

Google Adds to SEO Toolbox

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Have you heard of Google?

Google shareholders must dance up a storm when they realize how ridiculous it has become to ask a question like this. Google has become an unavoidable fact of life for anyone with the intention of having their website found online. It is the 'big daddy' of search engines with very nearly 50% of the search market in its pocket (49.1% this May to be exact - Nielsen/Netratings). For this reason alone I get pumped up when I am given new opportunities to peek into Google's treasure trove of stats. Today I would like to share with you a relatively new offering from Google's lab; **Google Trends**.

Now, to many SEO's there is nothing new here because we are all fanatical about keeping up on Google's offerings; in our fast-paced world this was released decades ago in SEO time (kind of like dog years). But to clients, this may very well be an interesting new tool in their marketing arsenal and I bet that many of your competitors haven't grasped the potential that this tool has for increasing your bottom line. So take heed and you just might find that piece of marketing information you have always wanted.

So what is Google Trends? It offers a genuine but prototype (beta) peek into Google's search history so that you can better understand search trends. The best way for me to describe how this might help you in your battle for rankings is by example.

Imagine that you are an adventure tour operator running your business in the Rocky Mountains. Your winter season has just started and you think it would be beneficial to know when prospective clients start searching for Spring/Summer holiday activities so that you can get a jump on your competitors. Unfortunately most keyword analysis tools do not provide historical data to determine this information and the only one that does is called **Keyword Discovery**; a great keyword tool but it does not get data direct from Google. Fortunately you now have Google Trends; information direct from the source!

In this case you are interested in determining when you should begin promoting your lucrative river rafting tours. You also want to know what people are searching for more; "river rafting" or "white water rafting". As it turns out you can discover both of these answers in a single Google Trends query. Go to **Google Trends** and in the search bar type the following: "white water rafting","river rafting". The quotation marks will act like quotes in any Google search by restricting "your results to only those searches that contain your terms in the specific order you've entered them" (About **Google Trends**). Now, you want to see a fixed term so that monthly trends are obvious so choose a full year; 2005 (a selection in the top right of your screen). Click enter and watch Google Trend magic. The following chart will appear as well as the answers you were looking for.



The Answers:

#1: It is immediately obvious that "white water rafting" is searched considerably more often than "river rafting".

#2: Just after April 2005 you can see that there is a gradual increase in searches for these terms. In this regard you may want to begin pay-per-click promotions for these terms in early May. At the same time you need to ensure the rafting section of your site has attained top 10 natural rankings by mid-April to ensure you are ready for prime time.

Now, as a result of your research you are left with a better understanding of when you need to get moving on your organic and paid SEO programs to ensure the best results for your upcoming tour year.

Some Caveats:

This tool is definitely in beta so if you are weary of the results you get I would recommend vetting the data from other tools such as Keyword Discovery (which offers historical data) or free tools like Overture's suggestion tool. In addition, keep in mind that the data you get isn't always positive. For example, in mid-july there was a significant spike in search traffic for both keywords. With a little research (just remove the quotes and try the search) it became clear that this spike may have been a result of a big news event where a 'raft' was linked with a terrorist incident (see the [article](#)). In other words, beware of big spikes because it is likely a result of news - and not necessarily good news.

In summary I find this tool to be a great asset and I will be using it regularly to get another window into the world of search trends. That said, it is like any Internet tool; it has its benefits but must be used with a dollop of common sense.