



Keyword Research in Japan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most foreign companies approach Japanese keyword research as a translation task.

The process usually looks like this:

- Start with English keywords
- Translate them into Japanese
- Upload them into SEO tools
- Publish content

The result is predictable:

- Low traffic
- Weak rankings
- Mismatched search intent

THE PROBLEM IS THE MENTAL MODEL

Japanese keyword research is not English keyword research with translated words.

It operates on:

- Different linguistic structures
- Different search habits
- Different intent signals
- Different script systems

Key shift: You are rebuilding a keyword strategy

WHY TRANSLATION FAILS

Failure Mode	What Happens
Formal translation bias	You target words that people never search
Script mismatch	You miss major search variants
Missing query patterns	You ignore uniquely Japanese structures

FORMAL LANGUAGE ≠ SEARCH LANGUAGE

Japanese users often search using:

- Shortened expressions
- Casual phrasing
- Hybrid terminology

Translation tools default to formal vocabulary.

Result: Your “correct” translation may have little actual search volume.

THE SCRIPT PROBLEM

Japanese search operates across multiple writing systems.

Script	Typical Usage
Kanji	Formal/professional
Katakana	Foreign & technical words
Hiragana	Casual/conversational
Romaji	Brand & acronym usage



KANJI SEARCH BEHAVIOR

Kanji-heavy keywords often signal:

- Higher intent
- B2B research behavior
- Professional terminology

Example:

- 電子契約 → e-contract
- 電子署名 → digital signature

Both are related, but carry different intent.

KATAKANA SEARCH BEHAVIOR

Katakana dominates:

- SaaS terminology
- Imported technology concepts
- Product categories

Examples:

- クラウド (cloud)
- マーケティング (marketing)
- AIツール (AI tools)

For many tech categories, katakana is the real search language.

HIRAGANA SEARCH BEHAVIOR

Hiragana appears heavily in:

- Informational searches
- Beginner-level queries
- Long-tail phrasing

This is often where top-of-funnel traffic lives.

HYBRID KEYWORDS ARE THE NORM

A translated keyword list usually captures:

- One version
- One script
- One intent layer

But Japanese search demand is fragmented across variants.

Implication: Missing script variants means missing traffic.

Modern Japanese search is increasingly hybrid.

Concept	Japanese Search Term	Script Mix
Generative AI	生成AI	Kanji + Romaji
UX Design	UXデザイン	Romaji + Katakana
Cloud Management	クラウド管理	Katakana + Kanji

QUERY STRUCTURE DRIVES SEARCH

Japanese search relies heavily on predictable suffix patterns.

These structures shape:

- Search intent
- Funnel stage
- Content expectations

Understanding patterns matters more than memorizing vocabulary.

THE “〇〇とは” PATTERN

とは roughly means: “What is X?”

Examples:

- SEOとは
- 生成AIとは
- 電子契約とは

Strategic role:

- Top-of-funnel
- Educational intent
- Massive awareness traffic opportunity

THE “○○おすすめ”, “○○比較”, AND THE “○○導入事例” PATTERN

おすすめ means:
Recommended / best options

Examples:

- SEOツール おすすめ
- CRMツール おすすめ

Intent: Mid-to-bottom funnel evaluation

比較 means: Comparison

Examples:

- 電子契約 比較
- SEOツール 比較

This is one of the highest commercial-intent patterns in Japan.

導入事例 means:
Implementation case study

This pattern is uniquely important in Japanese B2B search.

Why it matters: Japanese buyers heavily validate vendors through social proof and deployment examples.

INTENT STRUCTURE IN JAPAN

Query Pattern	Funnel Stage
〇〇とは	Awareness
〇〇の方法	Instructional
〇〇おすすめ	Evaluation
〇〇比較	Decision
〇〇導入事例	Trust validation

B2B SEARCH BEHAVIOR IS DIFFERENT

Japanese B2B buyers:

- Research longer
- Compare more systematically
- Validate more extensively

As a result:

- Comparison keywords are stronger
- Review keywords matter more
- Case-study queries are highly valuable

TOOLS THAT ACTUALLY WORK

Tool	Best Use
Google Search Console	Real search behavior
Ahrefs / SEMrush	Competitor analysis
Keywordmap	Japanese variants & patterns
Google Japan Autocomplete	Emerging search phrasing

COMPETITOR RESEARCH WORKS BETTER

The best starting point is usually not your English keyword list.

It is: → Japanese competitor domains

Why:

- Reveals real vocabulary
- Surface's hybrid keywords
- Shows actual SERP structures

COMMUNITY PLATFORMS REVEAL REAL LANGUAGE

Useful Japanese-language sources:

- Yahoo! 知恵袋
- Hatena Bookmark
- X (Twitter Japan)
- Google.jp autocomplete

These reveal:

- Informal wording
- Emerging terminology
- Actual user phrasing

JAPAN'S SEASONAL SEARCH PATTERNS

Period	Search Shift
March–April	Fiscal year procurement surge
Golden Week	Consumer search spike
Obon	B2B slowdown
Oct–Dec	Enterprise budget season

Key insight: Japan's business calendar strongly shapes search demand.

HOW TO BRIEF A NATIVE RESEARCHER

Most foreign companies will work with native speakers.

The quality of output depends entirely on the brief.

Key instruction areas:

- Script variants
- Intent classification
- Query pattern expansion
- Competitor domain analysis
- Funnel mapping

WHY LONG-TAIL OPPORTUNITY IS LARGER

Japanese long-tail SEO is unusually powerful because:

- Queries are naturally longer
- Script combinations multiply variations
- Intent is highly explicit

Result: Smaller-volume keywords often carry exceptionally high value.

SUMMARY

Keyword research in Japan is not about translating words.

It is about understanding:

- How Japanese users structure search
- How scripts influence intent
- How trust and evaluation shape queries

The companies that succeed are not necessarily fluent in Japanese. They are the ones who learn how Japanese search logic actually works and build their strategy around it.

About Us

Tokyo SEO Maker helps global B2B companies adapt their digital strategy for the Japanese market—from localization and SEO architecture to platform strategy and conversion optimization

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We provide high-quality support

