A balanced approach to data-driven SEO



We have nearly unlimited access to information and data. For search marketers, this can be a blessing or a curse. It's very easy to get sucked into the never-ending pool of data – but this rarely, if ever, benefits our work. So how do we protect ourselves from information overload?

Futurologist Alvin Toffler predicted in 1970 that the rapidly increasing amounts of information produced would eventually cause people problems. More than a few times, I've found myself overwhelmed and overloaded with information, and my guess is that you have also experienced this phenomenon.

If you take your SEO seriously, then you understand the necessity of tracking your efforts – after all, data is at the core of good SEO.

Management thinker Peter Drucker is often credited as saying, "You can't manage what you can't measure." While I agree completely with the statement, it seems as though some SEOs have resorted to just measuring *everything*, which is simply not practical. If we are going to be effective, we must have focus and be clear on what we want to track and why we want to track it.

Knowledge vs. information

One of the main causes for information overload, in my opinion, is that SEOs and marketers have confused information and knowledge. It's as if we believe that if we get more information, we will eventually uncover some knowledge. According to a March 2017 report from the CMO Council,

“Empowering the Data-Driven Customer Strategy”:

> *In the past five years, 42 percent of marketers have installed more than 10 individual solutions across marketing, data, analytics or customer engagement technologies, and 9 percent have brought on more than 20 individual tools or solutions.*

While this sounds like marketers are tracking more users at a deeper level, this next stat from the same report paints a different picture:

> *In that same five-year period,* ***44 percent of marketers have indicated they have spent more than 25 percent of their marketing budgets to replace existing technologies.***

While most are collecting increasing amounts of *information*, the “turnover” of martech solutions suggests that they have yet to find the *knowledge* they are really seeking.

So, what’s the difference between knowledge and information?

In this case, **information** is the data itself – the “facts” in raw form. **Knowledge**, on the other hand, is derived through carefully analyzing this data to really understand what is happening within your accounts.

Collecting data, for the most part, is free. You install some JavaScript tracking code and sit back and wait. Information on its own provides little value. The real value lies in collecting the *right* data, then analyzing it with an intent to transform it into knowledge.

The SEO implications

The job of a search professional is to increase the visibility of a brand or website in search and to attract qualified visitors that have the potential to engage. The art and

science of SEO can be very complicated. But a quote I recently heard from author and life coach Tony Robbins made me pause and rethink a number of my approaches: “Complexity is the enemy of execution.”

When we bury ourselves in data and overcomplicate our processes, we end up compromising our execution.

What’s the solution?

Now, I am not saying to “dumb down” your approach or ignore your data. What I am advocating for is more focus on what actually matters. Every campaign has its unique challenges and circumstances. In order to uncover actionable knowledge that you can use to improve your campaign’s effectiveness, you must have a clear goal.

Your goals will dictate what you track, how you track and why you track. Use your goals as a guidepost to keep you focused. By having this focus, you will be able to do the work that matters.

Now, it will be tempting to veer off-course and peek at all the other data you may be collecting. And if you must, then set up a limited amount of time to do so. But be careful that you don’t get sucked into the information overload trap.

Here are a few more tips to ensure you keep your head above all the data:

- Spend your time collecting and analyzing data that is on a need-to-know basis rather than a nice-to-know basis.
- Focus on quality of information collected, rather than quantity.
- Don’t multitask. Single-tasking keeps your mind focused on what is most important.

The digital age has given us access to insights our predecessors could not comprehend in their wildest dreams. As

search professionals, we are continually interacting with significant amounts of data that can quickly overwhelm us. If we are going to be able to drive results and add value, we must learn how to overcome information overload and focus on what really matters.

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the guest author and not necessarily Search Engine Land. Staff authors are listed here.

About The Author



Ryan’s pretty much your average guy, except for the average part. He is the owner and founder of Shelley Media Arts LLC. He is passionate about helping companies make a more personal connection online with their customers and prospects. Ryan is active in influencing and promoting human driven SEO, personalized marketing and empathic leadership. When he’s not working in the “shedquarters” you can find him hanging at the beach with his family or jamming out in the playroom with his 2 young sons. Check out SMA’s blog for more great content.
http://feeds.searchengineland.com/~r/searchengineland/~3/lF9uZYoU6cI/balanced-approach-data-driven-seo-287761