Align your content with customer intent via zero click search

30-second summary:

- While there are issues around zero click search, there *are* useful insights for brands looking to connect searchers into their purchase funnel that go beyond boosting SEO.
- Ron provides an overview of the various zero click SERP features and their functions, including the answer box, the “people also ask” box, and the knowledge graph.
- The first use case for these features is to qualify whether a keyword is worth targeting.
- Secondly, brands can get specific on the types of information people are interested in and better understand the needs of potential customers.
- Brands can then create relevant and meaningful content for potential customers that aligns with the product or service they are selling.
- Lastly, marketers must keep in mind that zero click is a free resource for achieving greater results.

Zero click search has been the phrase scaring people in the SEO world over the last couple years, and will likely continue to cause problems with how SEOs try to measure success into the future.

While Google scraping content from brands and then not sending visits to those brands isn’t necessarily a good thing, there are some powerful data points we can leverage from their use of zero click search results.

One good thing about zero click search results is that they

can help you better understand the intent of the user performing the search. Building search strategies focused on aligning your content to the interest of the user is what sets high performing SEOs apart from the rest.

Gone are the days of writing content that includes the right keywords in the right places to trick Google into connecting your content to a search query and ranking it in a favorable position.

Now, we have to spend a lot of time making sure that our brand is a good fit for the person on the other side of the computer and that our website gives them the information that they need.

So, how do you put yourself into the mindset of your customers and empathize with the problems they are trying to solve with a Google search?

First, a brief overview of the zero click SERP feature

The good news is that Google has spent a lot of time and money building an algorithm whose sole purpose is to understand those problems.

Brands can leverage the search engine itself and access important data points about searchers to validate who they are targeting with the strategies and information they are targeting them with. Even better, it’s all available for free!

If you don’t know, a zero click SERP feature is an element in the SERP that allows the user to access the information they are looking for without actually clicking on a result.

Let’s say you are working with a hiking shoe brand and throughout a keyword research you find terms surrounding the topic of the length of the Appalachian trail. When you perform

a search for the query “How long is the Appalachian trail?”, the following will pop up:

- The answer box, or the direct answer to your question, which is 2,190 miles, with a blurb explaining the average amount of time it takes a hiker to walk the entire trail, as well as the approximate number of hikers that actually make it through the entire trail
- A “People also ask” section is directly below with a list of additional questions related to your original search query
- A knowledge graph on the right for the “Appalachian Trail Conservancy”, which offers more information about the Appalachian trail (e.g. Wikipedia)

Now, let’s take a look at how these features can aid you in better understanding the people you want to target with your SEO strategy.

Qualify whether a keyword is worth targeting

If the top organic results are pages that definitionly discuss the topic with no tie to a product or solution (i.e. Wikipedia) and an answer box or knowledge graph is showing up, it is likely an indicator that people searching the term are looking for an encyclopedic answer to their question, so not part of your purchasing funnel.

If the organic results have product or solution result pages, then the intent is likely a mix between people looking for an encyclopedic answer to their question and those that might buy at some point in the future. In those cases, it would likely be worthwhile to target the topic.

For the example of “how long is the Appalachian trail” the former seems to be more the case, but there is still information on the page for building an SEO and content strategy.

The knowledge graph will show you what people also searched for, the time in the day/week a location is most popular, or even question or reviews about the topic searched.

The answer box sometimes goes into a little more depth regarding the topic searched. In the Appalachian trail example, it tells us it can take 5-7 months to hike the trail.

For my shoe company this could qualify targeting hikers tackling the trail because they are going to need multiple pairs of hiking shoes throughout that time. I just have to figure out what those people are looking for out of a shoe. That’s where “people as ask” and “related searches” comes in.

Understand customer search intent

Based on prior searches, this algorithm has identified additional topics that people seek when looking for information about the length of the Appalachian trail. Broadly, you can assume that people are searching “how long is the Appalachian trail?” have some sort of interest in hiking the trail.

This extra information allows you to get specific about what types of information people are interested in relation to the length of the trail – and therefore, help you create content that aligns with the product or service you are trying to get potential customers to engage with.

This allows you to start connecting these searchers into your purchasing funnel for hiking shoes.

In our current example, we see that people can walk an average for 20-25 miles a day when hiking the trail. If I had to walk that many miles, I’d probably be interested in shoes that would allow me to do that comfortably.

Apply this information to your SEO and content strategies

SEO is more than just trying to best optimize a page on your website for the Google bot to crawl. You want those pages to have the information that people need answered when they are searching these queries. Studying the SERP allows us to do that.

For example, if you wanted to target “best thru-hiking shoes”, you can incorporate the information we’ve learned above to answer questions that people might not know they have.

A blurb could look something like “The Trail Runner XT allows

you to comfortably walk 20-25 miles a day as you trek through the beautiful landscape of the Appalachian trail”.

Again, keep in mind that these are free insights that can benefit your brand

When doing research, it’s important not to forget about all of the data Google is giving us access to. Remember that the entire algorithm is built to best understand the needs of your users and give those users content that best fits those needs.

As marketers, we can leverage that data to get great insights into types of problems we need to be solving for our customers resulting in great content – and even better results.

Ron Cierniakoski is Product Manager at Terakeet, an enterprise search engine technology company that leverages 20+ years of expertise to serve global brands.

More about:

Align your content with customer intent via zero click search