12 Tips to Help You Thrive in Voice, Visual & Vertical Search by @andybetts1

Search is a much more ambient, complex, and multifaceted industry than it has ever been.

2018 was a transformative year for the industry, with AI-driven technologies creating new possibilities to engage with our audiences through search across a variety of devices.

Just a few of the changes the industry has seen include:

So where is the search industry headed over the coming year?

Amidst so much flux, the central tenets of Google's strategy are increasingly clear in a way they have never been before.

In particular, there has been consolidation around three essential areas of activity: voice, visual and vertical search.

By laying the foundations in these areas, marketers can prepare not just for 2019, but also the following years.

As technology's major players embed their products in our homes, cars, and offices, it is through voice, visual and vertical search that brands will be connected to their audience.

This is great news for marketers of all stripes, but most notably for technical SEO specialists and content marketers.

As new behaviors take hold with consumers, technical SEO specialists are uniquely placed to ensure a brand's online presence is fit for purpose across apps, websites, and devices.

With that platform laid, content marketers must create the assets their audience craves.

According to research from BrightEdge, only 3 percent of 250 marketers surveyed believe SEO and content are separate disciplines.

Senior leaders can now look to search to form the fulcrum of a customer-centric digital strategy if search specialists grasp the opportunity.

With that in mind, the below are 12 technical SEO and content marketing tips to help search marketers put their best foot forward in 2019 across voice, visual, and vertical search.

Voice Search Tips for 2019

The initial hype around voice search has started to subside and, in its place, there is a more reasoned optimism about the opportunities it will bring.

Marketers can see that voice enables conversational search, but in 2018 few have truly availed of this opportunity.

Here are four tips that will help you develop a great voice search strategy for 2019.

1. Make Full Use of Structured Data

The number one tip for getting the most out of voice search is to use structured data on all relevant elements of your content.

Deloitte reports that 54 percent of voice search users most frequently use this medium to “search general information.”

This will help search engines both to identify specific assets and to display them correctly in results.

Google has recently opened up rich results to all Q&A pages,

which is a huge opportunity to gain more SERP real estate – especially as voice search users are more likely to make informational queries.

2. Local Search Optimization

Customers are now only a short voice command away from finding your business. Or not, if you do not have the essential best practices in place.

Make sure your business is listed in local directories, with the correct business name, address, and phone number.

3. Get to the Point

Convenience is a key driver of voice search usage, so your content should get consumers right to what they need.

The micro-moments framework is particularly important here; people speak to their devices when they want to know, do, or go.

Base your content around these needs and you will see the improvement through user engagement signals on your website and app.

4. Develop Your Brand Voice

When consumers speak to their devices, they expect a clear answer to their query.

Sometimes, this will form a direct and pragmatic exchange, but other queries open more conversational opportunities.

For example, Google reports that [what car insurance is best for me?] and [which dog should i get?] are among its fastest-growing personal searches.

The typical “SEO content” filled with keywords makes for stilted listening in response here.

Every brand should have a voice – and that is becoming quite a literal requirement in the conversational search era.

Google's recent announcement of voice-driven news is a clear marker of where this practice is headed.

Visual Search Tips for 2019

With over 600 million visual searches now undertaken each month on Pinterest alone, it is clear that this technology has reached its tipping point.

Visual search turns a user's smartphone into a discovery tool, using images to form search queries.

It has been popularized as a means of searching for ideas by Pinterest, but also by Google, Amazon, and a host of retailers.

There are some technical and content tips every brand should bear in mind to make the most of this emerging opportunity:

5. Follow Image Optimization Best Practices

The information retrieval process for visual search is similar to that of image search, so the first step is to ensure your images can be served for the right queries.

Once more, structured data, load speed, and descriptive metadata are essential. Google published image search guidelines earlier this year, written up in a post on SEJ here.

6. Upload an Image XML Sitemap

The more information you can provide to search engines about your images, the better.

A great way to do this is to submit an image XML sitemap or to add one to an existing sitemap.

You can find further information on how to create and submit one here.

7. Make Images Central to Your Brand's Online Presence

In a post in late September of this year, Google was transparent about how it has tweaked the image search algorithm:

> *"Over the last year, we've overhauled the Google Images algorithm to rank results that have both great images and great content on the page. For starters, the authority of a web page is now a more important signal in the ranking. If you're doing a search for DIY shelving, the site behind the image is now more likely to be a site related to DIY projects. We also prioritize fresher content, so you're more likely to visit a site that has been updated recently."*

What does this mean for brands?

- **Old-fashioned reputation building still matters.** Even the best images need to be hosted on a reputable site with authority signals like external links still important.
- **Images cannot just be placed anywhere on the site, or even on the page.** If you are serious about visual search, you will make images central to your online consumer experience.

8. Build a Visual Identity

Visual search engines can tell which company an image belongs to based on its aesthetic qualities.

For larger brands, that may seem easier to achieve as they have huge budgets for videos and high-quality imagery.

However, the same rule can apply just as easily to smaller businesses.

Even if you make use of stock imagery for your social media accounts or blog posts, these can still be adapted to give them a unique look.

The important thing is to be consistent (so you have a true visual identity) and to avoid using stock imagery without adapting it at least a little bit.

Otherwise, a visual search engine will have no way of telling which images are yours, and which belong to the many other sites using the same visual assets.

Vertical Search Tips for 2019

As search evolves into the ambient phenomenon the main players want it to become, it also embeds itself in multiple new industries.

Within each of these industries (or verticals), consumers visit specific sites that are tailored to their specific needs.

Think Amazon, TripAdvisor, or Airbnb.

As more of these vertical search engines take hold, brands need a strategy.

These four technical and content tips provide a great starting point:

9. Data Deep-Dive

Consumers visit different sites for different reasons.

This means their expectations vary; whether they are met will be revealed in your analytics data.

Analyze all available data across each platform to identify your audience's requirements, so your brand can respond appropriately.

10. Work to Understand Ranking Factors

The Amazon A9 algorithm works very differently to that of Walmart or Target, for example.

Analyze the competition to try and understand which factors they prioritize and base your strategy on these findings.

This can also illuminate which factors each vertical search engine feels its audience prioritizes.

11. Create Unique Content for Each Platform

The perils of duplicate content are well-known in the search industry, but many brands forget that this also applies to vertical search engines.

Bear in mind that this content often can be served through Google, too.

However, if it is duplicated in numerous places you run the risk of missing out on traditional search traffic and of alienating customers who know cut and pasted content when they see it.

Use the findings from your data deep-dive to craft new content across all vertical search engines.

12. Maintain Consistency

Although it may seem paradoxical to create new content for all

platforms and also be consistent, there is an important distinction to be drawn out here.

It has often been said that you are only as strong as your weakest brand touchpoint.

Every piece of content you post online is a reflection of your brand identity and should maintain a cohesive voice.

View vertical search engines as part of the consumer journey, rather than a separate strategy.

Conclusion

In 2019, the symbiotic relationships between tech SEO, content marketing, and digital expertise will continue to develop.

In particular, they will converge in the arenas of voice, visual, and vertical search.

Search marketers should embrace this era of opportunity and accountability.

The industry can take center stage digital marketing, with artificial intelligence helping to inform, optimize, and measure more effective strategies.

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