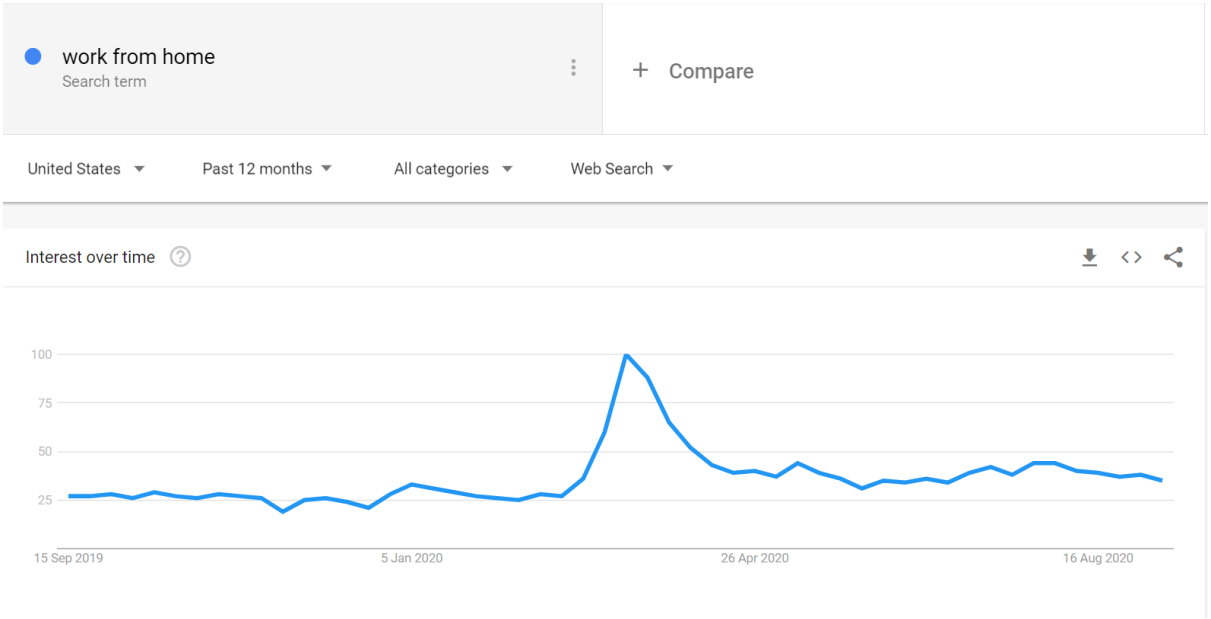
An SEO's Experience in 2020: Opportunities and Challenges

It would be downplaying it to say that 2020 has been a whirlwind of a year.

Many digital marketing companies packed up their office spaces in February, and employees – from the C-Suite to entry-level – had to adopt a new working style many were not accustomed to.



While few digital workers were previously able to work from home, the industry – and the world as a whole– had to adjust to full-time remote working during the coronavirus pandemic. Luckily, as SEOs and digital marketers, we have great experience in pivoting and adjusting our working styles and strategies, regardless of what challenges are thrown our way. It comes with the job.

Throughout this blog post, I'll discuss the various tactics I've seen work incredibly well for our clients and in the wider industry as a whole, in addition to advice for increasing productivity and overall happiness with the change of scenery to full-time working from home. I hope that this post provides ideas and potential projects SEOs can work on

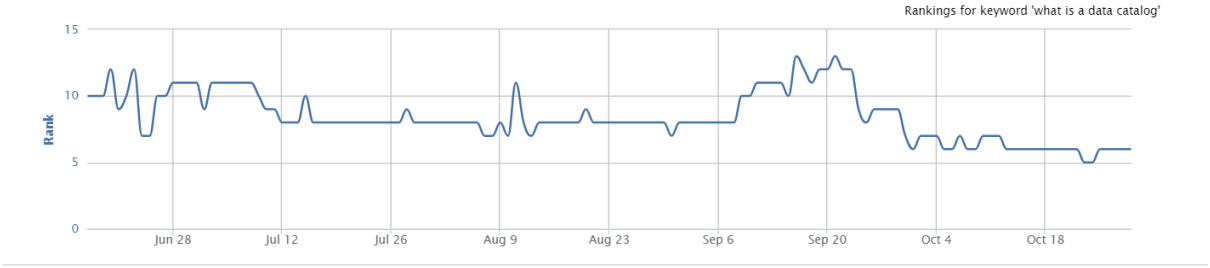
in-house or with clients, and that my tips for working from home also help you take a step back, unwind, and increase your productivity and work/life balance.

SEO tactics that worked extremely well this year

“Low hanging fruit” initiatives

With the influx of users sitting at home and spending more time online this year, a strategy we employed across our clients was to tackle pages that ranked in positions 5-9, or 11-14, and optimize existing content to increase visibility in the SERP.

These optimizations consisted of simple, yet effective changes that match and cater to the user’s search intent. As it’s been proven that people scan as few as the first two words of a title tag, the importance of having an effective title tag that concisely describes the content on the page cannot be overlooked. Title tag tweaks, H1, and meta description updates are some of the ways that our clients’ rankings have improved on the first page, and also won Answers Box and People Also Ask results.



Above is an example of a keyword ranking increase for one of our clients in the data intelligence industry. Through metadata optimizations and targeting People Also Ask questions, we’ve seen rank increase from 13 to 6 within this year.

Targeting “People Also Ask” questions

We’ve found that with increased searches in 2020, users are asking more questions overall and are looking for in-depth and valuable answers. Google’s People Also Ask SERP feature is the most effective way for companies to answer regularly asked questions, and drive more traffic to their site.

PAA questions have been an effective strategy in 2020 to increase traffic and increase brand awareness to our clients’ sites. The main way we targeted landing in the People Also Ask section for clients was to tailor new and existing content around answering these user’s questions. Tools such as AlsoAsked.com were vital in identifying these questions, and creative writers were extremely beneficial in attacking this SERP feature.

New content creation plans + updating existing content

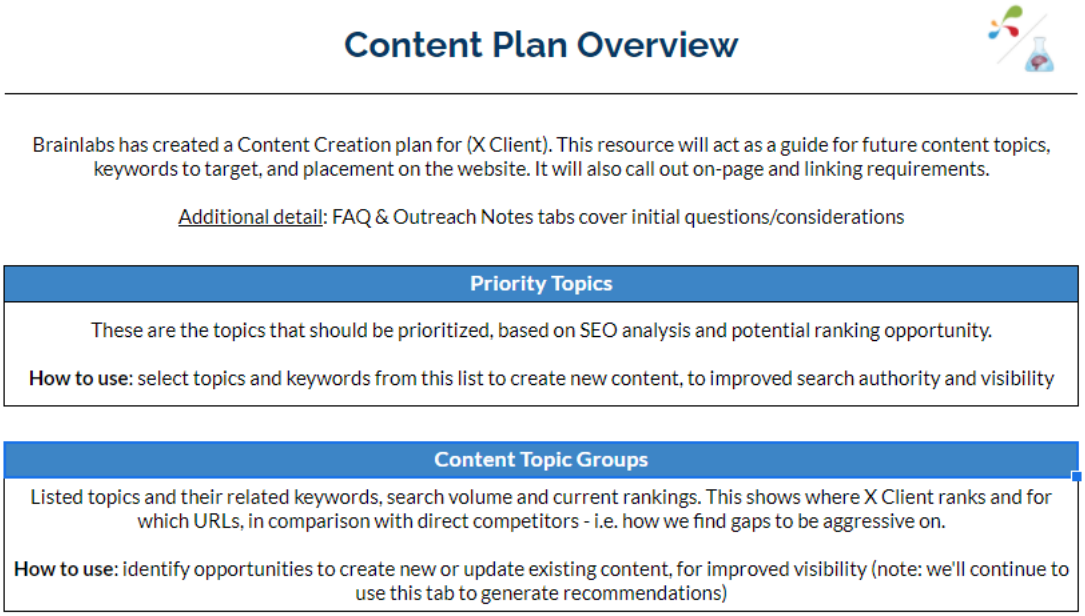
Similar to the success I’ve seen with a PAA-focused strategy in 2020, another initiative we’ve taken with clients that has had success this year is a holistic new content creation plan. These plans focus on a dedicated and consistent approach to creating content, based on content gaps our clients were missing out on and had an opportunity to attack.

This holistic approach covered the following:

1. Priority topics that should be written as soon as possible. These new page recommendations entail targeting valuable keywords that have the highest potential ranking opportunity, in addition to topics that competitors are covering.
2. Content topic groups that display the full list of related keywords for our clients and their competitors in the space. Every keyword is categorized by an overarching topic and bucketed into a broader topic.

These keywords within each content topic group are targeted overall with newly created content.

3. Recommend posting frequency and competitive insights where we highlight how often a client should be publishing various types of content relative to their industry. The posting frequency is formulated by identifying a client's top industry and search competitors, analyzing their posting frequency, and creating recommendations appropriately.
4. Content types where we think out of the traditional blog content box and recommend different formats, such as videos, infographics, and interviews (pending each client's needs).
5. Keywords to avoid – while in SEO we understand that building out a primary keyword's hub and spokes by targeting relevant secondary keywords is beneficial, we want to ensure that a client isn't overusing mapped keywords on various blog or website pages. To prevent keyword cannibalization on these pages, we set guidelines that focus on which keywords to avoid in the beginning of title and H1 tags.
6. Placement guide – many different clients in various industries have multiple places where they can post content (blogs, resource libraries, press rooms, and so on). Through this guide, we assist clients in understanding where specific content should be posted on their site.



Content Plan Overview

Brainlabs has created a Content Creation plan for (X Client). This resource will act as a guide for future content topics, keywords to target, and placement on the website. It will also call out on-page and linking requirements.

Additional detail: FAQ & Outreach Notes tabs cover initial questions/considerations

Priority Topics
These are the topics that should be prioritized, based on SEO analysis and potential ranking opportunity. **How to use**: select topics and keywords from this list to create new content, to improved search authority and visibility

Content Topic Groups
Listed topics and their related keywords, search volume and current rankings. This shows where X Client ranks and for which URLs, in comparison with direct competitors - i.e. how we find gaps to be aggressive on. **How to use**: identify opportunities to create new or update existing content, for improved visibility (note: we'll continue to use this tab to generate recommendations)

While the above tactics proved to be beneficial for our clients, the traffic gains and increased value we provided would not be possible if our working situations were subpar. So, next I'm going to dive into some work from home tips that have helped increase my productivity and helped me grow as a remote worker.

Full-time work from home: an SEO's perspective and learnings

While many digital marketers were used to virtual meetings while working in the office, some were left feeling excited – and others overwhelmed – by the idea of unexpectedly working from home full-time for months on end.

Workers around the globe were unable to leave the house during lockdowns, and had all the time in the world to focus on a new working style. This led to growth and experimentation for myself and many others in the space, so I'd like to share the strategies I found valuable.

1. Setting boundaries for work/life

balance

Wake up at 8:00 a.m. Shower. Eat breakfast. Read the news. Log in and get your day started. Work for eight hours. Clock out. Send emails after hours. Think about projects for the next day…

And so on. It's easy to fall into the routine – or trap – of feeling "always clocked in" when you work from home full-time. As we aren't leaving a physical location (and our work laptop) at the office, some of us feel the need to constantly check communications, emails, and other work that can really wait until the next day.

One strategy I found beneficial was to have a section in my home dedicated to work and nothing else. Personally, this is my homemade desk – I use my dual monitors for projects, meetings, and firing off emails throughout the day. After hours, I'll leave my work items on my desk, and refrain from using them or checking emails and internal messages until the next day, setting a defined boundary between my personal time and my work time.

2. Productivity breaks

The aspect of work I struggle with the most is batching out my work strategically. If I'm conducting a technical audit for a client, I start a project and power through as much of it in one sitting as possible. Having a strong focus is always beneficial during your work hours – you can think more effectively, make strong decisions, and piece together problems to formulate a solution that helps your client or your company.

While you're providing strategic insights for an incredible content recommendation, or have uncovered technical problems on your client's site, your shoulders are aching from being hunched over, your eyes are strained from looking at a screen

for over three hours, and you've forgotten to eat lunch.

I find it extremely beneficial to schedule breaks for myself throughout the day. Go for a walk. Read a book. Stare at a wall. Take 15 minutes of your day to stand up, stretch, move away from a screen and unwind. Your body and brain will thank you for the rest, and you'll be able to regain focus on a project, and maybe even come up with an out-of-the-box solution you haven't thought of before.

Summary

Overall, this year has forced us to get out of our comfort zones and try new things – both at home and within our work. And as SEOs, we're constantly growing and evolving, trying to figure out what works and what doesn't along the way.

With the way we've adapted in 2020 to produce meaningful insights in the SEO realm, I'm confident that our industry and the professionals within it will remain ready to take on whatever the future brings. What strategies and tactics have worked for you this year? Let me know in the comments.

https://feedpress.me/link/9375/14143176/seo-2020-opportunities-and-challenges