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Independent research

Map, Then Remap

Three versions of one real topical map for a game strategy and reviews site. What changed between drafts, what stayed tangled, and the template I'd use now.

Archive review · Site and niche anonymized

THE SAME REVIEW PAGE, VERSION 1 VS. VERSION 3



Between version 1 and version 3, **63 of 111 URLs** changed position in the map. Most of the changes made it shallower.

112	3	57%
URLs mapped	versions compared	re-labelled v1 to v3

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About this study

One map, three drafts

Topical maps are usually shown finished. The drafts are more instructive: they show **which structural decisions a team changed its mind about**.

1

What it is

A **URL-first topical map** for a game strategy and reviews site: every existing URL tagged with a parent topic and up to three subtopic levels. Three versions sit in one workbook.

2

The goal

Compare version 1 with version 3, row by row, and find **what the restructuring actually changed**: depth, parents, duplicates and gaps.

3

What I measured

Rows whose topic path changed, moves to a new parent, depth before and after, and **topic labels that appear in more than one place** in the final version.

4

The challenge

The workbook records the labels but **not the reasons** for changes, and it has no keyword, volume or intent columns despite its name.

Why it matters

Most sites restructure their topics at least once. Comparing drafts shows **which decisions are easy to fix** and which ones quietly survive every version.

The short version

What changed, and what didn’t

63 of 111	**URLs changed their topic path between version 1 and 3.** 43 of them moved to a **different top-level parent**.
34 vs 8	**changes made a path shallower vs. deeper.** Four-level paths fell from **25 to 13**. The map got flatter on purpose.
13	**topic labels sit in more than one place in the final map.** “Strategy” is both a top-level parent and a branch under “How to play.” “Odds” appears in two branches.
36	**URLs share their most specific label with another URL.** Five URLs share one tournament label, six share “players,” four share “setup.” Each is a possible overlap to review.
112 of 112	**rows already have a live URL.** The map describes **what exists**. It plans no new pages and records no queries.

What it means

The team fixed the most visible problem, a deep “online [game]” umbrella. The harder problem, **one topic living in two places**, survived all three versions.

Finding 1

The umbrella broke up

Version 1 put 38 URLs under one broad parent, “online [game].” Version 3 split it into commercial clusters with their own parents.

Top-level parent	Version 1	Version 3
online [game]	38	0
[game] sites (reviews and lists)	0	18
legal online [game] (regional pages)	0	6
payments, tournaments and mobile clusters	0	7
How to play	32	39
A major tournament series	19	19
Strategy	13	15
players, earnings, game variants, other	9	8

Why flatter helped

A brand review four levels below “online [game]” says little the URL doesn't. Two levels, **[game] sites > [brand] review**, matches how a reader actually chooses: by site type, then by brand.

Labels drift between drafts

One draft carried a misspelled topic label across 35 rows, fixed in the next version. Free-typed labels **drift between drafts**; a fixed list of topic names prevents that.

Finding 2

One topic, two homes

The final map still places several topics under two different parents. Each one is a decision the map never made.

Topic	Where it appears in version 3
Strategy	Top-level parent **and** How to play > Strategy
Odds	How to play > Strategy > Odds **and** How to play > Odds
Odds calculator	Under both versions of Odds
Psychology	Under top-level Strategy **and** under How to play > Strategy
Learning resources	Under both Strategy branches
Setup	Under Strategy **and** How to play
Tournaments	Under Strategy **and** the tournament series

Why it matters

When one topic has two parents, **internal links, breadcrumbs and hubs split too**. Two pages can end up answering the same question from different branches, and neither hub is clearly the authority.

What to do about it

Pick **one home** for each topic, make the other location a cross-link, and point breadcrumbs and hub links at the chosen parent. Then check whether two pages now answer the same question.

Finding 3

A map of what exists

Every row starts from a live URL. That's a sensible first step, and a limiting one.

What a URL-first map does well

It shows **how existing pages relate**, exposes duplicates and orphan branches, and gives internal linking a structure. This map did all three.

What it can't do

It can't show **missing pages**, because every row needs a URL. Questions with no page never appear. Neither do queries, volumes, intent or an owner per branch.

Column the map had	Column I'd add
URL	Status: live / planned / merge / retire
Region	Primary question or entity the page answers
Parent topic	Search intent and journey stage
Sub topic 1 to 3	Query evidence: Search Console, research or hypothesis
	Owner and last-reviewed date
	Change log: what moved, when and why

The workbook is titled a keyword cluster map, but its three working tabs hold only URL, region and topic columns.

Template

How I’d build the map now

Six rules that would have prevented the problems these three drafts struggled with.

1

Start from questions, not URLs

List the **entities and questions** a reader has first. Then attach existing URLs, and mark the gaps as planned pages.

2

One topic, one home

Every topic label has **exactly one parent**. If it seems to belong in two places, pick one and cross-link.

3

Three levels is enough

Parent, cluster, page. If you need a fourth level, the parent is probably **two topics**.

4

Use a fixed vocabulary

Choose topic names from a list, not free text. **Misspelled labels** should be impossible.

5

One page per question

If two URLs share a final label, decide: **differentiate, merge or keep** with a reason.

6

Log every change

Record **what moved and why** between versions. The reasoning is the most valuable part of a remap.

Where this connects

Overlaps found here feed straight into *Content Review Decisions*, and the questions column is the starting point for *Semantic Coverage*.

Limits and sources

What this review can and can’t say

One site, one workbook

A single strategy and reviews site and three versions of its map. Patterns are observations from **one restructuring**, not rules for every site.

No performance link

The workbook doesn't record whether the remap was implemented or what happened next. **No result is claimed.**

How I counted

Rows were matched across versions by URL path. A change means any difference in the parent or subtopic labels. Label matching ignores capitalization.

Anonymized

The site, niche and URLs are withheld. Topic labels are generalized; structure and counts are as recorded.

01 **Topical map, versions 1 to 3, from a past project**
112 URLs with parent topic and up to three subtopic levels. Not published.

02 **SEO Starter Guide: organize your site. Google Search Central**
Background on grouping topically similar pages and site hierarchy.
developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/seo-starter-guide

By Ameneh Saeednia, seogirl.ca, prepared with AI assistance. Site and niche anonymized.