3 easy internal linking strategies for keywords with different search volumes

Most savvy business owners and content marketers understand the importance of external links. They're a crucial ranking factor (as evidenced by new studies year after year, such as this brand new Stone Temple Consulting Study) and they're a strong trust signal from other high-quality websites.

Where a lot of businesses stumble, however, is using internal links to direct link equity to where it will have the biggest impact. Internal links don't earn you link equity-like external links do, but they're essential for directing traffic to pages that traditionally attract fewer links or need a much-needed boost in SERPs.

In this article, we'll break down the *dos* and *don'ts* of a good link structure, why you need an internal link strategy, and three different strategies you can use to target keywords with varying levels of competition and search volumes.

How do you create a good internal link structure?

What your internal link structure looks like will vary depending on your underlying goals (as you'll see later when we dive into the specific linking strategies), but a few elements should always be the same:

- **Maintain a shallow click-depth.** During a Google Webmaster Central hangout in mid-2018, John Mueller confirmed that the fewer clicks it takes to get to a page from your home page, the better. I recommend trying to keep your site structure as shallow as possible—if

possible, keep each page accessible within two to three clicks from the home page, or use breadcrumbs, tag clouds, and internal search to facilitate ease of use on more complicated websites.

- **Include links in your pages' main content.** There are two types of internal links: navigational and contextual. Navigational links include links in your header, footer, and navigation bars to help users find other pages within the same domain as search engines crawl your website. Contextual links—which is what we're talking about in this article—appear in your pages' content and they have higher SEO value.
- **Include keywords in your anchor text.** Most SEOs would advise against using exact-match keywords in internal link anchor text, but the better advice is to ensure that all anchor text informs readers what to expect from the linked content. Including keywords in your anchor text shouldn't be a problem if you're already creating highly-optimized content. Also, remember to give image links alt attributes that include keywords (these act like anchor text for text links).
- **Maintain a reasonable number of links on each page.** Google Webmaster Guidelines recommend limiting the number of links to a reasonable number. This both aids user readability and helps you avoid getting flagged as spam. Also, remember that if you point to the same URL multiple times on the same page, priority is given to the first anchor text and the subsequent anchors are relatively inconsequential.
- **Make sure every important page is linked.** Search engines can often find orphan pages—pages that aren't linked to by any other page—but users can't. Depending on the nature of these pages, you may choose to delete them, link out to them or block them from indexation.

Why you need an internal link strategy

According to CMI's 2019 B2B Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends report, 81 percent of B2B businesses believe that having a content strategy aligns their team "around common mission/goals and makes it easier to determine which types of content to develop."

The same thing applies to internal linking strategies. The better you understand what you want your link equity to do for your business, the better you'll be able to use an internal linking structure to achieve your goals.

Appropriately used, internal links can be a powerful tool. Creating a clean, consistent internal link structure is an amazing way to:

- Provide additional, helpful information to your visitors.
- Help Google and other search engines crawl your website faster.
- Increase traffic to high-converting but low-traffic pages, such as product pages (Andrew Dennis's 2018 article about "link building's secret sauce" includes examples of how to do this).
- Promote pages that are stuck on page 2 of SERPs (we call these "low-hanging fruit").
- Improve rankings for high, mid, or low search-volume keywords.

The *very best* internal link strategies pull double duty, by influencing user engagement metrics (e.g., page views per session, time spent on site, conversion rate, etc.) and impacting your ranking in SERPs for high-priority keywords. You can facilitate this by considering the customer journey on your site as you plan out which internal link strategy is

right for you.

Now, let’s dive into the three strategies you can use specifically to target keywords based on search volume and competition level.

Internal Link Strategies Based on Search Volume

1. Use internal links to boost main page relevance for keywords with high search volumes.

When your goal is to rank for a few specific high-volume and high-competition keywords, you’ll need a detail-rich homepage

to use this strategy, such as a landing-page-style home page designed to attract, persuade and convert new leads.

How to structure your internal links:

While your navigational links will still help users find your content and discover new pages on your website, most of your contextual links should link back to your home page through relevant anchor text (e.g., target keywords plus close synonyms).

Structurally, this will mean that you'll have more links pointing to your homepage than to any other page. This means that visitors to other high-quality auxiliary pages on your site should quickly find themselves back on your information-rich home page.

As mentioned above, however, if you point to the same URL multiple times on the same page, priority is given to the first anchor text. With that in mind, what some webmasters resort to is restricting access to navigational links for search engine bots at the top of the page to give more prominence to contextual links.

What this means:

The only goal of this strategy is to help your home page's rank improve. You'll be using every opportunity and leveraging every new piece of content to send more organic visitors to your home page.

Just keep in mind that all secondary pages and content assets (though they still need to be useful and relevant to attract external links) will not be designed to rank high for keywords—all of that link juice is destined for your home page.

2. Use internal links to target mid-search-volume keywords and drive traffic to key landing pages.

When to use this strategy:

When you want to focus on driving mid-search-volume keywords to key pages, such as product category pages within an e-commerce website or blog categories within a news-style website. This works best with robust category pages that include a lot of details and comparison regarding the products, blog posts, etc.

How to structure your internal links:

With this approach, you'll be using anchor text keywords to lead people to key category pages. In this strategy, your home page's job is to direct people to the most relevant category

page. Auxiliary articles and product pages should also all point back to these pages using medium-tail anchor text, to lead as much traffic as possible back to your category pages.

What this means:

This strategy turns each category page into an informational hub that users can revisit as they learn new information.

For example, a website selling second-hand cars might have a category page for Ford trucks. Whenever they publish new articles reviewing a new model or comparing Ford vs. other, they can link back to their category page using target keywords (e.g., “buy Ford trucks,” “used Ford trucks,” “best deals on Ford trucks,” etc.).

3. Use internal links to target low-search-volume keywords for your bottom-level pages.

When to use this strategy:

When you operate within a narrow niche and want to drive highly qualified leads to specific bottom-level pages, such as specific blog posts or product listings.

How to structure your internal links:

Bottom-level pages in this strategy should be quite detailed so that you can include copy and images that can be organically linked to other bottom-level pages.

What this means:

The goal of this strategy is to get users to see the “big

picture” that unfolds as they purchase multiple products or consume numerous pieces of content. For example, you might have a multi-part blog series that naturally lends itself to internal links. Or you might have product pages for power tools that link to product comparisons and DIY home projects that you can build with those tools.

The less competition you have for your keywords, the more likely it is that your pages will rank and convert. Just make sure that the keywords you’re targeting are actually being searched for.

How to implement an internal link strategy

Once you’ve settled on a link strategy that will help you accomplish your goals, it’s time to assess their internal links and anchor text. For this step, I highly recommend using a tool capable of measuring click depth, links to page, links from page, and metrics, which estimate the importance of web pages (alternatives to PageRank).

Luckily, plenty of tools like WebSite Auditor (full disclosure: I work for the company), DeepCrawl, or Sitebulb help webmasters understand, at a glance, which pages have the most link equity to share, what your current internal link structure looks like, and which pages currently attract the highest traffic. Using SEO audit tools of this type, you should be able to filter your URLs by substring and ensure that every page is sufficiently detailed and includes the right anchor text.

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