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August 14, 2006  
 By [Jack Smith](#)

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**Introduction**

If you missed the early stages of behavioral targeting (BT), you also missed all the BT 101 materials that appeared back then. Now that BT pundits almost always address their remarks to the educated, catching up can be hard.

For all you folks out there who are new to BT but need to know more, this is a 5 step plan for starting your first BT campaign.

**Once upon a time...**

Imagine that you're planning an online campaign for the "Eversink," a fancy new putter.



Your client, the seller of this prodigious golf club, is cash-poor and needs to do the job as economically as possible.

If funds were unlimited you might concentrate the campaign on a selection of premium golf-related websites. But the contextual audience that they offer is pricey, and your client's campaign would be a short one if that was all you did.

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## Step 2: Pick categories

Let's assume you've already done two things:

1. Produced killer Eversink creative directed at the consumers likely in the market for putters.
2. Decided to serve it on the (fictional) Gazillion advertising network, with access to hundreds of sites at once rather than on a single site.

Next, you choose BT segments from those Gazillion offers. This time it's a no-brainer because Gazillion has a "Golf Nuts" category especially for golfers. You select that category, and also specify that to get into the frame users must do the things that qualify them as Golf Nuts at least four times in two weeks.

You don't want to waste ammo on chance visitors

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## Step 3: Let technology do its stuff

Getting Eversink's ad to potential putter buyers is now up to Gazillion, with its many member sites and surfers.

First its software must spot the Golf Nuts that you need. That's easy (it's not always quite so simple): they read golf-related content. It then narrows them down based on your frequency criteria (i.e., four times in the last two weeks) to a final set of targets.

#### An (out of context) ad is served...

When a Golf Nut next appears on Gazillion's network, the trigger is pulled and an Eversink ad zaps off. It could go anywhere on the Gazillion network, of course, but this one goes to The Tinseltown Telegraph, a page dedicated to entertainment news, in front of which its target sits slack-jawed, reading tales of starlet infidelity.

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**...and serves its purpose**


But golf is this target's first love. Salacious gossip simply fills the gaps between visits to the pro shop at the country club. Eversink's killer creative immediately attracts his eye, wakes him up and draws him in. All thoughts of starlets are eradicated: he salivates, clicks, enters credit card number and presses "buy."

**Result:** your client's sold a putter on The Tinseltown Telegraph!  
 And that, at its most basic, is BT in action.

**Next:** [Integrate with other tools](#)



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## Step 4: Integrate with other tools

Of course, behavioral targeting isn't really that simple. The number of possible tweaks to the highly complex software is effectively infinite, and even at the basic level there are some extras kinks you ought to be aware of.

In real campaigns, BT works best as part of a mixed approach. It is particularly effective as a "closing tool," targeting warm prospects previously identified by other means-- an approach that we call "retargeting."

For Eversink, the procedure might, for instance, be to create a website for the putter, drive visitors to it with search and then target those visitors with BT ads.

#### **Ads out of context work...**

The number of golf gear prospects visiting The Tinseltown Telegram and other non-golf sites will never be enough to justify buying regular space, so golf ads will not regularly appear there. But that's a good thing. By serving ads on non-golf sites, Eversink may have a better chance of breaking free of the golf related ad clutter attracting a prospective buyer's attention.

#### **...and sometimes don't**

In some specialized markets, though, buyers seem to prefer to shop on contextual sites, and rarely respond when targeted elsewhere.

**Next:** [Balance reach and precision](#)

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## Step 5: Balance reach and precision

Every campaign has its own sweet spot where reach and targeting precision are in harmony and the client's financial returns are at their peak. For Eversink, achieving this was unnaturally easy: the vast supply of golfers and Gazillion's ready-made Golf Nut category made it a slam-dunk.

In typical campaigns, though, a lot more thought is required. Multiple behavioral categories may be needed, each with different requirements for how often a surfer must do what it takes to be included. Categories may also be refined by adjusting what it takes to be included, while custom categories may be created for specific campaigns or advertisers.

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## Conclusion

There's no reason to be awe-struck by BT. It's true that you can make it complicated if you want-- but it doesn't need to be; however sophisticated it is under the hood, the concept of serving ads to people who've shown potential interest in seeing them is an easy one to grasp, and you don't need a masters in marketing to put it to good use.

#### Additional resources

[Behavioral Targeting Best Practices](#)

[Five BT Companies Reviewed](#)

[Behavioral Retargeting 101](#)

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