

The Ultimate Guide to Keyword Research



MOBILEDEVHQ
by **TUNE**

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So you've decided to try out this ASO thing you've been hearing so much about, huh? Well you've come to the right place. MobileDevHQ is the leader in the space, and we've made it our mission to provide the best data and tools to conduct app store optimization.

Conducting keyword research is an integral part of improving your ASO and increasing organic downloads, and it's a great place to get started.

In this guide, we'll teach you how to perform proper and thorough keyword research. We've broken it down into five major steps, and will cover each step in-depth. After finishing this guide, you'll be an expert at picking the right keywords.

The five steps include:

1. Generating an initial list of keywords
2. Categorizing keywords
3. Evaluating keywords
4. Implementing keywords
5. Tracking keyword performance

Let's get started!



Generating the Initial List

The first challenge presented in keyword research is brainstorming a list of possible word choices. You should note that this is different than actually picking terms. You're not picking your final words just yet; rather, you're compiling a long list of keyword ideas, which you will later whittle down to the actual terms you will use.

Before getting started, it's helpful to create a framework to work from when generating keyword ideas. This framework is most useful when segmented by keyword type, often descending in order of how relevant the word is to your app (i.e. how likely it is to lead to a conversion). The framework acts as a kick-starter to get you thinking about keywords. To help you get going, here's a framework we created that we've had success with:

| FUNCTIONAL | CATEGORICAL | SECONDARY | TERTIARY |
|--|---|---|--|
| Describe app's features, mechanics, gameplay, and user need(s). | Describes the app's primary market, category, or niche. | Describes the app's secondary, or adjacent, market, category, or niche. | Describes the app's tertiary or semi-related, market, category, or niche |
| Examples: real estate listings, home listings, real estate agent, MLS listings, map of homes, open houses | Examples: real estate, home buying, rentals | Examples: mortgages, mortgage calculator | Examples: home design |

Once you have a framework to work from, the challenge of actually generating the keyword ideas arises. The goal here is to compile a long list (without any self-censorship) that you can later narrow down based on keyword specific data.

So how do you think of which words to use? There are a variety of sources you can use to get ideas (many of which you can find in our product). Here are some of our favorites:



Source 1: Your Current Keywords

If your app is live, you've already added some keywords. There may actually be some great keywords that have been there since day one, even if, on the whole, you know there's still work to be done. Make sure to add these to your list.

Source 2: Your Competitors' Keywords

Use our Competitor Keywords tool to get a clear picture of what terms your competitors are targeting. Go through each competitor and pick out any keywords you notice that might be pertinent to your app and add them to the list!

Here's an example of part of a list of keywords we got from our tool for a popular travel booking app:

| Currently Ranked Keywords | |
|---|--------------|
| Below are search terms for which the app ranks, grouped by keyword. | |
| start date | 04/09/14 |
| end date | 04/23/14 |
| Word / Search Terms | Count / Rank |
| hotel | (20 terms) |
| travel | (15 terms) |
| book | (10 terms) |
| hotels | (9 terms) |
| booking | (9 terms) |
| booking hotels | 5 |
| booking app | 6 |
| booking fees | 7 |
| hotels booking | 7 |



Source 3: Your Competitors' Descriptions and Titles

App descriptions are meant to convey the gist of an app in language that resonates with a potential user. Go through your competitors' descriptions and titles to gain insights and more ideas. You might not want to share too many keywords with your competitors, but using a few of the same words or drawing inspiration from their keywords can be a good idea.

Source 4: MobileDevHQ Intelligent Suggestions

We provide intelligent keyword suggestions that you can find at the bottom of your Keywords page. We take pride in having the best algorithms to suggest related terms. As you utilize the tool and create more reports and add more competitors, the suggestions continue to get better. Use this as another source of keyword ideas.

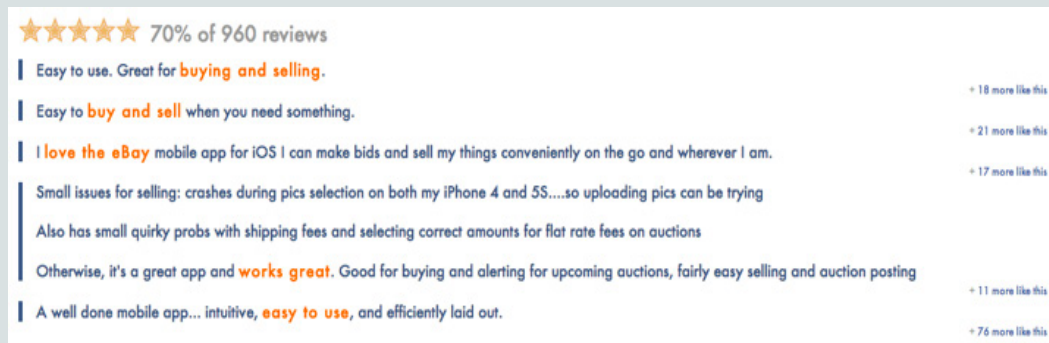
Here are some of the keywords our app suggested for the same travel booking app:

| Keyword Suggestions | | | | | |
|---|----------|---------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Add more keywords to track. These are keywords we think are relevant to your app, that you rank for, or that your competitors rank for. | | | | | |
| rental | orbitz | expedia | cars | booking | deals |
| last-minute | bookings | rooms | priceline | hotel rooms | reservation |



Source 5: Common User Messaging

We provide intelligent keyword suggestions that you can find at the bottom. Above, we mentioned that app descriptions often employ language that resonates with users. But how about seeing how users themselves are talking about your app, its market, or its features? You can use our Ratings & Reviews feature to see common user language that is segmented by rating. Here's what the 5-star reviews for eBay look like:



We group reviews by common language and messaging, so if you see a constantly used term, you should consider adding it to the list. For example, if you look at the review messaging for the eBay app, you can see that some variation of the word 'sell' shows up multiple times in the reviews.

Source 6: Good Ole Fashioned Brainstorming

At this point, you have a framework and (hopefully) a solid list of keywords. One of the last steps left is to fill in the gaps with brainstorming. Think of different phrasing, including both singular and plural versions of keywords, or different prefixes and suffixes.

One great place to find different variations is autocomplete. These are the suggested searches that Google and Apple present as you start typing in a search query. Although we don't know the exact algorithm that comes up with these lists, it's safe to presume that they are in some way based off of how popular the query is. Start typing in some of your keywords, and see what variations pop up.

The goal is to get every orientation (that sounds natural) imaginable. Eventually you will narrow this list down, but you want to start with a large list and funnel down from there.



Source 7: Keyword Misspellings

Keywords with often-misspelled forms can be another source of ideas. In May 2013, Google Play stated that of the 6 million monthly unique queries the store sees, roughly 50% are misspelled! This statistic, while Android-specific, could still be carried over to the Apple iTunes App Store. We recommend including misspelled versions of head keywords in your initial list and using data to evaluate whether they're worthwhile to include in your final keyword list (i.e., do they have significant volume indicating that they are, in fact, often misspelled?).

Those are the main sources you can go to for keyword ideas. But we aren't all knowing – if you have a source you like that we've missed, feel free to let us know at info@mobiledevhq.com. Now that your list is complete, it's time to start evaluating it and plucking out the best terms.



Categorizing Keywords

The next step in the Keyword Research process is to go through your list and categorize your keywords. Although this won't have an immediate impact on deciding which keywords you end up, it's very useful in later steps like evaluating keywords and tracking their performance.

Categorizing keywords just means assigning labels to terms so that you can later group them by specific categories in order to evaluate their potential and performance. It's all about segmentation; you want to have an idea of what types of keywords are best for your app.

How you categorize your keywords is up to you. You can create an Excel spreadsheet, add a 'Category' column, and then manually go through and decide which keywords should be assigned a certain category. However, if you've decided to use our product, you can simply use our labeling feature to quickly select and add labels to large groups of keywords. You can then filter by your labels to see how the group as a whole is performing.

The categories you decide to add are also in your hands. Every app and every marketer is different, so there's no generic list of labels you should be using. We typically advise our clients to start segmenting by following categories:

- Single keywords
- Categorical keywords
- Phrases
- Branded keywords
- Feature-based keywords

Once you've added labels to your keywords, you can use them in your evaluation process and your tracking. For example, you can see if 'feature-based keywords' tend to have a higher volume than 'categorical keywords'. Or once you've actually added keywords, you can evaluate if 'phrases' drive more downloads than 'single keywords.' It's all part of helping give you a better understanding of the best way to optimize your app for the app store.



Evaluating Keywords

You've generated a huge list of possible keywords, now it's time to evaluate and narrow that list down to the best ones for your app. Similar to traditional SEO on the web, the most important factors to take into account are volume, difficulty, and relevance.

An ideal keyword has low difficulty, high volume, and high relevance (measured by category correlation). However, the chances of finding that perfect keyword are slim. Although you may not be able to get that perfect combo, it's important to evaluate all your keywords in order to determine which terms will provide the best mix of difficulty, volume, and relevance.

So how exactly do you evaluate all these different factors for each term? The simplest way is to use an ASO tool. Once you've compiled a list of possible keywords, you need to input them into our product. Add each term followed by a comma and no space. Once you've added all the keywords in your list, we will start pulling data on them.

When you're ready to start diving deeper into each term, we have plenty of metrics to help you evaluate your keywords:

VOLUME

Although Apple and Google do not release app store search volume data, we have created a proprietary metric that approximates search behavior and volume within each app store. Although we can't assign an exact number on the search volume for a specific term, we can provide the relative search volume of a keyword compared to all the other words in your list, which we believe is just as useful.

What this means is that we can tell you how much each term on your list is being searched, relative to all the other added terms.

For example, below is what the Keyword Research might look like for a popular travel booking app. If we sort by volume, we can see that the search volume for each keyword increases relative to the base term, which is the term that is searched for the least out of all the added keywords. In this case, the base term is 'hipmunk.' The base term will always have a volume of 1x, but this doesn't mean it's only being searched one time. All the other

Your Top Charts & Keywords

Add Label

E.g., travel, flight app, hotel reservations

Add Keywords

Filter by term or label

Clear

| | Organic Downloads | Rankings | Keyword Research |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------|
| | Yesterday | Current | Volume |
| Reports | | | |
| travel | 650 | 3 | 900x |
| flight | 231 | 18 | 600x |
| cheap | 163 | 15 | 500x |
| deals | 95 | 15 | 300x |
| hotels | 148 | 4 | 300x |
| flights | 120 | 4 | 200x |
| expedia | 90 | 1 | 100x |
| hotel deals | 5 | 9 | 10x |
| cheap flight | 8 | 3 | 10x |
| hipmunk | - | - | 1x |
| Top Free iPhone Travel Apps | - | 1 | - |
| Top Free iPhone Entertainment Apps | - | - | - |
| Top Free iPhone Apps | - | 68 | - |

volume scores are relative to this, so the term 'travel' is searched 900 more times than 'hipmunk', and the term 'hotels' is searched 300 more times than 'hipmunk.' The volume metric allows you to see, from the list you have created, which terms are being searched the most.

DIFFICULTY

As you probably know, some keywords are much harder to rank for than others. This is why we have created a difficulty metric for each term. We base the difficulty off of two main factors:

1. How many apps are targeting the keyword
2. How volatile the ranking is for apps within that keyword

Volatility is based off how much the ranking of apps for a certain keyword changes. Each keyword has its own ranking system similar to the Top Charts. If we notice that the apps ranked within 'keyword A' are changing a lot, then that means it has high volatility, so the top apps don't stay constant. This would mean that your app would have a better chance of breaking into a top spot.

The difficulty metric operates off a scale of 0 (very easy) to 100 (very hard). Take this number into account when you are considering using a word for your app. It doesn't do a lot of good for you to target keywords where you aren't ranking well because your overall visibility will go down, and therefore your downloads will drop as well.

RELEVANCE

Category is another very important metric and helps you see how relevant the keyword is to your app. Your app will fall into a certain category within the app store, and determining which keywords are most relevant to a category is not as black and white as it might seem.

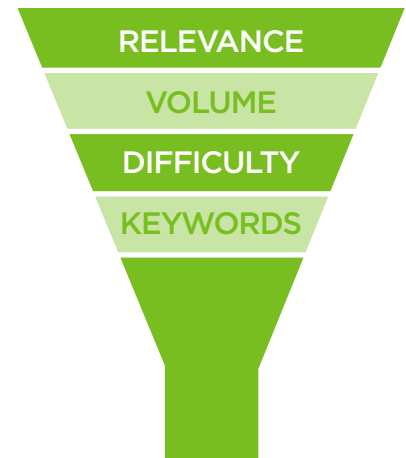
For example, it would make perfect sense for the keyword 'snow' to be related to the Weather category. It's seasonal and describes a frequently-experienced weather event. However, our tools show that 59% of the apps that show up for the keyword 'snow,' are actually in the Games category (compared to only 17% in the Weather category).

If possible, you want to avoid targeting terms that aren't related to your app. You might be able to rank first for the word 'finance' which has a high volume, but it won't do you any good if you are a cooking app because users who search for 'finance' won't be looking for an app to help with cooking. Your conversion rate for that keyword will be terrible.

You should now have a good idea of what each metric means and how it pertains to evaluating keywords. But how do you weigh each metric and value its importance? There is no specific mold that will fit every app and every situation, but for the majority of apps and keywords, we believe the first metric to filter terms by is relevance, then volume, and finally difficulty.

Why relevance first? Because if a keyword is not related to your app, most of the apps that rank for that search term are not relevant to your app. Going back to the keyword 'snow', if you had a weather app, but the majority of apps showing up for that keyword were games, you would want to consider using other keywords first. If you are still on the fence about how relevant a keyword is, try checking the top 10 apps that rank for that term. If the majority of them are related to your app, it signifies that keyword is relevant to your app.

The second filter is search volume. Again, total number of searches is not shown. What matters is the volume of all the terms relevant to your app in relation to one another. You want to know which terms, out of all relevant ones, are being searched for the most.



The final way to evaluate your keywords is by difficulty. You should have narrowed down your terms to a list of keywords that are relevant to your app and are ordered by search volume. To create your final list of words to choose from, you should look at how difficult each keyword is to rank for. If there is a term that has a huge relative search volume, but also has high difficulty, it might not be one that you want to target, depending on your app.

After going through the above steps, you should have your final list of keywords to choose from. Assign each keyword a rank, and keep that list readily available. The next section will focus on how to choose and implement your final keywords.



Implementing Keywords

You've already done the hard part by compiling your initial keywords and narrowing it down to your final list. The next step is to actually choose and implement the final words you will use. We will break this next part down into three steps and also segment each between iOS steps and Google Play.

STEP 1: INCLUDE 3-5 OF YOUR MOST IMPORTANT KEYWORDS IN YOUR TITLE

iOS: There are two main areas where you can implement keywords: your app title and your iTunes Connect keyword field. iTunes Connect only lets you have 100 total characters. This is one reason your title can be hugely helpful. It provides more space to add important keywords.

Why should you pick your most important keywords? Well, first, it's one of the first things users see when they search for your app. Ideally, you want to draw them in with the keywords that are most relevant to your app (and are therefore in your title). Second, historical data shows that apps rank higher for keywords used in their title when compared to the terms used in the keyword field. If you want a better chance at ranking for an important keyword, try to fit it naturally in your title.

Google Play: Google Play is slightly different, because you are only allowed 30 characters in your title. This makes it difficult to include numerous keywords, but no less important. As Google Play revealed in May 2013, your title is the most important piece of app metadata. Their advice was to keep it concise, but be "creative."

STEP 2: USING THE REST OF YOUR KEYWORDS

iOS: Put your other important keywords into the iTunes Connect keyword field. As we mentioned, you only have 100 characters. Due to that restriction, we want to provide a few best practices for finalizing the terms you use:

- **Break up multiple word phrases into individual words.** This increases the chances of your app showing up for a wider spectrum of keyword combinations. For example, instead of “realistic flight simulator,” use “realistic, flight, simulator.” This will allow you to show up for queries like “realistic flight,” “flight simulator,” and “realistic simulator” rather than just the string “realistic flight simulator.”
- **Don’t repeat terms.** If you use a keyword in your title, you don’t need to use it again in your keyword field. Again, this is another reason to break up phrases into individual words. As of August 2013, there are no added benefits for repeating keywords.
- **Only include both singular and plural forms of a keyword if it’s very important.** For example if you make a navigation app, include “map” and “maps”. If you only include one form, you will rank for both. However, the term left out will be ranked much lower than if you had included both forms.
- **Don’t worry about small connector words such as “the,” “of,” “a,” etc.**
- **You don’t need to include your publisher name or any language used in your in-app purchase package titles.** For example, if your in-app purchase name is “pure gold”, you don’t need to include “pure” or “gold” in your keywords. Both of those will already be accounted for in search.
- **Include competitor brand names at your own risk.** While you might see some benefit for showing up for your competitors’ brand name, there’s always the risk that upon submission Apple will remove it from your keyword list but still approve your app.

Google Play: Google Play is different than iOS, because you integrate your keywords into your description rather than into a specified keyword field. However, regardless of your platform, you should optimize your description for quick comprehension and scan-ability. Here are a few best practices for optimizing your description:

- **Make sure that your first 1-2 sentences respond to the problem your app is solving for the user.** Not everyone expands an app description when browsing an app store. This means providing that information up front in an easy-to-read form is crucial. Your app should be solving a problem or fulfilling a need. Clearly letting the user know what this is as soon as possible is crucial to acquiring new downloads.
- **Keep the brand copy, storytelling, and ad copy for below the fold.** This text can be great in hooking someone once you have garnered a potential user’s interest. If you place this copy up front, it may not help the user understand the app enough to entice them to dive deeper. Your branding and storytelling is meant to seal the deal, subdue any lingering doubts, and get users to download your app.

- **Ensure that your “Features” section is well labeled.** This is critical. If you do get a potential user to dive deeper into your description, you want to make sure they quickly and clearly know what the app has to offer. Also, try to avoid listing every miniscule feature.
- **Include any authoritative reviews you may have.** These can be extremely powerful, especially if from reputable review sites, journalists, industry elites, etc. We recommend including no more than 2-4. Pick your best ones to highlight your app and add credibility!
- **Include your website URL, Twitter URL, Facebook URL, and Google+ URL.** These can help increase brand-user engagement and awareness. This may make more sense for some apps than others, but in general it is a good best practice.

STEP 3: FINALIZING AND SUBMITTING YOUR KEYWORDS

iOS: Once you have finalized everything, copy and paste it into iTunes Connect, submit your binary update, and take comfort in knowing you have completed an ASO iteration successfully!

Google Play: For Google Play apps, update your description and your title. Now take a second and realize you just optimized your app based on a solid amount of data and working frameworks!

You should feel confident that your first ASO iteration will lead to an increase in ranking and an increase in downloads! However, your app store optimization journey isn't over. Now it's time to set up tracking to get some quantifiable data on how your efforts have translated into rankings and downloads. Once you have that data you can go repeat certain steps to keep improving your keywords!



Tracking Performance

In reality, this should be your first and your last step. It's extremely important to track your app's performance before and after your implement your ASO changes so you can see the difference between pre- and post-updated keywords. Thus, as you begin to finalize your list of keywords, before you update anything, create Search Ranking reports for those keywords. Our tools will begin tracking those keywords before you update so that you can get an idea of how exactly your rankings have changed due to ASO refinements.

Integrating your iTunes Connect account is very helpful because it allows you to have one central dashboard for your Search Ranking, Top Charts, and download performance. This also lets you understand and visualize how your search rankings correlate to your downloads and your revenue.

For our Enterprise customers, integrating our platform with TUNE's MobileAppTracking can also give you insights into how many downloads specific keywords are driving. You can now see if keyword A is driving more downloads than keyword B, even though B has larger volume.

We hope this guide can get you on your way to becoming an ASO expert and drastically increasing your organic downloads. Remember, it's a marathon, not a sprint. It might take some time for you to see the full impact of optimizing your app for the app store, but we promise it's worth it.

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If you have any questions or would like to learn more about our Enterprise ASO solutions, feel free to reach out via email at sales@mobiledevhq.com