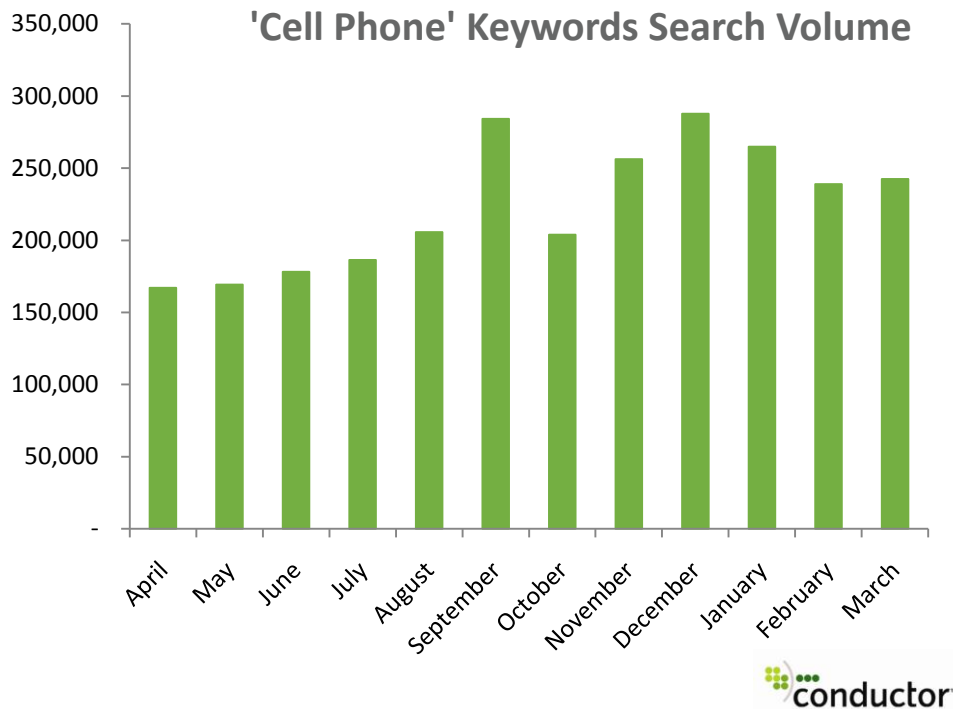
2

Download the keywords by clicking on the '.csv (for excel)' link at the bottom of the page and open the file in Excel. Google displays last month's search volume as an absolute number (e.g. March's search volume for 'cell phones' is 1,830,000) but gives each of the 12 month's search volumes as a percentage relative to the month with the largest search volume (e.g. March's search volume is .83 of the month with the highest search volume).

3

Copy and paste the keywords and search volumes into the keyword seasonality worksheet. The tool will convert the relative search volumes to absolute volumes, average the set of keywords by month and output a chart that will expose keyword seasonality across the keyword set.

To highlight the benefit that can be gained from using the tool to expose keyword seasonality, we analyzed 20 generic, non-branded, high-volume cell phone terms totaling more than 4.6 million monthly searches in the worksheet. While we are not professional cell phone marketers, we generated the chart below to illustrate the kind of insight that can result from this exercise.



The first apparent trend is the expected spike in search activity during holiday months, (November and December), noting that search activity does not immediately dip after the end of holiday season in January as significantly as might be expected-it is not until after March that the search volume drops by nearly 20%. To a search marketer having this information could mean a search campaign continues until March rather than ending immediately after the holiday rush in January.

The chart also shows a search spike in September nearly equal to December's, possibly due to the back to school rush. Again, this information provides marketers with insight that can significantly alter search marketing efforts, resulting in a significant marketing push in September.

Equally as important as exposing seasonal spikes in search activity is exposing seasonal dips. Search volumes drop to their lowest levels in April and May, which to a retailer with diverse product types, for example, could mean a focus on alternative products whose search volumes spike in spring.

WHAT'S THE MORAL OF THE STORY?

DON'T FORGET SEASONALITY IN YOUR MARKET ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Many search marketers pay attention to seasonal *traffic* trends by analyzing their site analytics with an eye towards seasonality. Far fewer consider seasonality during the market assessment process. To really consider seasonal trends in SEO decision making, seasonality must be exposed during the market assessment process. With a little digging using nothing more than Excel and freely available tools, search marketers can gain significant insight into the seasonality of their target markets.

About Conductor

Conductor is the most widely-used SEO technology company empowering enterprise marketers to manage and improve their SEO efforts. More than 250 of the Fortune 500 and Internet Retailer 500 rely on the company's technology solutions and expert team to continually measure, improve and manage their natural search efforts in order to increase site traffic and revenue. Conductor is based in New York City. www.conductor.com