



Changes in SEO Strategy

SEO has long been the holy grail for internet marketers—and content creators—of all kinds. Attracting eyeballs, and website visitors, was job number one. While that's still the case to a large degree, SEO has become less of a numbers game and more of a driver for creating high-quality, relevant content. This is because of the ongoing algorithmic changes that Google and other search engines make to deliver a positive search experience for users.

TRICKS OUT, RELEVANCE IN

There was a time when Google, the most popular search engine, could be “tricked with hacks such as fraudulent backlinks and keyword packing,” says Danny Grainger, an SEO expert and copywriter. But those days are gone. “Today, these behaviors are severely punished by Google and are most certainly a massive don't in any SEO strategy,” he says.

“What currently seems to be the most effective approach in claiming high ranks—positions one to three—on a Google search engine results page (SERP) is focusing on legitimate backlinks to grow domain authority and publishing super-valuable and specific long-form content on your website,” Grainger says.

CREATING QUALITY CONTENT IS STILL PARAMOUNT

Google is all about providing users with the results they need. That's how it maintains its position as the top search engine, and it's a position it's not likely to lose any time soon. Google decides what good content is by using domain authority and time on page as indicators of relevance and value.

“Two of the key performance indicators of a webpage are the number of authoritative backlinks and time spent on page,” says Grainger. Pages with a high number of backlinks from pages with a domain ranking of 200-plus, along with time spent on page of 5-plus minutes per session, will rank very well, he states. “This shows Google that the content on the page is both valuable enough for other people to link to it and worth reading in its entirety.” For content creators, Grainger says, this means creating information that is highly informative and shareable. To do that, he suggests “including statistics, studies, and even novel research.”

As with content in any form across the ages, providing valuable information to readers should be top of mind. That's where engagement begins. And that should be good news to



legitimate content creators whose mission is more about informing, educating, and providing value than gaming the search engines to boost numbers.

USE LONG CONTENT, BUT ONLY IF RELEVANT

There's a lot of buzz these days about the value of long content—2,000-plus words long. But while Google is rewarding longer content, that's only true if the content is relevant to user search intent. "A common mistake is having long-form content that won't answer the user's search query," says Janice Wald, a blogger and blogging coach with Mostly Blogging. "Google won't give you visibility if your post doesn't answer the search intent of the user. Make sure your content is long, but filled with substance."

"Search engines want to provide the best user experience to their customers which, for search engines, means providing the most accurate response to their users' queries," says Giulia Iannucci, a brand strategist and founder of KnowThyBrand in the U.K. "SEO is all about providing valuable content to the user in an optimized way. No matter the algorithm, the content that you provide and the way it is accessible are key to the user and hence are key for an effective SEO strategy."

VOICE SEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Today, many internet users talk, rather than type, their search queries. This is due to the increasing popularity of voice search assistants such as Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri. Because of this, says Iannucci, "long-term keywords need to be defined to address the way people ask questions verbally, not only when typing. You won't ask Alexa 'Italian restaurant near me,' but 'Where is an Italian restaurant nearby?'" Long-tail keywords, she says, "need to be able to answer questions like where, how, what, etc."

DON'T IGNORE THE TECHNICAL SIDE

The most important thing to focus on when it comes to search optimization is the "true user experience," says Haley Anhut, content marketing manager for Clean Origin. "[I]t can be really easy to forget that a human, and not just a computer, will be reading your content," Anhut states. "In fact, Google is now prioritizing content that feels more organic and conversational." This bleeds into the technical side, she says. "We'll be seeing Google shift its focus to the core web vitals at the beginning of 2021. This means prioritizing page speed and page responsiveness."

LINKS TO THE SOURCE

Danny Grainger Copy
dannygraingercopy.com

Mostly Blogging
mostlyblogging.com

KnowThyBrand
knowthybrand.com

Clean Origin
cleanorigin.com

Web Vitals
web.dev/vitals

Core web vitals are metrics that provide an indication of important aspects of the user experience—loading, interactivity, and visual stability. Again, Google and other search engines are first and foremost focused on giving their customers (consumers using search) the best possible experience. That should also be the focus of content creators. It's a marathon, though, not a sprint—and one in which the terrain is continually changing.

BE PATIENT

"I think one of the biggest mistakes made with SEO strategy is thinking that you'll see results instantaneously," says Anhut. "Patience is a huge part of being an SEO and trying to find ways to speed up the process is usually just a waste of time," she cautions. "I also think people have this idea that you have to know complex programs such as Python to be a good SEO, which is also false. Yes, it might be timesaving and an impressive resume builder, but it's absolutely not necessary."

Quality content, relevance, and a positive user experience are the focus of Google and other search engines. Content creators who make these their focus as well are likely to be rewarded by a steady stream of loyal visitors.

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