



7 Important Trends in SEO for 2016

How to Build an Effective SEO Strategy Incorporating Video Content, On-Page SEO, Local Search, Mobile Optimization and other Google Must-Haves.

The only constant in the world of SEO is change. While mobile received the most attention in 2015, 2016 is shaping up to be the year of user experience. This year SEO will be divided into three stages: Awareness (strategy), Consideration (solutions) and Decision (audience reaction). Fundamental and technical SEO will remain critical, and technology and data will be crucial to help optimize and measure the success of your organic efforts in 2016 and beyond. How will you implement these trends to benefit your success?



1. Remember That Content Is Still King

In 2016, content is about having diverse, informative and exciting elements on your website. Some ideas that will help with SEO rankings are amazing PDFs, infographics, videos, images, interactive content, online quizzes or anything that will keep users engaged. Be original and unique when creating content that goes beyond simple text and think about things that your customers will want to see.

Video Content Will Overtake Written Content in ROI

In 2016, a handful of new technologies and the continuation of years-long trends will shift. Video will outpace written content in terms of reach, engagement, effectiveness and overall ROI. Vine, Periscope, Snapchat, and other video apps are partially responsible for this, setting users' expectations toward more visual content. The real herald may come from Google, which is now experimenting with video ads in search results.

Word Count Counts!

For traditional text-based content, we have known for some time that Google shows a preference for longer, more comprehensive content. The average word count for top-ranking content in 2015 is in the range of 1,140–1,285 words. This is up over 25% from 2014. There is no reason to suspect that Google will not continue to favour ever-increasing word counts and blotted pages. Content needs to focus on providing comprehensive coverage of a topic, rather than shorter passage that only brush the surface of a topic.

Social Media Content Will Be More Readily Indexed

Google has existing agreements with Facebook and Twitter — Search for a news item and you'll probably see a tweet or two appear in your mobile search results. In 2016, platforms will become heavily indexed in the vaults available to Google and other search engines. Social media posts will carry a value and a consideration similar to any independent web page, the separation of "web" and "social media" blurring even further from an SEO perspective.

In-depth research has shown successful social activity can have significant secondary effects on your SEO efforts. Specifically, activity on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter can help search engines discover/index your site and aid in content distribution. For example, when you tweet a link to your latest blog post, you have shared with all of your Twitter followers as well as anybody interested in any #hashtags you might have used in the tweet. This increases the visibility of your tweet, your blog post and also, your web page.

2. On-Page SEO Still Matters

Despite all of the new advances in SEO, on-page optimization is still vital. Here are several key considerations:

Schema Markup Tags

In order for search engines to match content with the intent and context of the user search, search engines need to "read" the web page content and confirm if it matches by relying on a standardized markup schema integrated into the code. Thus it is vital that the correct markup tags have been added to the website.

Open Graph Tags

As mentioned previously, the future of search is social and in this new age, social relevance will increasingly weigh more in search results. To facilitate this, a website and its content should have the same functionality as social media networks. To accomplish this, special OG tags need to be included in the page.

This will ensure that content and links are more shareable in these networks. Increasing engagement with targeted audiences leads to high click-through rates and better conversion.

Twitter Cards

Twitter cards allow users to extend the information-giving capability of a tweet through a “View Summary” button seen underneath the 140 characters. Just like OG tags, Twitter cards can and should be incorporated into a company page.

Increase Site Speed

Over the past five year, Google has made it apparent that site speed matters in search rankings. With a bigger emphasis on the user experience than ever before, site speed will continue to be a critical ranking factor. As users become more and more accustomed to the fast load times, sites with long load times will be left in the dust. Every on-page component should be tweaked to ensure maximum speed and page-loading efficiency.

Page Tagging

The year 2016 will experience more mobile searches, which will surpass desktop searches. This change will increase the need for page tagging as businesses start rolling out tags to offer structure to mobile users’ results that require different browsers and devices to load pages differently.

Keywords Morph into Collections

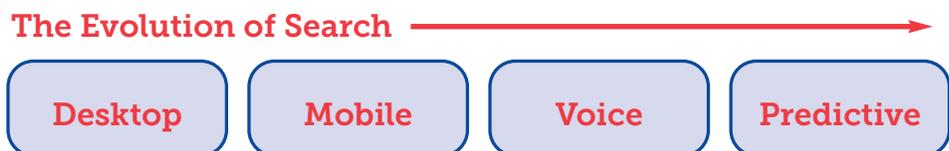
Google has gotten smarter and that’s a good thing for searchers. Because Google’s algorithms now better recognize the meaning behind a query, it may give the same answer to various queries that, although use different keywords, are asking the same question. When someone searches for “trousers,” the search engine now knows to include results for “pants.” But that’s just the start.

So, now, instead of researching individual keywords when creating keywords on your business web page, you need to identify groups of related terms and their synonyms. Then, you must create pages that are relevant not only to the core term but also to the wider group of related terms.

This trend can make your website content more interesting. Instead of awkward text stuffed with a repetitive keyword, your site can be more creative and use synonyms — as long as you stick to the point.

3. Voice Search Changes Everything...And We’re Just at the Beginning

In the November 2015 issue of *Time Magazine* there was a fascinating article entitled “Google Searches for Its Future.” Here is a very simple summary:



Amit Singhal, Google’s senior vice president in charge of all search-related products, has a vision. Think *Star Trek* and its communicators.

“The company’s hope is that, together, this transforms the concept of ‘Googling’ from something that happens via a static search bar into a kind of ongoing conversation with an omniscient assistant, ready to step in and fulfill any request — even ones you haven’t thought about yet.”

The key to the success of this vision is understanding the consumer through and through, anticipating thoughts and actions.

Whether you want this or not, it is a reality and it is coming. The question is how will that affect business and what do we need to do now to build for the future? That’s the challenge for SEO.

4. Google's RankBrain Brings Artificial Intelligence to Search Results

Bloomberg reported in October 2015 about a new method Google uses to interpret a "very large fraction" of the search queries it sees every day. The new method is called "RankBrain" and has already been live in Google for months now.

Basically, RankBrain is a way for Google to understand more ambiguous queries better. It uses AI (artificial intelligence) to try to guess what your query is referring to, like a human would.

"RankBrain uses artificial intelligence to embed vast amounts of written language into mathematical entities — called vectors — that the computer can understand. If RankBrain sees a word or phrase it isn't familiar with, the machine can make a guess as to what words or phrases might have a similar meaning and filter the result accordingly, making it more effective at handling never-before-seen search queries."

According to Google's Gary Illyes, it doesn't kill SEO: "Your SEO magic still works" with RankBrain.

But does it? The traditional and typical "SEO magic" relies on keywords as the basis for any optimization, but what do you do if the machine has learning capability and can interpret metaphors as searches for specific items? What if keywords are no longer the key to your "SEO magic"?

As an example, if you need a local dentist you are more likely when using voice search to ask "find me a local dentist" as opposed to typing in "dentist + location."

Do the words "find me a local dentist" appear anywhere on the website? Indeed do they need to? Or is Google now so advanced that you don't need to have the "right words in the right order" on the page?

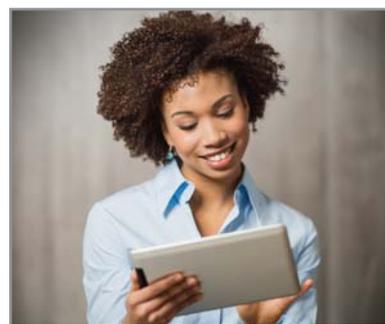
The development of this AI took over a year and has been carefully blended into the main search algorithm so it can now handle around 15% of all the search queries that Google receives.

The result is clear; SEO has changed and the old "SEO magic" simply won't cut it in 2016.

5. Mobile Optimization Will Become More Important than Desktop Optimization

Earlier in 2015, mobile searches surpassed desktop searches for the first time.

Continuing into 2016, this shift will continue, eventually making mobile traffic by far the more important, with desktop fading into obscurity over the next five years. Just this past August, Google claimed that a desktop-specific site isn't necessary, and its change to a local three-pack reflects its commitment to a "mobile" experience across all types of devices.



Mobile search requires a separate strategy. What has worked on desktop is no longer adequate or appropriate.

6. Local Search Becomes Everything

Back in the 1990's, pre-Internet and certainly pre-Google, there really were only a few ways that most businesses (and smaller brands without deep advertising budgets) generated enquiries on a daily basis — this was from traditional print media and directories such as Yellow Pages. Many businesses got around 80% of their revenue from a 20-mile radius of where they were based and despite the rise of the Internet, that fact hasn't changed much over the past twenty years.

As powerful as local search has become, Google has a new advertising service that promises to be a real game changer. In summary, Google has created an advertising box that puts home service providers in touch with searchers. Plumbers, builders and the like will be able to get leads, directly and solely, from Google.

The service has been beta tested in the San Francisco Bay Area.

"From 'unclog bathroom sink' to 'locked out of apartment,' there are millions of searches every day on Google for plumbers, locksmiths, and other home services. To help these businesses better connect with their customers, we're introducing AdWords Express home service ads — available today in beta for plumbers, locksmiths, house cleaners, and handymen in select cities throughout the San Francisco Bay Area," stated Google.

Whether you think this to be a good or bad idea it seems that trials are telling Google two things; firstly that users like it and secondly that Google can make money at it.

This new local search trial is currently occupying the top slot in place of the usual top three advertisements. This means that to dominate pay-per-click search, a brand will now need to sign up to Google's "home service ads" programme. In addition, if you click the button "More Plumbers," everything other than the Google product is removed and every one of these entries is a paid entry.

It is still unclear if the standard pay-per-click rules apply regarding size of bids, quality score and content/keywords but this will become clearer as the trial progresses and it moves towards mainstream roll-out.

With a monopoly position, Google has now found a way of removing people who would like a part of its revenue stream from the search results.

There are no details so far on how this programme works but your business life will be in the hands of a single provider who can turn the tap on and off at will.

Whatever your view on this development, one thing is for sure: it will redefine the local space in 2016.

7. Don't Forget Conversion Optimization

Conversion optimization is the process of using customer feedback along with analytics to improve a website's performance. A better conversion rate is equal to an improved ROI. Other than improving the ROI, conversion optimization also helps to protect the restricted attention span of visitors by providing them with exactly what they want. It's important to keep in mind that optimization is all about acquiring the right type of customers for your business. In 2016, conversion optimization will be a hot topic and key buzzword. You heard it here first.

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