



# brandwatch

## Top Tips for Writing Brand Queries

### Introduction

In order to surface social insights and analysis about your brand, or competitors, you need to be capturing good quality and relevant data.

If you are lucky enough to be searching for an unambiguous brand then you can often get away with quite a simple Query string that will not require too much syntax.

IKEA is a favourite example of a unique brand term that captures 99% relevant mentions with just one term in the string (the other 1% is for the Scandinavian furniture enthusiasts that use IKEA in profile names, and a song about everyone's favourite flat pack furniture company, by Jonathan Coulton on his Album [Smoking Monkey](#)).

When searching for mentions about an ambiguous brand or a search topic however, Query writing can become quite a complex, frustrating and time-consuming task.

In the Client Services Support team at Brandwatch we play around with Boolean operators on a daily basis, writing Queries with a broad range of search objectives for clients and internal research projects. Requests can be anything from standard brand tracking to broad research topics such as "how do people talk online about managing their money" or "what are the biggest concerns about the physical signs of ageing for women over 50".

For us the more obscure and tricky the Query, the better! We find it really satisfying to write a good complex Query for a particularly challenging brand name. SEAT, NEXT and MAC (cosmetics) are examples of particularly challenging brands we've had to write Queries about.

Through much experience and testing we have developed several techniques to help us write better Queries and make the process more efficient and enjoyable.

Here are a few top tips to share with you:

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## Research

Search for brands on Wikipedia, look at their own websites, and find Twitter and Facebook brand profile pages. These sources will provide a lot of the information you'll need to get started with your Query, such as:

- Whether the brand term has any disambiguation
- What products they have
- Key activities
- If there are any #tags or trending topics happening around the brand at the moment

## Brand terms

Include as many different ways that the brand can be referred to. For example;

**"Marks and Spencer" OR "Marks and Sparks" OR "Marks & Spencer"**  
**"Marks & Sparks" OR "M n S" OR raw:(M&S OR M&s OR m&s)**

Always research and test whether your brand needs context terms in the Query in order to capture a high proportion of relevant results.

Unlike Google searches, which use a similar structure to Brandwatch Queries, we aren't just interested in just the first couple of pages of the results; all mentions captured are important.

## Context terms

Think about and research how people are talking online about the brand you are searching for. Add terms and phrases to capture mentions about a range of topics surrounding the brand, not just products e.g. PR, marketing campaigns, corporate, and charitable activity.

Check for brand's sub-brands and test whether they need to be linked to the main brand terms or if they can be searched for on their own.

E.g. Apple has several sub-brands that are often referred to without a mention of the main brand: iPod, iPad, iMac etc. Unlike the main brand name, the sub-brand names don't have any other interpretations and can therefore be included separately in the search string:

**(Apple NEAR/15 (Computer\* OR laptop\*)) OR iPod OR iPad OR iMac**

Include common verbs and descriptive words used to capture mentions in the correct context.

**((eat\* OR gobbl\* OR munch\*) NEAR/5 Mars)**

For each term you add, try and think if it is specific to the context, and if it could possibly also pick up irrelevant mentions.

If you are not sure how well certain words will work as context terms, test them by temporarily removing all other parts of your string (make sure you copy and paste the string into a text doc. So you don't lose it). Then, search for the term/s you are unsure of with the brand terms on their own and see what mentions are returned.

## Use NEAR/n instead of AND

Using NEAR/n will link brand and context terms closer together and really help to improve the relevancy of your mentions.

You can play around with the proximity used with NEAR/n to see if you can improve capture volume whilst maintaining quality. From experience we usually find somewhere between NEAR/15 and NEAR/25 works best.

## Exclusions

If you're adding exclusions to a Query, make sure that they are specific to the type of mentions you want the system to ignore.

You can test any exclusion terms you are not sure about by changing the NOT to AND then checking that the mentions returning in your results, are the ones you want the system to ignore.

**((Apple NEAR/15 (Computer\* OR laptop\*)) OR iPod OR iPad OR iMac)**  
**AND (colour\* OR paint\* OR spice\*)**

Remember to change the operator back to NOT once you have tested that those terms capture mentions you're not interested in.

## Test, Refine, Test, Refine, Test...

Always test and check the returned results continuously in the Query creation window as you build your Query and add new terms.

Use the test results to highlight additional terms or phrases that could be added to your string, or terms or phrases from irrelevant mentions you want to exclude.

Before you save your string, make sure that you can scan through a good proportion of the results checking the first few pages, the last few pages and some throughout the results to see how well your Query has worked.

Once you have saved your Query, it is also good to review the mentions in a dashboard. Click on any spikes in the data in the history graph on the summary component – to check that it is being caused by relevant mentions about the brand.

Also, view the Topics Cloud component to see if there are any obscure terms that are coming from irrelevant mentions.



## Pronouns technique for big brands with lots of noise

When writing Queries for really big brands, you will often see lots of advertising and sales listings (noise) returning that can cloud up your results and make it difficult to get to the really useful stuff.

Someone writing from a personal perspective will often use personal pronouns to express their opinion or describe their experiences, so by adding them to your search string and instructing the system to find mentions that include them as well as the other terms, it can help you get to the qualitative consumer mentions that really matter.

**((I OR Im OR Ive OR me OR my OR mine) NEAR/25 “Coca Cola”)**

## Knowing when to stop

This is one of the most difficult elements to Query writing, as we don't know exactly what's out there so it's impossible to know how many results your Query should be returning.

The best way to gauge when to stop writing your initial Query is a bit of good old common sense and ensuring you have done the following to optimise your search as much as possible:

- Make sure you've included and tested a decent amount of terms around the context/s for which you are searching for the brand
- Check that the volume you are seeing is what you would be expecting for the type of brand or is a decent amount for performing analysis on, i.e. huge global brands should return mentions in the 100,000s (in certain languages)
- Test your Query thoroughly
- Check that the results returning are >90% accurate

This gets a lot easier to gauge the more you write Queries, we promise.

## Reiterate

In order for the Query to continue to track as much activity as possible, it is important that you check it every couple of months to see whether any new context terms need adding.

Also, if any new campaigns are launched that you want to keep track of on social media, make sure you check that the Query would be picking up the mentions and then add terms if necessary.

## In summary

If you're already using Brandwatch, hopefully the above tips will help you with your Queries. If you ever get stuck, please don't suffer in silence.

There are lots of things Brandwatch can do to help: [User Guides](#), extra Training or you can even get us to write them for you. Speak to your Account Manager or the Support team to find out more.

*If you'd like more information on how Brandwatch can help give your business the edge in social media, please book a live demo with us at [www.brandwatch.com/demo](http://www.brandwatch.com/demo).*