

What is Contextual Targeting?

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Targeting is the core of digital marketing wisdom. Instead of shouting into the void in hope of hearing someone respond, you are directing your message to very specific groups, the ones that are most likely to answer. Here's the Catch 22 of digital marketing - how do you know which groups those are and where to find them? Read on to find out!

Since tracking potential customer's behavior is becoming increasingly difficult due to privacy regulations, marketers have to be innovative in their approach to gathering valuable data. Welcome to contextual targeting – being at the right place at the right time, without the hassle of cookies and tracking. Leave it to the others!

What is contextual targeting?

There are many ways to target potential customers and clients. Some of them are simple: based on location, age, gender, or income. More complicated types of targeting are usually more effective. They are based on a customer's lifestyle, interests or behavior, which requires a solid strategy and sophisticated tools.

Contextual targeting focuses on all of these categories, but without the hassle of chasing the intricacies of your customer's preferences and behavior. With contextual targeting, you only display ads on websites and webpages that are relevant to your product or services. For example, ads for hair products on a hairstyling website are defined as contextual ads.

Contextual advertising should not be confused with behavioral advertising. Although this type of targeting is based on users' search behavior, the path to them goes through tracking and understanding web content, not the users themselves.

When you use behavioral advertising, you gather data by tracking website visitors' browsing history, clicks, purchases, etc. Then you segment users into groups, which are targeted with ad campaigns tailored to their behavior and prospective needs.

There are two types of contextual targeting:

- **Keyword contextual targeting** - targeting contextual ads based on relevant keywords and website content. A good example would be an ad for waterproof boots displayed on a blog post about fishing equipment.
- **Category contextual targeting** - targeting contextual ads based on general categories or topics, for example, displaying an ad for hair care products on a beauty website.

Although scanning the web is somewhat simpler than chasing after users, you still have to build a solid strategy to analyze websites and context.

How to set up contextual ads

Since you are already here, we take it, you are already familiar with Google Ads and how they work.

Setting up an AdWords contextual advertising campaign is simple:

- Define an ad group with a theme that describes the product or service
- Add between 5 and 50 keywords (or topics) to each ad group, without repeating them in different ad groups
- Set up the bid (you can optimize it later on in the campaign)
- Prevent your ads from showing on certain websites by adding negative keywords or excluding topics

- Set up [Google Ads Conversion Tracking](#)
- Based on ad campaign performance, you can optimize them further down the line

Through the Google Ads platform, your ads will appear on relevant Google search results pages and their network of partner sites. Contextual targeting is also possible through Google AdSense program. It is geared towards website owners seeking to monetize their site and content. AdSense delivers relevant ads to individuals' websites, by matching them to specific websites according to their content and visitors.

How to get contextual targeting right

With contextual advertising, you don't have to worry about the variables of human behavior. Your ad is simply there after a user expressed interest in the relevant topic. However, just because someone is visiting a sports website doesn't mean they are looking to buy running shoes. Matching your ad with specific content and categories is an automated process. Before you put it in motion, you need to customize the settings to work for you, not against you.

If your ad customization is too broad, you will burn through your advertising budget without reaching the actual buyers. If your settings are too specific, you won't reach enough people. So where is the golden mean? How do you find highly relevant context for your ads among millions of websites?

Website categorization

Contextual targeting requires you to categorize websites in accordance with the relevance of their content to your product or service. To truly understand the context of a web page and the entire website, you need more than a few broad topics and keywords.

[Website Categorization API](#) is a tool that branched out of [Whois XML API](#). It is one of the largest cyber intelligence data providers.

Website categorization meets the sophisticated demands of contextual advertising and goes beyond automatic keyword triggers.

Contextual targeting is based on three levels of website analysis:

- Crawling - scraping, storing and organizing website content.
- Machine learning - extracting topics and keywords from the website. They are analyzed in a manner that simulates human interaction with web content.
- Human assistance - human supervisors use this information to classify websites into one to three out of 25 categories.

By examining web content, topics, and keywords, you can create a list of websites and web pages for highly-relevant targeted ads. Since website categorization allows you to combine up to 3 categories, you can create very specific ad campaigns.

For example, it can help you with category contextual targeting. If you want to sell beauty products, you can create a list of sites that belong to both “beauty and fitness” and “shopping” category. This way, you will be sure that your contextual ads are reaching people who are there to shop. These lists allow you to opt for placement targeting by specifying websites that will display your ads.

Website categorization will also enable you to be more specific with keyword-based contextual targeting. It will allow you to display ads on web pages that match both your targeted keywords and topics.

Conclusion

In some aspects, contextual targeting is superior to tracking users' behavior. Behavioral advertising requires user consent and consistent tracking for a long time. People's needs and preferences change. In addition, tightened online security and privacy regulations make it more difficult to track online behavior.

Contextual targeting allows you to skip the assuming and wondering. It helps you to focus on being in the right place at the right time. However, web categorization as a tool for contextual targeting is still a secret shared by only a few seasoned digital marketers.

Want to join the club? [Sign up for a free demo](#) and reimagine your ad campaigns!