

# How-To Guide for Validating Prospect Search Terms

Marketing specialists recognize that the first channel most “search and shop” students use to gather intelligence about program options is the web. As marketing teams strive to keep up-to-date with the techniques of search engine optimization (SEO)—using title tags, placing keywords in all header levels, and maximizing inbound links—many do not have an effective approach for selecting the keywords most often used by prospective students. (See Tool 6: Reading List for Staying Current on SEO Trends for additional insight).

This tool assists marketing directors with the identification of keywords that best align with prospective students’ searching and web browsing behavior. We’ve outlined three techniques: Focus Groups, Google Analytics, and Custom Research.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups can be an inexpensive yet effective means of capturing the search experience of prospective students and those current students who recently enrolled. The format allows for rich discussion and real-time follow-up questions, a far faster and more effective tool than even the best-crafted survey. For example, during a focus group, prospects can describe, in their own words, what they must be able to find quickly in order to stay on a website and why they value the information. With these insights, your team is better prepared for both SEO and a website design or redesign project.

### Plan Questions Around...

*...improving SEO and pay-per-click ad placement.* Similar to the other methodologies featured in this tool, focus groups can elucidate how prospective students use search terms and why. For example, a focus group might uncover that prospects refer to a program using an acronym. Now that you are aware of a new search trend, follow the instructions on the following page to gather data beyond the anecdotal about how many prospects search in a similar way. Then, consider incorporating the acronym into your SEO strategy.

*...designing website for user expectations.* When building or redesigning a website, focus groups can also help the marketing team understand what students seek out when visiting a COE website and what information they consider a differentiator between useful and useless websites. For example, after a focus group heavily stressed concerns about program cost and the experience of online learning, one COE Forum member created a “questions answered page” with robust responses to those concerns. Another added links from the main page to student testimonials, test-drive opportunities, and a sample course scheduled after hearing similar concerns.

### Focus Group Sample Questions

- Warm-Up: Why are you returning to school? What or who motivated your search?
- Search Term Research:
  - How would you begin searching for such a program (e.g., speaking to friends or colleagues, reading trade journals, searching the Internet)
  - If using the Internet, which keywords would you type into a search engine?
  - Describe your ideal program based on your motivations for returning to school.
  - What do you imagine this type of program would be called?
- Design Research:
  - When considering an education offering, what pieces of information do you immediately seek out?
  - After looking at our website, what questions did you still have? (In this case, be sure you have instructed participants to use the website for a specified amount of time before the focus group.)
  - About what topics do you feel uneasy even after spending \_\_ minutes on our website?
  - What content or design of the website would ease your remaining concerns about enrolling?
  - What is your vision of success in this continuing education program or professional degree?
  - *(Continue to add to this list, engaging your team in a brainstorming exercise.)*
- Wrapping Up: Is there anything you think we should have asked that we didn't?

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## Focus Groups (Continued)

### *Planning Logistics*

- Size: 10 maximum participants
- Time frame: 45 to 90 minutes
- Organizing Participants: In general, researchers believe that a homogenous group leads to more open discussion. For example, consider selecting participants in similar age brackets for keyword testing.

### *Set Participants' Expectations*

Set expectations when recruiting focus group participants and underscore any offered compensation. In your communications, consider setting these ground rules, to facilitate participation from all participants:

- Expression of Opinions
  - Be open in expressing your opinions because there are no “right” answers
  - Respect the opinions of others
  - Please allow only one person to talk at a time
- Sharing of Your Responses
  - Keep in mind that the information that you provide today will be shared with the management team in order to improve the current web site’s design and functionality. However, your responses will be kept anonymous. (The facilitators will associate your responses with a code, not with your name)
  - Remember that your participation is voluntary

### *Analyze Results*

1. Group answers from all interviews to each question
2. Categorize the responses according to the website problem addressed (feel free to create subcategories as needed)
3. Identify themes in each category
4. Ask yourself, “How do the responses answer the website usability questions?”
5. Draw conclusions between themes or trends and the questions you set out to answer
6. Discuss these conclusions with your web team and determine an action plan

#### *Leverage These Characteristics of Focus Groups*

- Cheaper than a consulting engagement
- Allows a diverse group of users to explain their rationales behind search terms
- Moderator can ask clarifying and background questions in the moment

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## Google Analytics

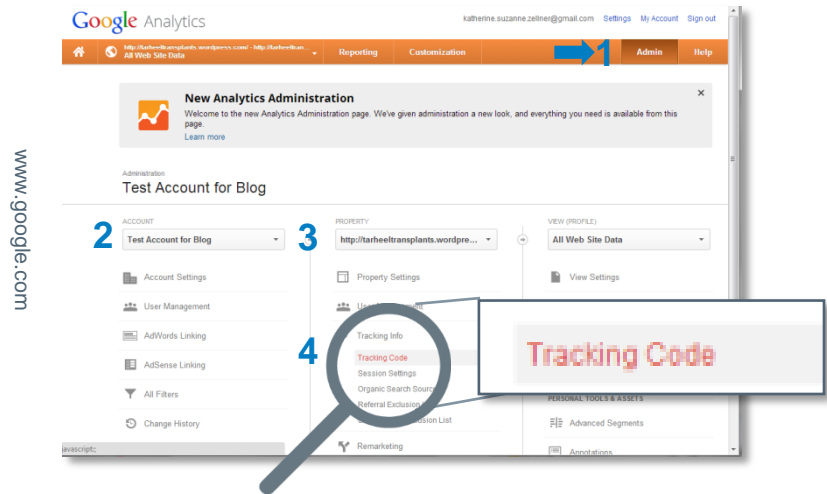
Google provides straight-forward [instructions](#) for setting up Google Analytics for your website<sup>1</sup>. For those members not yet using Google Analytics, this section of the tool extracts the most essential steps from Google’s instructions and offers a model for what keyword tracking using Google Analytics should look like.



### Embed Tracking Link

Embed tracking links in your website’s code: visit Google’s Analytics website for the [most up-to-date code](#)<sup>2</sup>. Find the code unique to your website by following the navigational path illustrated below:

- 1) Click “Admin”
- 2) Create an account
- 3) Add URL of website
- 4) Click “tracking code”
- 5) Copy code that populates
- 6) Verify that tracking link has been properly embedded. The status will read “installed” if embedded successfully and “not installed” if embedded unsuccessfully



### Navigate to Keywords Report

Navigate to the “Reporting” tab to see keywords that lead users to your site, in both paid and unpaid searches. The example below from Avinash Kaushik’s blog Occom’s Razor, illustrates the top keywords for his website. The screenshot shows the following navigational steps:

- 1) Expand “traffic sources”
- 2) Click “sources” heading
- 3) Find the “search” subheading
- 4) Select “organic”

Keyword	Visits ↓	% New Visits	Bounce Rate
1. (not set)	34,636	61.86%	76.36%
2. avinash kaushik	1,552	50.64%	53.35%
3. avinash	765	39.35%	57.52%
4. occam's razor	755	61.19%	66.89%
5. survey questions	351	97.72%	93.45%
6. working at google	250	91.60%	88.00%
7. kaushik	224	48.66%	63.84%
8. occams razor	216	37.50%	61.57%
9. customer survey questions	172	98.26%	93.02%
10. occam's razor blog	165	27.88%	76.36%

1) <http://www.google.com/analytics/learn/setupchecklist.html>  
 2) [https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1008080?hl=en&utm\\_medium=en&utm\\_campaign=en\\_us&utm\\_source=SetupChecklist](https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1008080?hl=en&utm_medium=en&utm_campaign=en_us&utm_source=SetupChecklist)

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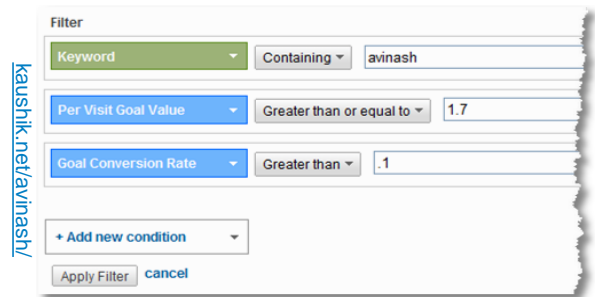
## Google Analytics (Continued)



### Filter Your Keywords To a Usable Number

The actions below allow you to answer customized queries. Your team could determine which keywords accomplish specific goals (e.g., inquiry form completion) or which keywords are used by prospects in a particular city.

- Narrow keywords to only those in which the user completed a “goal,” such as completing an inquiry form or referring a friend. (To complete this step, you will have to established “goals;” to learn how to [set up goals](#), visit Google Analytics Help<sup>1</sup>.)
- Test variations of program names using the “keyword” plus “include” buttons to check if one version of your program name is more heavily searched than another
- Limit geography to see if keywords used vary by region



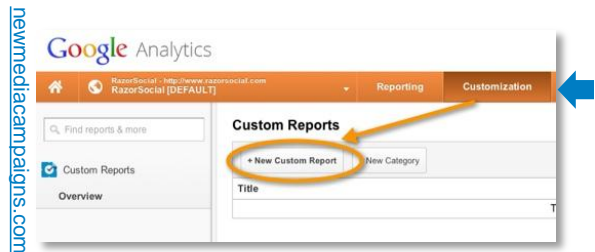
kaushik.net/avinash/



### Add Custom Reports to Uncover Complementary Web Analytics

Several Google Analytics experts at New Media Campaigns offer links to [pre-fabricated reports](#), saving you time and offering insight into what other website owners have found helpful<sup>2</sup>. Custom reports allow you to add web analytics factors beyond or instead of keywords (e.g., visits by time of day) and saves these settings for future tracking. A selection of these reports especially suited for a higher education audience are described below:

- Time-of-day: At what hour do most users browse your site? This information could be especially useful for understanding when prospects are receptive to phone calls (speaking to prospects while they explore the website can help recruiters coach the prospects into registering for an event or taking another action).
- Non-branded keyword: This is a pre-fabricated keyword report, a shortcut to the steps described above. Exclude brand names (e.g., your university name) by selecting “keyword” plus “exclude.” Then click “apply” so that you can see search terms that prospects use when they do not specifically mention your organization’s name.
- Referring sites: This report is set up to show which sites are sending traffic to you
- Link analysis: This report shows where inbound links are directing traffic



newmediacampaigns.com

1) [https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1032415?hl=en&ref\\_topic=1007030](https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1032415?hl=en&ref_topic=1007030)

2) <http://www.newmediacampaigns.com/blog/easy-ways-to-improve-google-analytics#customreports>

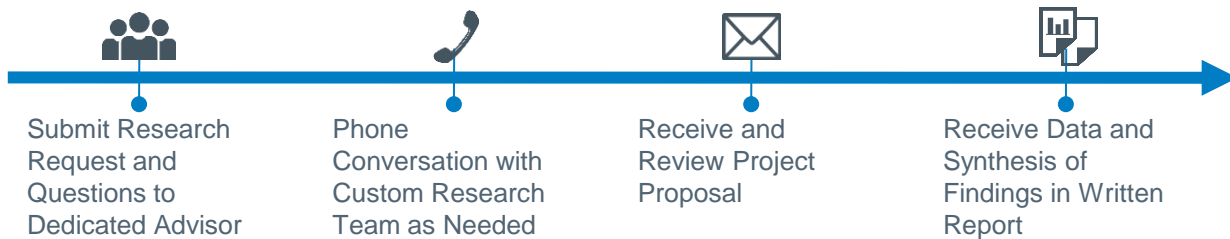
<sup>5</sup>No-Brainer Ways to Help Improve Your Google Analytics Setup." 2013. <http://www.newmediacampaigns.com/blog/easy-ways-to-improve-google-analytics#customreports> (accessed 26 Aug 2013). Kaushik, Avinash. "Occam's Razor by Avinash Kaushik - Digital Marketing and Analytics Blog." 2013. <http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/> (accessed 26 Aug 2013).

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## Custom Research Data Pull from the COE Forum

Custom research “data pulls” offer insights into how employers describe the skills and knowledge that your program imparts. Because prospective students may also use the same terminology they see in an advertisement for their dream job when searching for continuing or graduate education programs, we at the COE Forum suggest that your staff investigate how employers advertise jobs related to your program offerings. A great starting place in this investigative journey is the custom research team. The list of questions below will help you get started in crafting a project request.

### Overview of the Custom Research Process



### Sample Research Questions

