THE PERFECT KEYWORD

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Introduction

This book is a comprehensive guide that will help you understand how to choose the best keywords for your app. Through my experience studying App Store Optimization (ASO) and working with dozens of developers, I have discovered that keyword selection is one of the most complex topics for someone new to the world of ASO. Choosing the wrong keyword can lead to major problems, such as loss of impressions and downloads, negative reviews, and more.

If keywords are the Lego building blocks of App Store Optimization, this book is the instruction manual on how to assemble them. I have condensed all the most important knowledge that I have gained from developing my own ASO tool and helping dozens of developers improve the positioning of their apps on the App Store into this text.

The book is divided into chapters to make it easier to consult. Each chapter covers a specific topic, and my goal at the end of the text is to provide you with all the necessary information to choose your keywords with confidence. Additionally, this book is designed to be consulted multiple times, serving as a reference every time you have a doubt about optimizing your app.

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Changing your metadata without a strategy is highly counterproductive. For this reason, in this book, I will guide you step by step, explaining the safest possible method for making changes.

At the end of the book, my goal is to make you capable of choosing the best keywords for your app with confidence and also to monitor your progress and make strategic adjustments based on the performance of your keywords.

Anatomy of A keyword

If you have already read my previous book, [Introduction to App Store Optimization](#) (available for free on Gumroad), you will already know what we are talking about.
Each keyword should be evaluated based on its three properties.

Popularity

The first property is called popularity, which can be called by different names such as traffic in various App Store Optimization tools, but the correct name used by Apple is Popularity, and I will continue to call it that in this book.

This property is a value that ranges from 0 to 100 and indicates how much a keyword is searched on the App Store. **Most keywords have a popularity between 10 and 40, while highly searched keywords like "Instagram" have a popularity that approaches 100.**

Popularity is a value directly provided by Apple and can be analyzed using App Store Optimization tools like [Astro](#).

PRO TIP: If you want to consider purchasing an App Store Optimization tool and want to ensure the quality of the data it offers, the easiest method is to compare the popularity provided by the tool with that provided by Apple in Apple Search Ads.

To do this, simply open an account in [Apple Search Ads Advanced](#), add a campaign group, and analyze some keywords.

Unfortunately, Apple does not provide a value from 0 to 100 but provides a value on a scale from 0 to 5. In any case, what you need to do is add some keywords to the tool you are considering. If you find significant discrepancies, such as Apple Search Ads showing a value of 5 and the tool you are considering showing a value of 2, you can abandon that tool and spend your money in a better way.

Difficulty

The difficulty of a keyword, often called competitiveness, is a value that indicates how complex it is to reach the top 10 positions for that keyword.

This value is not provided by Apple, and each App Store Optimization tool calculates it using proprietary algorithms that return a number that also ranges from 0 to 100.

If you need to calculate the difficulty for a keyword, you may not necessarily need an App Store Optimization tool. You can probably tell how difficult it is for your app to rank in the top 10 for a certain keyword simply by looking at the metadata of the top 10 apps in the ranking.

Do they have many more reviews than you? Do they have a title or subtitle optimized for that specific keyword you are analyzing?

At this point, it may seem difficult to make these considerations, but as you continue reading the book, you will begin to understand how to recognize some signals.

Relevance

This value can only be assigned by you because it depends on factors that cannot be analyzed numerically. Let me explain.

Relevance is a value that we can assign to a keyword that represents how relevant that keyword is to our search.

Suppose we are looking at a calendar app, and our app is paid and costs around $5. Using [Astro](#), we find the keyword "free calendar," which has a popularity of 26 and a difficulty of 54. It seems like a feasible keyword to scale for our Calendar app, but the problem is that we are selling a paid app.

Anyone searching for this keyword is looking for a free app, so we already know that they are not our ideal target audience.

Therefore, despite the "free calendar" keyword seeming like a good deal, it is not at all and could cause more problems than benefits.

Although several tools also provide a value that can give you an indication of whether the keyword may be relevant to your app or not, I personally believe that this value should be left to common sense. **You are the one who knows your app, and only you can understand whether a keyword is suitable for you or not.**

Usually, when I do a keyword search, I assign each keyword a High, Medium, or Low relevance value, or if you prefer, use the numbers 1, 2, 3. This way, I can also filter by this value.

The Characteristics of the Perfect Keyword

To summarize, we have seen that a keyword has three properties: popularity, difficulty, and relevance.

From this, we can deduce that the perfect keywords for our app are those that have high popularity, low difficulty, and strategic relevance to our app.

Finding these kinds of keywords is extremely rare and requires hours of work. Our goal, therefore, is to ensure that we find those that represent the best possible compromise for our app.

For example, it is possible that your app operates in a highly niche market, making it difficult to find keywords with high popularity. In this case, we need to ask ourselves, what is the average popularity of keywords in my industry? If the average popularity is 30, a keyword with a popularity of 30 could be considered a high-popularity keyword for you.

Where and How to Insert Keywords

Now let's understand where to insert the keywords we will find and how to insert them.

In App Store Connect, there are several fields where we can insert keywords. Here is a complete list in order of importance:

- Name

- Subtitle
- Keyword field
- In-app event names
- In-app purchase names

However, not all fields are equal. Keywords inserted in the name are more important than those inserted in the keyword field, and those in the subtitle are more important than those in the keyword space.

It follows that we must prioritize our keywords by inserting the most important ones in the name and subtitle and the less important ones in the keyword field.

Once these first three fields are optimized, we can also work on creating specific events and in-app purchases.

How to insert your keywords is usually the part where people struggle the most. The reason is simple: there are several rules to follow, and it's not always easy to remember them all. That's why you'll find a handy list below that explains in detail all the key points on how to position your keywords.

Keyword Insertion Rules

1. Do not repeat keywords.

This is probably the most important rule to follow. As previously seen, the fields in which we insert keywords have different importance for the algorithm. Keywords in the name are more important, followed by the subtitle and then the keyword field.

Suppose you insert a keyword in both the name and the keyword field. **What will happen is that the keyword contained in the name field will be ignored, and only the one in the keyword field will be read.** This means you have not only wasted valuable characters but also lowered the effectiveness of one of your keywords.

2. Do not split keywords.

Suppose you want to insert the keyword Habit Tracker in your subtitle and also add the word Planner. You might think of doing something like this: Habit Planner Tracker. However, you have split the Habit Tracker keyword, which will be given less importance by the algorithm.

The same applies to keywords in different fields. If you have a keyword like Habit Tracker, do not split it between the title and subtitle, or you will lower its relevance for the algorithm.

3. In the Keyword field, separate words using a comma

In the keyword field in App Store Connect, simply enter words separated by a comma without adding spaces. Going to our Habit Tracker keyword, it should be written in the keyword field as habit, tracker.

4. Do not use the following list of words.

Not many know this, but there is a list of words that the algorithm ignores. If you insert these words in the keyword field, they will only occupy characters unnecessarily. You do not have to memorize them; I will explain a system to avoid inserting these keywords shortly.

a, about, above, after, again, against, all, am, an, and, any, app, are, aren't, as, at, be, because, been, before, being, below, between, both, but, by, can't, cannot, could, couldn't, did, didn't, do, does, doesn't, doing, don't, down, during, each, few, for, from, further, had, hadn't, has, hasn't, have, haven't, having, he, he'd, he'll, he's, her, here, here's, hers, herself, him, himself, his, how, how's, i, i'd, i'll, i'm, i've, if, in, into, is, isn't, it, it's, its, itself, let's, me, more, most, mustn't, my, myself, no, nor, not, of, off, on, once, only, or, other, ought, our, ours, ourselves, out, over, own, same, shan't, she, she'd, she'll, she's, should, shouldn't, so, some, such, than, that, that's, the, their, theirs, them, themselves, then, there, there's, these, they, they'd, they'll, they're, they've, this, those, through, to, too, under, until, up, very, was, wasn't, we, we'd, we'll, we're, we've, were, weren't, what, what's, when, when's, where, where's, which, while, who, who's, whom, why, why's, with, won't, would, wouldn't, you, you'd, you'll, you're, you've, your, yours, yourself, yourselves

5. Do not use plural keywords.

Plural keywords should always be avoided because when we insert a singular keyword, the algorithm automatically indexes our app for the plural keyword as well. So not only are you wasting characters, but you also risk running into the repetition issue described in point 1 because a plural keyword counts as a repetition.

6. Do not include your company name and category name among the keywords.

Have you ever tried searching for your company name/developer name in the App Store? If you have, you have probably noticed that you can

find your app this way. This is because your app is automatically indexed for your company name. The same goes for the category. In practice, your app inherits the keywords contained in the chosen category name, which could be a good reason to insert a secondary category for your app.

7. Order matters.

This rule is not well known, but **the order of the words you use also has weight for the algorithm.** For this reason, in all fields where we insert keywords, the most important ones should be on the left and the less important ones on the right. In some cases, different companies choose to adopt this approach even in the app name, moving the keywords to the beginning and the app name to the end.

8. Be careful with special characters.

Not many know that the App Store has a bug in the app name field. The characters that make up an app name are a total of 30, but **if we insert special characters like ":", "&", and "-", these characters will be counted as doubles.** Consequently, if our name is exactly 30 characters, the algorithm will truncate the last word, losing its importance. If you have used fewer characters, inserting a special character will not be a problem.

Now that you know the rules for inserting keywords, I suggest downloading this app from the Mac App Store. It allows you to optimize your keywords by removing spaces, plurals, **and words that the algorithm does not consider (point 4).**

I'm sure it will make your life much easier. However, please note that it only works with English words.

How to find the best keywords

Now that we know the characteristics of a keyword, where to add our keywords, and which rules to follow to avoid mistakes, the next step is to find the most suitable keywords for our application.

Checklist

1. Brainstorming

The first step is to jot down a list of keywords. Imagine what keyword a user might use to search for your app. It is important to choose the most relevant keywords for our project. You don't need to have many keywords. 10/15 will suffice.

2. Check competitors' keywords

Search the US store for each of the keywords you have found. For each keyword, write down the name and subtitle of the top 3 apps in the ranking. This way, you will have many more keywords. To speed up this work, you can use the free version of Astro using the search function accessible using the command + u shortcut.

3. Get keyword suggestions

You can use the paid version of Astro or any other App Store Optimization tool that has this function to receive other suggestions starting from the basic keywords. The suggestions provided by Astro

are suggestions directly from Apple Search Ads and therefore allow you to understand what people are really looking for.

4. Filter by relevance

Now, starting from the list of keywords you have, you need to filter for the most relevant ones for your app. We have seen what relevance means in the chapter "Anatomy of a keyword."

5. Filter by difficulty and popularity

Now that you have a list of keywords relevant to your app, select those with high popularity and low difficulty. This is not always possible, but you need to find the best compromise.

6. Prioritize

Now that you have your list of keywords, it's time to decide which keywords to insert in the name, subtitle, and keyword field. With Astro, you can add a note to assign the keywords to a specific field.

7. Repeat for as many stores as possible

Most developers focus on the US store, completely neglecting keywords for other stores. This represents an opportunity for those who want to get more downloads easily. To optimize your keywords for another store, all you have to do is translate all your keywords using a service like [Deepl](#) and go through the checklist points again, starting from point number 3.

Keywords Assessment

Now that we have our keywords, the next step is to assess our metadata. **This chapter will be crucial to understand our situation and avoid mistakes in the following stages.** In fact, ASO is an incremental process that must be carried out with the utmost attention.

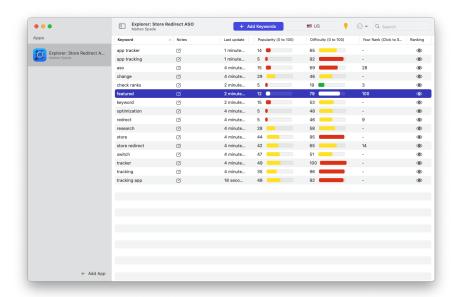If your app is not yet available on the app store, you can move on to the next chapter.

Let's start by analyzing the keywords we have already included in our application.

To do this, we will use the free version of Astro, which allows you to track up to 50 keywords. Once you have downloaded the app we can start adding the keywords we currently have in the metadata of our app.

Many people believe that it is necessary to monitor hundreds of keywords for each application to achieve good results. The reality is that often most of the downloads come from the keywords on which we are already ranked high in the ranking, let's say in the top 10 positions. If your app is just starting out, it is really difficult to rank first in the ranking immediately, but I will explain all the tricks on how to improve your ranking in the chapter "How to improve your ranking.

In the example below, we will work on my app Explorer, which is an app that allows users to change the default store of their device and search for keywords on both the iOS and iPadOS stores.

I start the analysis by importing the metadata I already have on App Store Connect, so all the keywords I have in the Name, Subtitle, and keyword field.

My app Explorer is a relatively new app, but once I imported the metadata into Astro, I already have a basic idea of which keywords not to touch.

For example, we can see in the Your Rank column that I am ranked 28th for the keyword ASO. The ASO keyword has a popularity of 15, which is not very high, but since my app is in a very niche market, it's worth keeping. Then we have the word "store redirect," for which I am ranked 14th. This is a word with good popularity that is worth focusing on.

The first thing to do is to analyze the keywords we currently have in our metadata and mark those not to touch because they represent a source of traffic for our app.

The other keywords for which we are not ranked are likely not generating any downloads unless they are part of a long-tail keyword (see explanation below). In that case, they should be maintained.

You can use [Astro's Note](#) feature to mark the keywords you want to keep.

Even if you are not ranked for some keywords, if these keywords are highly relevant to your app, it is still worth keeping them. Sometimes it's not easy to get the first position for a very popular word, but **we can use the root of the word to rank well on a long-tail keyword.**

A long-tail keyword is a keyword composed of several keywords, even 3 or 4, which usually has less traffic than the main keyword but still maintains good popularity. Example: Keyword: Habit Tracker, Long Tail Keyword: Daily Habit Tracker.

Now that we know which keywords to keep, take some time to evaluate the changes to make to your metadata. Also, consider the possibility of making incremental changes and **always save a backup of your metadata on your favorite note-taking app.** Just copy the name and subtitle of your app and mark the update date. This way, you can go back to a previous version if something doesn't go as planned.

Before Release

Our metadata is finally ready. We have chosen the title, subtitle, and all the keywords seem to be in order and in the right place. Are we ready to release? No, not yet. We need to work on the code first. Let me explain why.

ASO is often thought of only as the choice of keywords, but **ASO concerns every single aspect of our app**, from the choice of keywords to our screenshots to the code. If our app is slow and does not have a good user experience, negative reviews will come, which will impact our ranking and therefore our ASO. As you can see, everything is connected.

To climb the ranking for a specific keyword, we need two things: Downloads and Reviews, and the more popular the keyword, the more we will need.

The fuel that will bring our app to climb the ranking is reviews. The more reviews we have, the better. Every free download for our app, if it does not turn into a purchase, should at least turn into a positive review.

To get reviews, there is only one way: Ask, ask, and ask, and the best time to do it is as soon as possible.

Many users will download your app just out of curiosity and then uninstall it a few minutes later. If we can't turn them into customers, we should at least try to get them to leave a review.

The best way to do this is to show them an alert that asks if they like the app. If the answer is no, invite them to leave feedback via email or a support page. If the answer is yes, show them an alert to leave a review using StoreKit.

To summarize, to climb the ranking, in addition to following the advice on how to use keywords described up to this point in the book, you also need downloads and reviews. The more reviews you ask for, the better. Do it often and as soon as possible.

Monitoring

After a keyword change, it takes about 1 week to see the effects, but during this time, it is important to carefully monitor the performance of our keywords and compare the current situation with the one before the release.

Indicators to keep under control

Number of impressions

If the number of impressions drops, it could be an indicator that something is not working in our strategy. Let's monitor the situation for a few days through App Store Connect and, if necessary, restore our old keywords.

Number of downloads

If the number of impressions increases but the number of downloads does not, it could mean that the keywords we have chosen for our app are not relevant enough for us. So, customers find us, but then our app does not meet their expectations and is not downloaded. In this case, we need to go back and analyze our list of keywords.

Keyword ranking

You can monitor the ranking of keywords using the free version of [Astro](). This part is very important to understand if we are indexing for new keywords and at the same time if we are gaining positions for old ones.

How to improve your Ranking

After modifying your metadata, there are three possible outcomes:

1. If there are errors in your analysis, downloads and impressions may decrease. In this case, simply restore your old metadata to return everything to normal and start your analysis from scratch. Remember, you can release a new version of your app without making changes to the code.

2. Your impressions and downloads will increase, and in this case, you're on the right track. The next step is to continue adding keywords for other stores. I suggest starting with countries that download the most apps, which you can find on this list. Remember, **you don't need to translate the entire app to benefit from ASO; translating the metadata is enough.**

3. The third scenario is when you don't see any improvement. In this case, perhaps you were too conservative with the changes. Try modifying other keywords and make sure there are no errors by carefully following all the rules in the chapter "Where to insert keywords and how." If you don't find any errors and believe you've included the best keywords for your app, try adding metadata to more stores as described in point two.

It's also possible that you're simply in a highly competitive category and need external help to climb the rankings. I'll discuss this more in the next chapter.

A Second Source of Traffic

Despite your efforts up to this point, your app is not ranking for the selected keywords. This can happen when you're in a competitive

industry or when companies are investing thousands of dollars in advertising.

If you don't have a large budget to invest and your competitors are spending thousands of dollars, it will be difficult to rank high for the best keywords. However, this doesn't mean it's impossible.

What you need is a second source of traffic, which can be a social network, YouTube, a blog, or any source that can bring traffic to your app.

Getting traffic for free is not easy. For example, to do it on Twitter, you'll need to create content for your target audience and interact with other users on the social network. Other social networks work more or less the same way.

If you have a budget to invest, you can use advertising services like Apple Search Ads, Facebook, TikTok, etc. What's important to understand is that **there's no channel that works well for every app.** For example, a photography app might work well if promoted on Instagram, while a cooking app could receive thousands of downloads through a specialized blog.

There's no universal solution; the only way to discover the channel that works best for you and your app is to experiment.

If you manage to get downloads through a second source of traffic, you'll also notice an improvement in your ranking. Remember that ratings are essential for climbing the rankings.

If you want to read more on this topic, I recommend the book Traction by Gabriel Weinberg and Justin Mares.

Conclusions

We've come to the end of this book, and I hope I've been able to explain to you in a simple and clear way how to optimize your metadata to the best of your ability.

The app market is a hyper-competitive market, but despite this, there are people every day who achieve financial freedom by working on their projects.

Initially, it won't be easy, but if you truly believe in what you're doing and continue to pursue your dreams, I'm sure you'll achieve great results.

Just like our applications, this book needs continuous updates and revisions. So, if you find any errors or want to send me feedback, you can email me at hello@tryastro.app.

If you want to tell me about your projects and the strategies you're using to grow your app, we can connect [on Twitter](#)!

Matteo.