AI SEO In Detail

Search volume sanity checklist — source, window, grouping, location, rounding

Episode 18 · Search volume explained
youtube.com/@AISEOInDetail

Search volume is an advertiser's estimate — averaged, rounded and grouped. Use it as a range, never as a measurement.

1 Where the number comes from

Source	What it is	Watch out for
Google Ads data	The Keyword Planner's figures, also available through APIs (DataForSEO's Google Ads search volume endpoint). The closest you get to Google's own count. An average monthly volume plus the twelve months behind it.	Built for advertisers deciding what to bid on, not for SEOs measuring demand. Averaged, bucketed, grouped.
Clickstream-based estimates	Anonymised browsing data from panels of real users, scaled to the whole population by a model (e.g. DataForSEO Labs endpoints). Can split grouped variants and be more precise at low volumes.	Modelled: the panel is a sample, the scaling a guess, the model refreshed on its own schedule. Closer for one keyword, further off for the next.

2 What happens to the number — tick each before you trust it

- ☐ **Averaged over 12 months.** A spring peak and a dead winter become one calm number. Look at the monthly values (seasonality: episode 13) before building in October on a spring average.
- ☐ **Rounded into buckets.** The ladder: **10 · 20 · 30 · 50 · 70 · 90 … 1 000 · 1 300 · 1 600 · 1 900 · 2 400** — steps grow with volume. Two keywords at 1 600 may really be 1 400 and 1 800. "1 300 is 30 % better than 1 000" is fake precision.
- ☐ **Floored at zero.** Below the bottom of the ladder (about 10 a month) you get 0, not a small number. Zero is below the floor, not no demand (episode 19).
- ☐ **Close variants grouped.** Plurals, some misspellings, some reordered words share one number. Identical volumes on near-identical keywords = **one synonym group: never sum**. Sometimes singular and plural are not grouped and differ a lot (episode 20).

3 Two tools disagree? Check these five before blaming one — they usually answer slightly different questions

Check	Ask	Tool A	Tool B
Source	Google's planning data, or a modelled estimate?		
Time window	Last 12 months, a different 12, or last month only?		
Grouping	Group reported, or variants split apart?		
Location / language	Whole country, all countries, a language setting?		
Rounding	Which ladder, how coarse at this volume?		

4 Reality check with your own data (free)

Pick a keyword where your page has ranked in the **top three for a full month**: almost everyone who searched saw you, so Search Console impressions ≈ real searches. Compare with the tool; do 5–10 keywords to learn how a source behaves for your market (usually high, usually low, about right).

Keyword	Tool volume	My impressions (month, top 3)	Same range? (Y/N)	If not: grouping / location / month?

Red flag: the tool says 1 300 and you see 150 impressions at position 1 (made-up numbers). Something is off: the grouping, the location or the month.

5 How to use volume

1. **One source per dataset.** Mixing Google figures and modelled figures in one ranking is mixing currencies without converting.
2. **Read the months,** not just the average.
3. **Use it as a relative signal:** good at saying one topic is much bigger than another, bad at saying how many visitors you will get. For pages that exist, your own impressions are the better measure.

Pulling it via the API: one task = up to 1 000 keywords, about **$0.09**. A comma, ampersand or slash in **one** keyword fails the whole task; very long keywords are rejected; about 12 requests a minute. Save the raw response with the twelve months.

Narration is AI-generated; the example numbers on this page are made up.