

Lesson 3

Evaluating your competition, part 1

Checking out the competition

Now that you know what keywords are, we're going to begin the choosing process by doing a Google search ourselves. Open your browser and put your cursor in your Google search bar, if you have one, or go to google.com. Let's say you're thinking about creating a site about golf. Don't think about it for real—golf is one of the most competitive subjects out there—but it will serve as a good example. Type in the word **golf**.

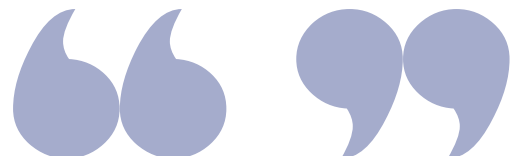
How many results does it show in the top right corner? Like 47 thousand bajillion? I thought so. That is the number of web pages out there that contain the word golf. Whew.

And who dominate the first page of the SERPs? At the time of this writing, it was ESPN, CNN, Sports Illustrated, PGA tournaments, and major manufacturers like Callaway. It's not likely that you're going to usurp one of those spots unless you have 47 thousand bajillion dollars to spend on your web site. So let's narrow it down. Go back and type in **golf shoes**.

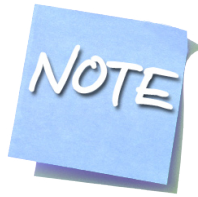
The number went down, right? Still a lot, though (12,400,000 at the time of writing). What if you get more specific and type in **women's golf shoes**? Getting better: 2,040,000. And if you add **Callaway** before **women's golf shoes** it's down to 210,000, and then add another qualifier such as color—**Callaway women's golf shoes white**, you get 74,100. You can see there is less and less competition the more specific you get. This is not a very accurate way to gauge competition, and we'll get into why later, but it's a good way to demonstrate the general concept as we start out.

Search parameters

Are you familiar with the difference between using quote marks in a search and not using them? When we typed in **golf shoes**, Google gave us back a list of every web site that has both the word **golf** and



the word **shoes** somewhere on it. The words don't even have to appear together. So maybe some of them are news sites with one story about a golf tournament and another article about women's fashion that includes the word **shoes**. So this is not really your competition. They're not trying to sell golf shoes; you are.



A search without quotes returns sites with all words in the phrase, not necessarily occurring together. A search with quotes returns sites with all words in the phrase, occurring together and in the specified order.

But if you type **golf shoes** with quotes, Google will return everything that mentions **golf** and **shoes** together and in that order. This gives you a better idea of how many sites are actually talking about golf shoes. Go ahead and try it yourself. How many results did you get this time? A lot fewer than without quotes, right? Now try **women's golf shoes** in quotes. Even better yet—49,600!

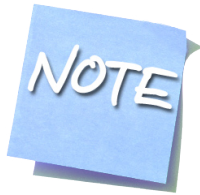
Probably, there are still sites in that list that are not trying to sell golf shoes but mention them in other contexts. And of those who are trying to sell golf shoes, a large percentage will not have optimized their site for that keyword. Not everybody works on the muscle first, in other words! A strong majority of web designers—some say as high as 90%—throw up sites (okay, that sounded gross) with little or no thought to keywords or their value. This is where the Google parameter **allintitle** comes in useful.

Finding your more serious competition

Googling something with the **allintitle** specification tells you how many sites have been optimized to capture that keyword's traffic by having the keyword in the title. Go back to your Google page and type **allintitle:"women's golf shoes"** just like that, including the quotes. Make sure you put it into the Google search bar, not the browser's address bar. Notice that the number has dropped off big-time.

Look at the list of results. The words underlined in blue make up the title of that page (not to be confused with the name of your site, i.e., amazon.com). Webmasters who understand SEO (search engine optimization, acronym #2!) will use their best keywords in the title of each page because the title is one of the main things search engines use to

rank sites. If you were searching for women's golf shoes yourself, wouldn't you be likely to check out sites with a link in big blue letters that proclaim [women's golf shoes](#)? So doing allintitle searches makes the picture of your competition little clearer. We'll bring it into very sharp focus in Lesson 5.



Page title is one of the most important factors in how search engines rank sites. Therefore, a well written, keyword-optimized title for each page is absolutely vital.

How do we determine how much competition is too much? Hard to believe, because it sounds like a lot, but numbers of 30,000 and under are generally considered beatable in a search using quotes, and 5,000 in a search using allintitle.

Mind you, this is by no means the final word on whether you should use a certain keyword. It is part of a *very general* guideline that is especially helpful to newbies. The more experience you get, the less you'll have to depend on a chart to make your decisions, but I'm a big believer in having *some* kind of guide to go by when you're just starting out.

Something else to keep in mind as you weigh your keyword choices is that all competition is not created equal. Some keyword could have hundreds of thousands of allintitle results and yet be a good choice because some of the sites in the top ten are weak. You will learn later how to analyze other sites and find out how hard they would be to beat in the SERPs.

Assignment to complete before continuing

Using your keyword ideas from the last lesson, do some unquoted, quoted, and allintitle searches in Google. Note how the titles in the SERPs correspond with your searches. Start to make decisions on which keywords you'll target. List the best ones so far on the worksheet on page 266 or print your own list.