A quick guide to SEO in 2019

Nothing forces you to keep a close eye on Google updates quite like having a wide variety of SEO projects and clients.

With clients in almost every industry, I'm forced to check early and often when changes appear in search to see how they're playing out differently based on the industry (and even the search intent within each industry).

Moreover, I have to think ahead.

In 2018, most of the big changes came from Google's search ranking algorithm updates, its growing emphasis on structured data, and tweaks in the Google search console.

But there's also a shift in focus from what sites owners wanted to what users need.

The rollout of mobile-first indexing demonstrates Google's response to the impact of technology on human behavior.

As people spend more time with their mobile devices, it's only natural to pay more attention to content that's optimized to be dynamic and mobile-friendly.

Google's speakable markup typifies both the company's plans for search and the AI-is-the-future mantra. The growing popularity of voice assistants and their newfound place in smart homes have certainly guided advances in how search engines operate.

However, as somebody who drives rankings for a wide variety of clients and personal projects, I'm still holding my breath as to whether voice search can drive any meaningful business metrics.

In 2019, content optimization will continue to matter. From structured data to on-page optimization, competition for ranking advantage may come down to which sites can meet Google updates standards.

For the SEO community, 2019 requires a better understanding of how people engage online in order to create meaningful content that positively impacts user experience and a site's search engine visibility.

SEOs will need to double-down in understanding four key areas:

- Mobile
- Structured data
- Relevance
- Accessibility

Mobile matters

According to Pew Research Center, one in five American adults access the internet through their smartphone.

In the latest report by We Are Social, mobile phones account for 50% of the web traffic share by device globally.

The growth of the mobile industry has not been overlooked by Google, who rolled out the mobile-first indexing in the first quarter of 2018, after over a year and a half of experimentation.

This move shows that Google is increasingly using the mobile version of your page for its crawling, indexing, and ranking systems. While this update does not provide any ranking advantages per se, SEO in 2019 will certainly put greater

emphasis on optimizing pages for mobile crawlers.

Sites that offer two versions of their content will continue to see a negative impact on their SERP (search engine results pages) performance if mobile renderings are amiss. For digital marketers, this means both mobile and desktop content should be equivalent.

As mobile web pages become Google's primary search engine index, webmasters, SEO specialists, and digital marketers must ensure websites are well-coded and mobile-responsive. Checking out how your page's content renders across various mobile devices is critical to identifying issues like speed and performance which could potentially affect your bounce rates.

Content optimization through structured data

The search engine results page, especially in terms of informational searches, is dominated by structured data and schema: snippets of information that help Google understand the content of your page rather than guess the data.

Structured data provides Google contextual information that helps in classifying your page and which, when done right, enhances the appearance of your site in search.

In 2019, the SEO community will continue to explore how to further optimize this feature, which is valuable for e-commerce pages and business web pages especially as schema options grow. According to Rebecca Gill of emagine, using expert profiles and structured data can convey to Google who you are, what you're doing, and why your website should be on page one real estate.

Here are some types of information that can be added through structured data:

- Business name
- Contact details
- Aggregate rating
- Products and services
- Place or address

While structured data enables your site to be featured in Google’s knowledge graph, it’s not a guarantee. Google is stringent and rightfully so on how structured data is implemented.

Done right, it can do wonders to your SERP performance. But if the information provided is inaccurate, too broad, or badly formed, Google will identify your structured data as ineligible, which would negatively affect your rankings.

Research and relevance

RankBrain, Google’s machine-learning AI system introduced in 2015 reflects the evolution of how people look for content online.

Despite very little information from Google about how it works, we know that the technology is an important ranking signal, and it’s unique in its capacity to understand if users are satisfied with their search query results. This means that SEO in 2019 will continue to have a stronger emphasis on watching search intent.

What do users want? Information, resources, or products? Mapping keywords based on a buyer’s journey will be crucial this year.

In addition, RankBrain’s ability to process both single and long-tail keywords demands even more comprehensive keyword research and expanded awareness about your consumers.

Businesses will have to look for all the topics relevant to their industry, understand the search intent around the various topics, and make sure that they match a site’s content closely. Still, Google will continue to favor larger and more authoritative sites, so unless you’re running a page comparable in breadth and depth as Wikipedia or Forbes, the

focus should be on niche relevant keywords.

In the meantime, consider updating site content. Since 2011's Google Freshness update, dated content continues to significantly impact rankings in the SERP. Updating old posts, including its publishing data, will tell Google that sites are providing fresh content, especially those that are linked to higher authority sites.

It's not about writing daily, weekly, or even monthly. It's about making sure that your best content is always relevant based on the most recent information.

Last year saw links losing value and the trend will continue in 2019.

Relevance is the new "authority" when it comes to links.

A competitor analysis audit will be essential to determining just how many links, and what links, will work for your industry or niche.

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Content and accessibility

If Google's priority is user experience, then on-page optimization efforts are non-negotiable.

We've seen how keyword density is no longer as impactful as before, especially with structured data playing a bigger role in search. Content and writing style will also be influenced by semantic search with Google's efforts to identify the contextual meaning of the query.

In 2019, expect content with more images, videos, and even music embed. Google looks at user satisfaction and rich media is one way to improve online engagement.

But even if your content is well-written, accessibility to your site can impact how you rank in SERP.

“As of the 2010 census, one in five Americans have a disability, and one in ten people have a disability that directly impacts their computer use. That’s 56.7 million people! This is a huge portion of our potential users, and we have an ethical duty to help all people who will use the technology we create.” – Fen Slattery, Accessibility Lead at Clique Studios.

Accessibility is about inclusion and when your website performs terribly for a group of people, it’s unlikely that it will hold any sort of rankings for a significant period of time.

Ongoing changes

Change is the only thing certain in the SEO industry. Google’s interest in AI technology is firmly anchored on how people look for information online, and the way they do so has changed over the years.

2019 is likely to see even lower organic CTR than in 2018 as Google continues to offer more and more options to keep users in search.

For the SEO industry, this means understanding how people think, and how people act. Digital marketers, website owners, and businesses need to be flexible, curious, and creative. They need to look for ways to gain trust and authority, two values that have not only remained important in an ever-changing SEO landscape but are now considered non-negotiable to getting on page one.

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Featured snippets are one of the main engines of economic

growth today, with countless businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs relying upon

them to get their message out to prospective clients.

If your SEO strategy is wo

rking well, you can expect to see results in about three months. Here are ten

reasons why that might not be the case.

Writing good content isn’t enough.

Here are 4 key factors to consider when creating effectively structured SEO cont

ent, and tools to use to meet each need.

Link reclamation is a simple but efficient

entactic to turn unlinked brand mentions into links. Here’s when to reach out, who

to contact, and what to say.

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