A five-step framework for effective keyword targeting in 2020

30-second summary:

- Proper optimization is about comprehensive basics, not the “secret tricks”.
- The most important basic tactic to get right is keyword targeting.
- First, you need to know where in the sales funnel your clients are.
- Then, you use the best-matching and most valuable keywords targeting the clients’ intent.
- By mapping the keywords to your content, you’re able to always keep track of which page is targeting which search queries.
- Founder and CMO at SEO PowerSuite and Awario, Aleh Barysevich’s guide will help you succeed at keyword targeting.

Sometimes we get carried away with details, letting the big picture slip from view. However, when it comes to SEO, the devil isn’t in the details or yet another little known keyword targeting and overall research technique you’ve dugout. But rather, it is in being strategic when working on your essentials.

And today we’ll try to look at keyword targeting (the cornerstone of your keyword research) from a different angle. Making sure all of your efforts are truly coherent with your business goals and are best shaped to the competitive

landscape you operate in.

Step 1. Deciding on the funnel stages

The idea of funnel stages is not new to SEOs.

At any given moment each of our potential customers is on a different "stage" of the purchasing process – from only suspecting they're having a problem (top funnel) to researching available solutions (mid funnel) to actually looking to purchase one (low funnel).

However, in terms of keyword targeting, we mostly use this concept to classify the keywords we already have to better integrate them into our content plan and the overall site structure.

What we tend to forget about is that different business goals are better matched by different funnel stages. And there are two questions you'd better ask yourself before getting down to keyword research:

A. How do you plan to monetize your SEO traffic?

Depending on the monetization model, you might be more interested in a wider or, on the contrary, narrower keyword range.

- **Advertising – Top funnel keywords**
  When your primary goal is eyeballs for your ads, what you need is the highest search volume informational keywords.
- **Affiliate marketing – Mid funnel keywords**
  Affiliate marketing is mostly about squeezing into the customer journey on its investigation stage, just before

the customers decide to finally buy the product.

- **Ecommerce – Low funnel keywords**
  Targeting hundreds of different products means your keyword strategy will be dominated by low funnel purchase intent keywords.

B. Are you limited in budget and resources?

Targeting top-funnel keywords requires more resources. You have to scatter your efforts over multiple topics, while getting lower conversions.

So with a substantial budget allocated, you might want to target the funnel top even with your e-commerce website. Yet with little to no resources available, whatever business you're in, you are better off focusing on low-funnel transactional keywords.

Step 2. Forming intent-based keyword groups

Intent-based targeting is also nothing new, in fact, it is essential for content to appear for appropriate queries.

The more Google was talking about semantic search, the more SEOs were debating: how to use keywords now, when Google is able to look beyond keywords, at meanings and context?

Building dozens of shallow pages for separate keywords was clearly no longer an option. Dropping keywords altogether and simply creating super-in-depth content also proved out of touch, since both search engines and people still rely on keywords.

It seems like, SEO-wise, the best approach to **building content is around keywords with specific search intent**. This way,

we’re giving the user what they are truly looking for, yet still providing relevance signals to search engines.

So, whatever methods you choose to find your initial keyword list, your next step will be to divide them into smaller groups based on intent. For example:

Keywords	Intent
buy rare vinyl records buy jazz vinyl	research specialist vinyl stores
buy vinyl cheap best prices on second-hand vinyl vinyl on sale	find places to buy vinyl cheap
used vinyl stores where to buy used vinyl in san diego	get a list of best vinyl stores
how to choose used vinyl how to examine vinyl	get tips on choosing vinyl
clean vinyl records is it ok to clean vinyl records with alcohol	get tips on cleaning vinyl

Step 3. Determining true business potential

When analyzing business potential, we usually look at search volumes and keyword difficulty to make sure the keywords we choose have the potential to bring in some traffic.

But upon a closer look, especially when we’re talking about top-funnel informational keywords, not all of this traffic has the same business value and chances to convert.

It’s common sense, logic, and intuition. Based on them, I usually classify my keyword groups into “high”, “mid”, and “low” business value.

With the last category usually cut off from the campaign altogether.

Keywords	Intent	Business Value
buy rare vinyl records buy jazz vinyl	research specialist vinyl stores	High
buy vinyl cheap best prices on second-hand vinyl vinyl on sale	find places to buy vinyl cheap	High
used vinyl stores where to buy used vinyl in san diego	get a list of best vinyl stores	High
how to choose used vinyl how to examine vinyl	get tips on choosing vinyl	Mid
clean vinyl records is it ok to clean vinyl records with alcohol	get tips on cleaning vinyl	Low

Step 4. Identifying best-matching content types

If you look closely, you will surely notice – Google SERPs aren't formed randomly.

Have you noticed a correlation between the type of the search results (say, a how-to guide, a news page, a review) and the type of search query?

The thing is, some types of content seem to Google as better matching this or that particular search intent. And this seems only logical. If you were to decide which results to show on a SERP:

- For informational keywords, you'd likely pick step-by-step guides, infographics, and explanation videos;
- For transactional queries, you'd prefer product pages, signup pages, free consultations, etc;
- For investigational queries, they look for comparison pages, tables, and reviews.

However, with search queries being constantly adjusted by RankBrain, relying solely on common sense might lead to a misconception.

So we'd need to check what types of pages actually rank for a particular group of keywords. So that you'll identify the most popular type of content on the SERPs for each of the intent groups on your list.

Keywords	Intent	Business Value	Content type
buy rare vinyl records buy jazz vinyl	research specialist vinyl stores	High	Record store's websites
buy vinyl cheap best prices on second-hand vinyl vinyl on sale	find places to buy vinyl cheap	High	Discount offers in online record stores
used vinyl stores where to buy used vinyl in san diego	get a list of best vinyl stores	High	Listicles
how to choose used vinyl how to examine vinyl	get tips on choosing vinyl	Mid	How-to guides
clean vinyl records is it ok to clean vinyl records with alcohol	get tips on cleaning vinyl	Low	How-to guides

Step 5. Mapping keywords to content

For a brand new website, keyword mapping is one of the most important things to check before launching.

At this stage, you need to ensure that all of your valuable keywords are effectively distributed among the future site pages.

Things are more complicated for a website that's been around a while, as some of your pages probably already have Google rankings. Any changes you implement could lead to either

losing your current rankings or ending up with pages cannibalizing each other’s keywords.

That is why before deciding on your ideal keyword map, make sure you take into account all of the current rankings already earned.

And finally

Next comes optimizing each of your pages for the keyword groups you’ve selected. This process is sure to be pretty time consuming (and is definitely worth a separate article).

But following this five-step framework and being strategic and consistent from the very start is what ensures the efforts you invest in content optimization truly pay off.

Aleh Barysevich is Founder and CMO at SEO PowerSuite and Awario.

More about:

A five-step framework for effective keyword targeting in 2020