

“... The end goal, as always, is to find a string that, when tugged, rings a clarion bell that draws physicists toward something new. As Einstein reportedly said, if you know how it's going to turn out, it's not science, it's engineering.” - Daniel J. Levitin, [*A Field Guide to Lies: Critical Thinking in the Information Age*](#)

Extreme relevance could be hazardous to your growth.

In digital marketing, as in party politics, clinging too tightly to the orthodoxy can be limiting. In addition to playing to one's "base" in an extremely cost-effective manner, every growth company is also thinking: "how can we big-tent this thing?" (Unsubstantiated rumor: GrubHub recently asked themselves: "how can we move beyond being just a hub for grub?" But I'm probably just making that up.)

Last time, we noted that extreme relevance was a hallmark of search engine marketing. That alone is worth fighting for. Strange that we need to defend it, but as the saying goes, no good deed goes unpunished!

Despite its flaws, I continue to believe that broadly speaking, our field of "new media" is markedly better than the old media. As visionaries, we proclaimed in 1999 that the future would be all about relevance, granularity, and "permission." We were proven right, somewhat.

The uncomfortable truth, though, is that brave visionaries tend to be smug. We repeat ourselves frequently because we're just so right about the future. In so doing, we may unwittingly switch off our all-important opposable mind or "integrative thinking muscles," and that can be fatal to innovation and growth.

Manage to Growth Goals, Not Quality Score

Companies like Google have celebrated and even enforced relevant advertising, almost to a fault. Their early fans (such as User Experience professionals, an enlightened group Google Search largely aligns itself with) began distancing themselves when Google deviated even one iota from that formula. Oh, well.

So how can we zoom out a bit and reach a wider audience? (Hmm, a little like the old broadcast "interrupters" used to do? A bit, yes, but don't be too irrelevant in keyword advertising, because, as discussed in [Part 15](#), Quality Score woes could bite you in the butt.)

Consider the time-honored notion of "shopping." As we traditionally understand it, while "shopping" *can* be the single-minded pursuit of locating and checking out with a single, specific item as seamlessly as possible - there are also many other ways, as complicated beings, we undertake this activity.

This is where some of the tech elite get it wrong. Even if we're just repurchasing toilet paper, many of us like to, oh, I dunno, get out of the house once in a while and squeeze the Charmin. Indeed, I'm sure you could find studies that prove better mental health, lower blood pressure, and higher

cognitive function flow from a nice journey to the Charmin-squeezing shelf. So don't be so sure the future is all about drones, apps, and never changing brands of TP. And as far as re-ordering contact lenses and prescription medication, that isn't really all that futuristic. That prosaic process is a reality today, for those who seek it.

Not only the process but the metaphor, of "browsing around," is a real thing online, just as it is in the brick-and-mortar world.

Early versions of Quality Score overshot the target. They were overly stringent, which resulted in inconveniences for all advertisers. They were hastily thrown together to clamp down on the unfortunate prevalence of bad, lazy, unfair, and arrogant actors in the PPC auction. So the how-to formulas, Quality Score algorithms, and the boilerplate advice that corresponds to them, may have been guided by an obsession with outliers - in particular, highly irrelevant ads and highly inappropriate landing page content.

So not all of it is fair. And we're going to the poorhouse if we pursue only the most obvious paths from keyword search to avid interest to purchase intent.

The Anthropology of Shopping: Needs Emerge Rather than Being Pre-Formed

In our culture, "shopping" has many meanings, but allow me to remind you of two of them.

Shopping can mean going out and getting one or two (or ten) things you specifically need - you might even make a list. An artichoke, road salt, beer, and gas, for example. Even at that, we often wind up (quite expectedly) broadening the scope of our shopping trip. We didn't really specify what kind of beer we were getting here because we like to try new types. We wait until we're at the store to browse. If, at the gas station, it strikes us that the car is really dirty (and a dust storm isn't imminent), we may add on a carwash.



Figure 1: From a recent quest for road salt, a shopping expedition produces a selection of beers. Purchased earlier: raccoon, sheep, duck, and turtle.

Another definition for shopping is more recreational, or possibly, compulsively acquisitive. We go “out to the shops” to look at kitchen items, deals on apparel brands, something we might like. Nowadays, people do that online, too. But certain narrow approaches to online communications and customer acquisition fail to appreciate that cultural element of shopping.

Indeed, in the lofty world of marketing and advertising strategy, much is put into the “consideration phase” of the purchase process (or the “customer journey,” or “research”). Much of it is made of it in Powerpoint presentations proffered by publishers, and sales pitches for Display advertising by the reach-and-frequency hounds in that part of our industry (and Facebook).

If we remain too siloed, many of us PPC practitioners aren't seeing much room for that meandering process on the ground in terms of the typical execution of campaigns in “relevance-obsessed and granular” platforms such as Google Ads, and in particular, the strangely atomized world of Google Shopping - clearly, an environment designed by engineers who like databases and big-data systems that can machine-learn their way to max relevance, but also a world devoid of narrative. The buyer,

following the database logic of Google Shopping, already knows which color, size, and pattern of the McHorlick Regency Rug Collection they wish to make their living room complete... and \$2,199.99 later, the perfect match between highly specific intent and advertising targeting has been consummated. Unlikely!

Cast a Wider Net for Growth: 5 Ways to Loosen Things Up

I love Google Shopping, but something is missing in the model.

Fortunately, there may be a middle ground. Indeed - through Google Shopping (even) and several other techniques, there is room for us to do what advertisers have always done - introduce consumers who may be moderately inclined towards our brand to something a little bit new and unexpected, without annoying the heck out of them.

I give you the following five ways of broadening your budget to address consumers at various degrees of intent and various phases of the purchase journey. As we take advantage of these opportunities, measurement may become more complex. But then again, so are most forms of adulting.

In future, I'll dive more deeply into some of these methods - particularly DSA.

1. Higher-order concepts.

To seek a copacetic audience and customer base for one of our key e-commerce clients, a few years ago we began building a large campaign around more general non-branded means that searchers use to express their desires for safer, more green and natural versions of consumer products. Many of these queries can be fairly granular, but they stop short of extreme purchase intent. We can go up a couple of levels of abstraction, though, to build awareness of even broader expressions of ethics in consumerism. While it might not work if you went too broad with progressive-Poindexter keywords like "ethical supply chain," take this example and extrapolate it to your own company's situation.

Say your company sells backyard pools with greener materials and it also provides a process by which the usual chlorine is replaced by something friendlier to your skin and to the environment. (I'm not an expert in this area, so please don't correct me on the example as it isn't meant to be "accurate.") You'd keep running ads against keywords like "eco-friendly recreation," "+harmful +chlorine +swimming," and so on. In some ways, this resembles a classic B2B strategy that would provide a "white paper" to influence a purchase decision over time by educating first. It might help, in this example, if you did offer related content (written or video), or perhaps even a schedule of local events, seminars, meetups, etc. that would build awareness around a certain movement, assuming your company positions itself squarely within that movement.

2. Targeting a large swath of queries in your vertical, quite generally.

Let's say you offer a wide variety of software products that focus on a subset of manufacturers and their needs. You might have gone very hard after some highly relevant keywords. To add growth, do

what some of your competitors are doing – go even broader, on the expectation that you may need to negative out many highly irrelevant queries over time, or just bid conservatively. The example below shows how aggressively Netsuite may be bidding on a lot of its broader keywords, but perhaps the advertiser in #3 slot, a smaller company, can make it work too.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "barbecue manufacturing accounting software". The search results page displays several advertisements:

- Ad 1:** From www.netsuite.com/. Title: "2020 - Manufacturing Software | #1 Cloud ERP Solution". Description: "Leading Cloud-Based Integrated Business Suite for Manufacturing. Free Demo! 100% Cloud Platform. Free Product Tours. Real-Time Data. One Unified Suite. 19,000+ Customers. Inventory Management. Types: Business Software, Cloud ERP Software. 2020 Top Manufacturing · Order Management · NetSuite ERP System".
- Ad 2:** From www.misysinc.com/. Title: "MISys Manufacturing Software | Compatible with Intuit & Sage". Description: "Integrates seamlessly with the most popular accounting software. Explore MISys. Reduce inventory costs. Analyze costs accurately. Eliminate purchase errors. Manage Purchasing. Types: Sm to Med Manufacturers, Inventory, Production, Purchasing, MRP, Forecast".
- Ad 3:** From www.globalshopsolutions.com/accounting/manufacturing. Title: "Accounting Software | Manufacturing Industry". Description: "You Are Not Alone When You Have Real-Time Accounting & Financial Reports!".
- Ad 4:** From quickbooks.intuit.com/Accounting/Software. Title: "QuickBooks® Online Canada | Online Accounting Software". Description: "Track, Organize & Manage Your Business With The Top Rated Accounting Software Solution".

Figure 2: A mix of advertisers targeting keywords like +manufacturing +software, +accounting +software, "manufacturing accounting," and... who knows, really.

3. Fuzzy matching for your product type.

Perhaps you've heard that traditional broad match is wildly unpredictable because it matches your ad with a range of unpredictable queries. Right, but reach matters too. You might, if you're in some specific kind of dog furniture (say, dog houses) that has been known to help Airbnb hosts increase

profits, advertise against the broad keywords **Airbnb dog furniture**, and then monitor and adjust according to the query flow you see. (Don't literally do this. This is an example.)

4. Dynamic Search Ads.

I'll cover [Dynamic Search Ads](#) in the coming weeks. Allow me to provide two brief examples, though. For some years now, I've referred to Dynamic Search Ads as "paid SEO." If you have a large site with multiple constituencies, including a vast consumer audience for free or partly firewalled content, it isn't terribly economic to advertise to that audience, and it might take a long time to put together a gigantic campaign to reach that audience with all of its varied types of queries. Let's say it's an established review site like TripAdvisor or a consumer information service in a valuable vertical such as real estate - say, Zillow. (Note: I have no affiliation with either.) The audience is valuable, and keeping that audience growing and following the content is important, but it's not so valuable as to make conventional online advertising an appealing proposition. Indeed, that's why many such companies hoped to grow their way to prominence by optimizing their content for organic search traffic. For such companies, the available pool of organic search traffic has been declining a little bit each year for the better part of a decade. There is nothing wrong with setting up DSA campaigns to pay for similar traffic streams that might have been free years ago. Building a valuable audience entirely for free nowadays is unrealistic.

You can then further refine that spend by isolating some segments of it that appear to contribute the most to revenues, or even to a cocktail of custom KPI's. (For example, by Geography, Audience, etc.) And at some point, once satisfied that the audience has been built to a level that satisfies other paying stakeholders, you could shut it off again.

5. Super broad term to a very narrow audience.

It might be unrealistic to advertise on the keyword [yummy] to all of North America. (When I just tried typing this keyword, my screen was taken over by a Justin Bieber video and a local establishment called Yummy Samosas. I was already aware of one of the two.) But let's say you wanted everyone in South Bend, Indiana, to identify your product with the "yummy" concept. It wouldn't cost you a bunch to make it so, even bidding \$3.00 a click. Some modicum of relevance would be a must, along with savvy use of ad extensions, local calling options, and other common-sense aspects of reaching out to that particular narrow geography (albeit on a very broad concept).

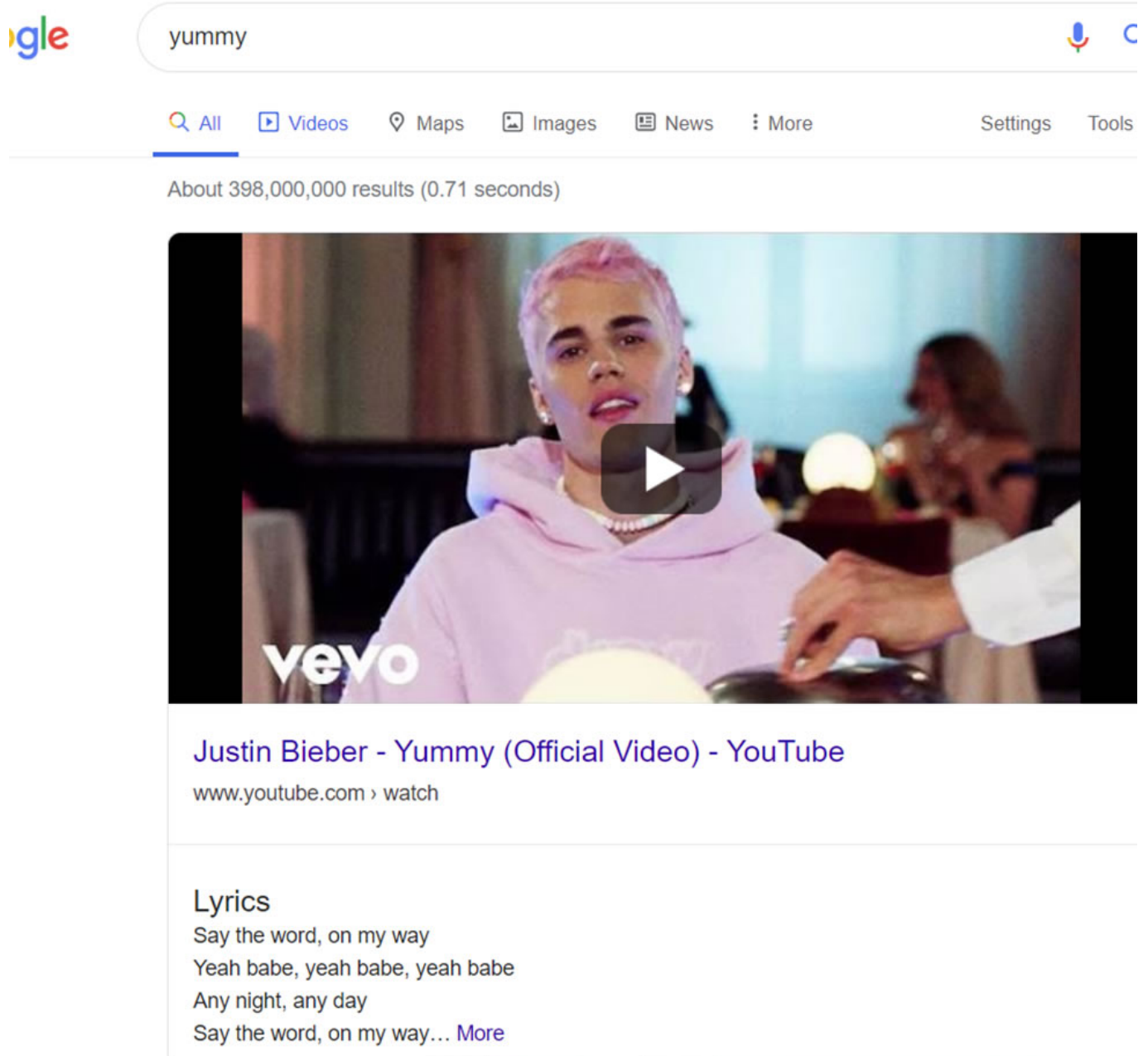


Figure 3: We implore you to advertise your business on this SERP, to push the Biebs down the page a wee bit.

Well, gotta run. That must be the Yummy Samosas people calling. I think they want me to run their marketing. I'll think about it.