



SEARCH MARKETING STRATEGY PLANNING FOR 2020



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INTRODUCTION

While different brands run their strategy periods between different start points in a year, it's likely that there will either be active or passive planning for 2020 in progress. At the beginning of a new decade, however, what we're encouraging any brand with a history going back more than a couple of years is to commit to a thorough process of examination and evaluation in order to contribute to their next plan.

Reflection is an underrated thing – and the kind of surgical dissection we're recommending is often only conducted following a catastrophe. For many brands, time constraints mean that – provided the year shows growth – little energy can be given to finding out which parts of a strategy were successful. Of course, we wouldn't want to undervalue the benefits of an experienced marketer's intuition, but equally – to misquote Aristotle – an unexamined marketing strategy is no strategy at all.

For that reason, in addition to information useful for planning a new strategy, we'll be looking at giving some advice on how to evaluate your activity for the preceding year. Obviously, it's impossible to template strategy for the number of industries that are planning, but what we're looking to achieve is a foundation in the techniques you'll need to use to make sure you hit the ground running.



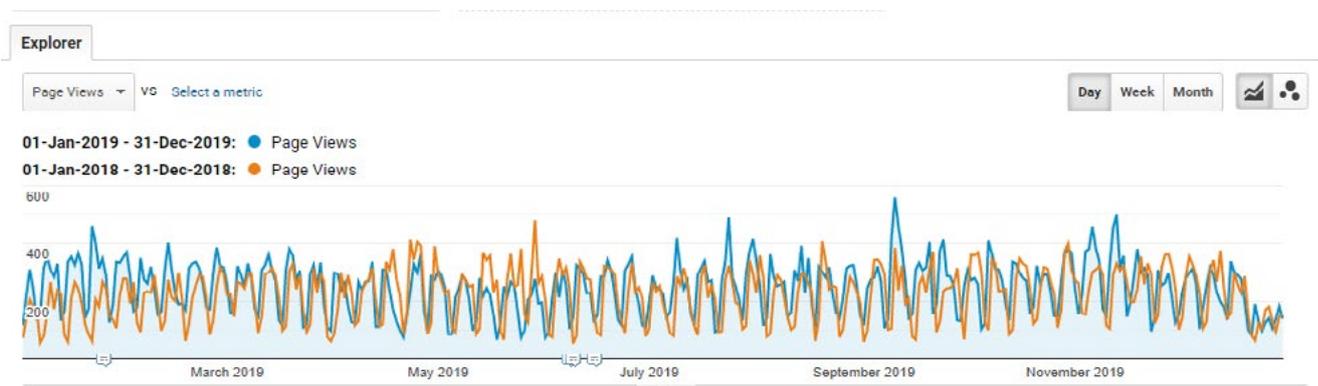
THE YEAR IN REVIEW

A strategy review, as stated previously, is often only conducted as a result of a bad year – but while there is a lot to be learned from a bad year, there is equally plenty to be gleaned from even your best year. We’re going to use the Google tools for this (Google Search Console and Analytics), but there is obvious benefit in terms of depth from using external tools – however, for those that don’t have access, we’ll keep it simple.

TRAFFIC

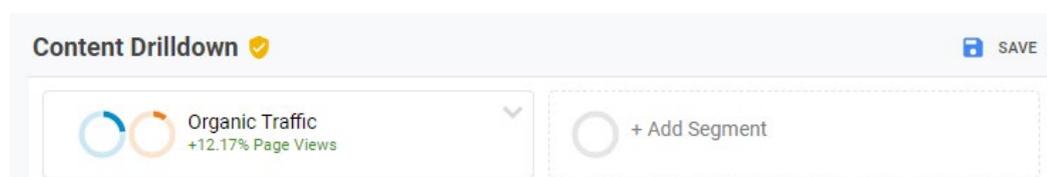
First we’re going to have a look at traffic – this is quite a top level test of your performance, but by analysing your traffic you can narrow down the areas of your site that have performed the best (in the hope it matches with where you’ve been putting in the work).

If we look at the following example - a brand looking to improve blog and resource page traffic and had focused a lot of work on improving the quality of content they were producing for those specific folders as well as optimising layout, they could look at the fact that the agency improved various key metrics like conversions and overall traffic and call it a win – they could move on with more of the same after a really successful year.



But what if we break it down?

For this, we recommend using ‘Content Drilldown’ in Google Analytics which will give you a summary for each page path. Because I’m looking specifically in terms of SEO in this instance (you can filter to paid or referral traffic in the same way depending on where your interest lies), I’ve selected only the organic segment from the selector at the top:



Once this is done, we can examine whether their efforts have been rewarded (at least on a surface level).

Page path level 1 ?	Page Views ? ↓	Unique Page Views ?	Avg. Time on Page ?	Bounce Rate ?	% Exit ?
Organic Traffic	11.51% ▲ 90,393 vs 81,061	12.19% ▲ 80,287 vs 71,562	16.64% ▲ 00:03:08 vs 00:02:41	4.35% ▲ 74.22% vs 71.13%	8.31% ▲ 68.62% vs 63.35%
1. 📁 /blog/					
01-Jan-2019 - 31-Dec-2019	33,458 (37.01%)	30,907 (38.50%)	00:06:01	87.36%	88.01%
01-Jan-2018 - 31-Dec-2018	23,163 (28.57%)	21,447 (29.97%)	00:04:43	87.24%	85.45%
% Change	44.45%	44.11%	27.32%	0.14%	3.01%
2. 📁 /services/					
01-Jan-2019 - 31-Dec-2019	12,459 (13.78%)	10,942 (13.63%)	00:03:24	73.31%	64.51%
01-Jan-2018 - 31-Dec-2018	14,290 (17.63%)	12,469 (17.42%)	00:02:59	72.20%	63.07%
% Change	-12.81%	-12.25%	14.10%	1.53%	2.29%
3. 📁 /resource/					
01-Jan-2019 - 31-Dec-2019	10,247 (11.34%)	8,836 (11.01%)	00:04:19	67.32%	74.53%
01-Jan-2018 - 31-Dec-2018	7,650 (9.44%)	6,704 (9.37%)	00:03:33	70.58%	71.84%
% Change	33.95%	31.80%	21.48%	-4.61%	3.74%

Here we can see that, thankfully, the efforts have earned positive results – with the majority of the listed metrics showing improvement. However, even in this snapshot we can see a place where they can improve – i.e. the service page performance.

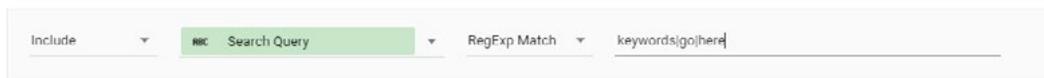
From here, you can drill down (as you would expect) into each subfolder to examine the performance of individual pieces of content. Again – this is a top level overview, not a full review. If you need a list of content by year, for example, you’d need to use a crawler (Screaming Frog or similar) or be fairly confident that none of your 2018 content had zero traffic that year.

Once this overview has been conducted, you can start to look at it in a bit more detail.

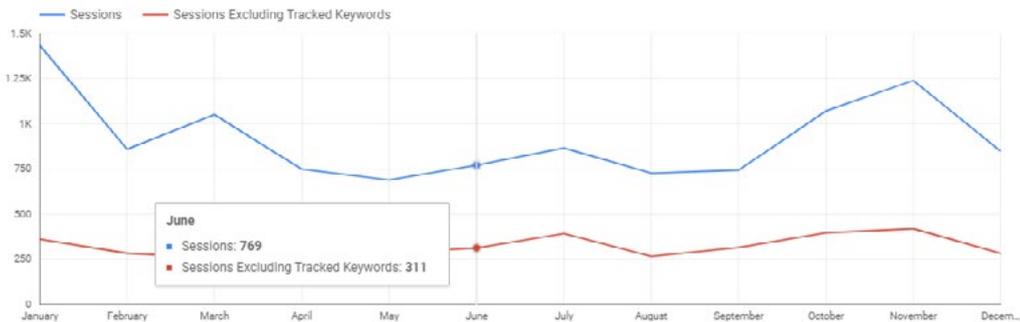
KEYWORD PERFORMANCE

While tracking individual keywords is of increasingly debatable utility as a main KPI; as a broader performance indicator, keyword performance in general offers great insight. We wrote a piece on building a keyword performance report using Data Studio and GSC [which you can find here](#), but the core of the analysis is to track the performance of all of your keywords – 100 keywords with a search volume of 10 still add up to the same as a trophy keyword with a volume of 1000.

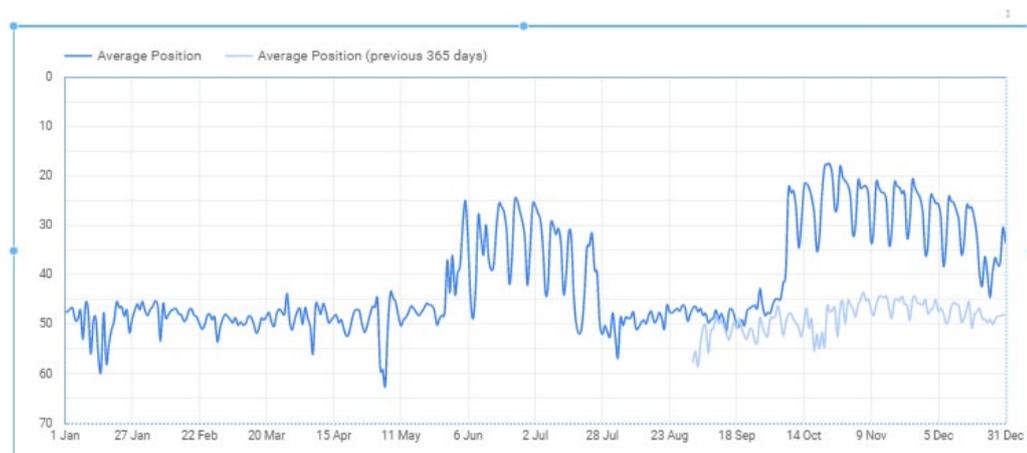
For that reason, and using filters of your standard tracked keywords – you can create a comparison to ensure you’re tracking the right keywords – you can simply blend two Analytics views as a data source, with one of them using a filter excluding your keyword list. This is done using the following set up:



This will give you a chart something like the below (if you need a bit of help getting started with Data Studio, you can [get our eBook here](#)):



The difference here will show you how much weight you are putting on your target keywords compared to what they deserve. In addition, you can also look to check the year’s progress using a simple line graph (x axis inverted) with and without tracked keywords.



Again, what we're looking for is, obviously a positive trend for both tracked and untracked keywords – but a negative trend in either or both can also reveal that you've been focusing too narrowly or too broadly (though you should be aware that for newer brands and those looking to cast their net more widely, an increasing number of keywords can skew these results).

You can also look to cross reference this against landing page performance tables (N.B. I think I stole this, at least in part, from Aleyda Solis [@aleyda](#)) which can give you an idea as to which pages are serving which query (which can often surprise).

Page Performance by Query					
Landing Page	Query	Url Clicks	URL CTR	Impressions	Average Position
https://www.click.co.uk/	click consult	89	40.09%	229	1.31
https://www.click.co.uk/blog/5-cool-things-can-google/	things to google	27	8.01%	337	3.42
https://www.click.co.uk/blog/5-cool-things-can-google/	things to do on google	17	5.56%	306	3.74
https://www.click.co.uk/services/social-media/	social media management agency	12	1.28%	938	21.88
https://www.click.co.uk/blog/how-to-persuade-youtube-to-recomm	how to get youtube to recommend your vide	12	16%	75	5.04
https://www.click.co.uk/blog/whats-data-driven-seo/	data driven seo	8	3.92%	204	1.78
https://www.click.co.uk/blog/5-cool-things-can-google/	cool things to do on google	8	1.87%	428	1.21
https://www.click.co.uk/about-us/team/	click consult	7	3.18%	229	1.31
https://www.click.co.uk/blog/5-cool-things-can-google/	things to do with google	6	6.52%	92	4.13
https://www.click.co.uk/blog/change-interests-pinterest/	how to reset pinterest	6	10.53%	57	2.75

Page Performance by Query (Tracked Keywords)					
Landing Page	Query	Url Clicks	URL CTR	Impressions	Average Position
https://www.click.co.uk/	click consult	89	40.09%	229	1.31
https://www.click.co.uk/services/social-media/	social media management agency	12	1.28%	938	21.88
https://www.click.co.uk/about-us/team/	click consult	7	3.18%	229	1.31
https://www.click.co.uk/services/paid-social/youtube-advertising/	youtube advertising agency	5	1.27%	395	11.34
https://www.click.co.uk/services/reputation-management/	online reputation management uk	4	2.34%	171	8
https://www.click.co.uk/services/display-advertising/ad-formats/	display advertisement format	4	7.55%	53	1.36
https://www.click.co.uk/	seo agency	4	0.08%	5,051	20.73

This in turn can be followed by an exploration of keyword cannibalisation (for which there's a free template pinned to the top of the profile of [@HannahRampton](#)).

These can all be repeated using the paid segment – and while we can't share the table itself, the set up we use is on the right.

With paid search, we can easily look at pages which are bouncing people back to the SERP, queries which are under or over performing and identify possible targets for the next negative keyword list. Bear in mind, however, that these observations and analyses should be conducted against your previous year's strategy, the health of your PPC account should be checked far more regularly.

Chart > Tab

DATA
STYLE

Data Source

Main (Not Provided Fil...

+ BLEND DATA ?

Dimension

ABC Campaign

ABC Search Query

ABC Destination URL

+ Add dimension

Drill down

Metric

AUT Sessions

AUT Bounces

AUT CTR

AUT Cost

AUT Impressions

+ Add metric

WHY CONDUCT THE REVIEW?

There is certainly an argument to be made that the time you spend reviewing could be spent on constructing your 2020 strategy. It's valid – we get limited time to plan our activities (often limited time to implement them) – so why should we spend this time reviewing our previous year when we know (observable in the data) that we succeeded?

The main reason is that while our headline statistics improving, reaching or beating targeted growth is a fantastic achievement, they are fairly shallow metrics generally. Increased session numbers, even increased conversion rates and revenue are surface details, or the tip of the proverbial iceberg beneath which are vast quantities of underlying data and it's important that we're in a position that allows us to improve our performance incrementally by identifying with precision what we have done well and vice versa.

In addition to this – many parts of a strategy review can be done using Data Studio. While it's in its infancy still (with new features added all the time), Data Studio has moved beyond being merely a reporting platform and can now be used for simple analysis and is able to offer great insights even in its present form – and once you've built what you need, it can simply be reused, added to and improved each year with less effort overall, speeding up this review process every year as well as feeding data in to your strategy planning.

IS THIS EVERYTHING?

In short, no this series of reviews isn't everything you can do. Without a specific strategy in front of us, it's hard to tell you where to look – needless to say, assess your strategy as you find it.

As I've stated throughout – it's difficult to offer a generic template for planning a search strategy that could apply to multiple verticals and brand sizes. Instead, what we're going to do in this eBook – as with the review section – is try to offer some tools and techniques to make the planning easier.

SYSTEMATIC PROBLEM SOLVING (IDENTIFY, ANALYSE, OVERCOME)

The problem solving method is great for pinch points and persistent issues – and will also help you identify projects you can then add into an evaluative analysis (as per the next section). Even successful strategies will leave certain problem aspects of a site untouched – either because they appear complex, have been previously and unsuccessfully tackled or simply due to restrictions of time or budget.

However, systematic (as opposed to intuitive, or 'Aha!') problem solving offers a clear route to tackling issues and, because of the systematic nature of the technique, is repeatable. I'm going to use the 'identify, analyse, and overcome' process here – but equally applicable is the IDEAL model (Identify, Define, Examine, Act, and Look).

IDENTIFY

The first step is admitting you have a problem – as the saying goes – and most organisations could probably provide a list of their present issues off of the top of their head. However, even if you had no issues heading in to this book, the review stage of this eBook will have helped you to identify some.

1. Identification of a problem is more than spotting that one exists, however, it's about naming or defining that problem:
2. Customers are adding products to baskets but aren't converting; we need to ensure that more of these baskets result in sales.

Customers are arriving on site, but the pages per session is unusually low for our industry meaning that they are likely leaving before finding what they want – we need to bring in more relevant traffic and/or make it easier for them to find what they want.

Identifying a problem in a simple sentence or two is a meta-level executive process – an interesting 2003 paper called [‘The Psychology of Problem Solving’](#) puts it this way (defining both well-defined and ill-defined problems):

It is useful to consider the roles of problem recognition, definition, and representation in the solution of well-defined versus ill-defined problems. Recall that a well-defined problem is one whose path to solution is straightforward, whereas an ill-defined problem is one that does not lend itself to a readily apparent solution strategy. Consider the following well-defined problem, referred to as the Tower of Hanoi problem:

There are three discs of unequal sizes, positioned on the leftmost of three pegs, such that the largest disc is at the bottom, the middle-sized disc is in the middle, and the smallest disc is on the top. Your task is to transfer all three discs to the rightmost peg, using the middle peg as a stationing area, as needed. You may move only one disc at a time, and you may never move a larger disc on top of a smaller disc. (Sternberg, 1999)

The problem here is easy to recognize: One needs to move the discs onto the rightmost peg. The problem is also defined clearly; the relative sizes of the discs as well as their locations are easy to distinguish. Also, the solution path is straightforward based on this representation. Working backward,

A well-defined problem

Three five-handed extraterrestrial monsters were holding three crystal globes. Because of the quantum-mechanical peculiarities of their neighborhood, both monsters and globes come in exactly three sizes, with no others permitted: small, medium, and large. The small monster was holding the large globe; the medium-sized monster was holding the small globe; and the large monster was holding the medium-sized globe. Since this situation offended their keenly developed sense of symmetry, they proceeded to transfer globes from one monster to another so that each monster would have a globe proportionate to its own size. Monster etiquette complicated the solution of the problem since it requires that: 1. only one globe may be transferred at a time; 2. if a monster is holding two globes, only the larger of the two may be transferred; and, 3. a globe may not be transferred to a monster who is holding a larger globe. By what sequence of transfers could the monsters have solved this problem? (See Kotovsky et al., 1985)

Most people find this problem to be more difficult than the Tower of Hanoi problem (Newell & Simon, 1972). However, it is actually directly isomorphic to (i.e., its structure is exactly the same as that of) the Tower of Hanoi problem. In this case, it is the difficulty of representing the problem correctly that increases the level of difficulty of the problem as a whole. After you are told of the isomorphism between the two problems, the solution is simply a matter of mapping relationships from one problem to the other. In summary, problem definition is usually easy for the class of well-defined problems; however, accurate problem recognition and representation are not necessarily straightforward, even when the scope and goals of the problem are clear.

A well-defined, but poorly explained problem

In the case of ill-defined problems, however, it is often the case that all aspects of problem formulation are relatively challenging. Perhaps the easiest stage in attempting to solve an ill-defined problem is that of problem recognition. It is often relatively simple to identify a fuzzy problem. For example, it is easy to identify the problem of developing a test of creativity. It is hard, however, to define the exact contents of such a measure.

The real difficulty in solving an ill-defined problem is in clarifying the nature of the problem: how broad it is, what the goal is, and so on. Although well-defined problems have a clear path to solution, the solution strategy for an ill-defined problem must be determined by the problem solver. To develop a problem-solving strategy, it is first necessary to specify the goals of the task. For example, if we take on the task of designing a creativity test,

we must decide whether the goal is (a) to estimate the creativity of undergraduate psychology majors or (b) to measure creative potential among people of all ages and educational and cultural backgrounds. Before the path to solution can be constructed, the goal must be clear.

ANALYSE

Sadly for all involved, identification is only the first step to developing a solution – the next part is the analysis of the problem which is where we begin to flesh out our problem. For this it helps if you can form working groups with a broad knowledge base, as the solution to any problem in search can often be found at the edges of a number of skillsets. For example, if we look at our two problems from the identify step:

1. Customers are adding products to baskets but aren't converting; we need to ensure that more of these baskets result in sales.

Here we could look at a number of things:

- Are the number of clicks on the checkout button from product pages – are they what we would expect?
- If they are clicking through, where are they abandoning the process?
- What time of the month are most of the 'cart abandons' occurring?

Customers are arriving on site, but the pages per session is unusually low for our industry meaning that they are likely leaving before finding what they want – we need to bring in more relevant traffic and/or make it easier for them to find what they want.

2. Again, there are a number of avenues for exploration:

- Which pages are seeing the highest exit rate?
- Do the exits occur from specific types of page?

Analysis is about clarifying the problem in order to make the solution easier to reach. Again, the review of the past year's performance will provide you with a lot of data, but it can be supplemented as we begin to properly frame the problem.

As we can see from the two instances above (though simplified), once we begin to properly frame the problem [this happens] [we need this to happen] [what aspect of this could move us from this to this], we can see that possible solutions begin to emerge from the analysis.

OVERCOME

In most cases, this would refer to a process of testing, analysis and optimisation, but for strategy planning, the aim of this step will be to define a solution ready for use in the next section. So, again, we can use one of the two problems as examples.

Problem: -

- Customers are adding products to baskets but aren't converting; we need to ensure that more of these baskets result in sales.

Analysis: -

- Clicks on the checkout button from product pages lower than expected.

Solution: -

- We will carry out optimisation test on button size and position.

Again, while simplified, the process of identification and analysis are intended to present the resolution – the ability to overcome the problem. Though the initial phase may not be the one to fix the problem, for the purposes of strategy planning, we can schedule problem solving phases which will each deal with the highest priority problem available.

PIE FRAMEWORK

Traditionally used to qualify and prioritise conversion rate optimisation (CRO) tasks, it will also work for all areas of strategy development, PIE is a simple scoring framework made up of 'Potential', 'Importance' and 'Ease'. Using the framework for strategy is less precise than for technical optimisation – as there will, by necessity, be some judgement calls and educated guessing; however, having reviewed the data as per the section on analysing the previous year's strategy, and carried out the problem solving tasks, you will be able to make these calls more easily than if you skip straight to planning.

POTENTIAL

For the purposes of developing a 2020 strategy, potential refers to the likelihood that any change or commitment will positively improve performance in search. For example – a site which lacks content could score a commitment to creating content regularly throughout the year as a 10. We know that content is important for contextualising a site's meaning and purpose and has been a vital part of any search strategy for a decade.

However, that same site could rank a thorough schema project around a five – it's an optimisation that has great potential overall in helping to make your data easier to parse by various search engine algorithms, but while lacking the content it is far less likely to deliver growth.

IMPORTANCE

Importance can seem a fairly relative metric when it comes to strategy – and while it's difficult to judge exactly, if you know how consumers are using your site, you know where they land and how they navigate the pages. Depending on your attribution modelling, you should be able to work out the monetary value of the traffic to each page, or type of page. You can use these figures to make reasonable predictions based on traffic value and, from there.

Compared against the cost of implementation, you can work out an approximate score for importance – if we know that we need content (priority) we can use the potential returns from implementing the content strategy against the cost of the copy. The more the calculation works in your favour (potential ROI), the more importance you can attribute to the project.

EASE

While it's a fairly self-explanatory term, 'ease' here isn't just a judgement on technical execution, but also of company politics – how easy is it going to be not only to (a) access the resources, finances and time for implementation; but also to (b) convince senior stakeholders that it is a necessary project.

Again, to use two previous examples – it may be easier to convince senior members of an organisation to hire or contract a content writer for a set project than to manage a web development project that might need multiple tweaks and changes over a longer period.

LIFT zone	Potential	Importance	Ease	PIE score
Homepage	10	10	8	9.3
Checkout	8	10	9	9.0
Product page	10	9	7	8.7

Web analytics
Heuristic analysis
Voice of customer

Cost
Traffic volume
Return on investment

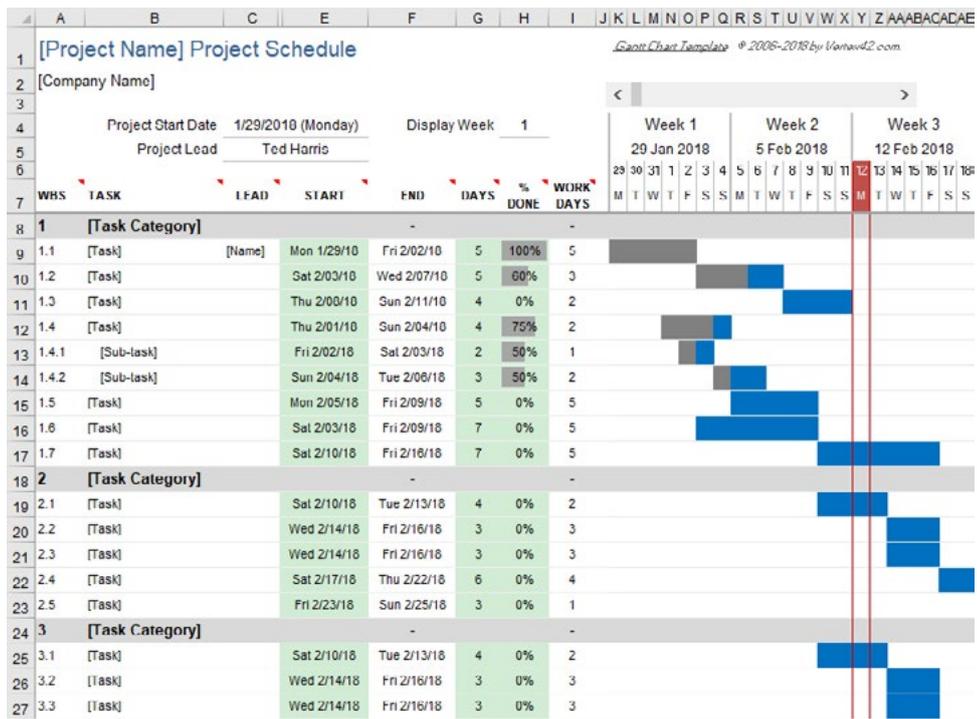
Technical
"Political"

Example PIE framework – from Widerfunnel

STRATEGY PLANNING

Once we have a PIE framework, the rest is a mix of workflow and project management and that is something it's difficult to give advice on. Only you will know your resources and how long each task will take. However, while you should obviously try to remain agile (a strategy which is too rigid will break), it's important to plan your full strategy – taking into account the fact that projects almost always overrun.

The best way to do this is to create a Gantt chart or plot out the strategy using one of the many available project management tools. While an agile approach is preferable, too loose an approach to this step can lead to a lack of focus and the possibility that your strategy will descend into firefighting various issues as they reach tipping points throughout the year.



CONCLUSION

Strategy can often appear a buzzword – or a group of all too ephemeral ideas about what people would like to happen in a given timeframe, but it doesn't need to be like this. By committing to a thorough process such as the one outlined here, you can ensure that you have a genuinely strategic approach to 2020, with your tasks clearly defined and your outcomes predictable and measurable.

The best part about this is that it is far easier to maintain than it is to implement – once you have the process in place, it makes subsequent years easier to assess, successes easier to explain and future actions easier to decide upon. By embarking on this process you are ensuring that you can be clear and instructive whether a strategy is a success or a failure – you can accurately say 'this was supposed to produce this and it did/did not, therefore we need to do this' and have the data to back up your points.



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ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning digital and search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC). Part of global consumer brand business Ceuta Group, we have a team of 70-plus specialists and a portfolio of more than 60 clients worldwide.

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