Five ways SEOs can utilize data with insights, automation, and personalization

Constantly evolving search results driven by Google's increasing implementation of AI are challenging SEOs to keep pace. Search is more dynamic, competitive, and faster than ever before.

Where SEOs used to focus almost exclusively on what Google and other search engines were looking for in their site structure, links, and content, digital marketing now revolves solidly around the needs and intent of consumers.

This past year was perhaps the most transformative in SEO, an industry expected to top $80 billion in spending by 2020. AI is creating entirely new engagement possibilities across multiple channels and devices. Consumers are choosing to find and interact with information by voice search, or even on connected IoT appliances, and other devices. Brands are being challenged to reimagine the entire customer journey and how they optimize content for search, as a result.

How do you even begin to prioritize when your to-do list and the data available to you are growing at such a rapid pace? The points shared below intend to help you with that.

From analysis to activation, data is key

SEO is becoming less a matter of simply optimizing for search. Today, SEO success hinges on our ability to seize every opportunity. Research from my company’s Future of Marketing and AI Study highlights current opportunities in five important areas.

1. Data cleanliness and structure

As the volume of data consumers are producing in their searches and interactions increases, it’s critically important that SEOs properly tag and structure the information we want search engines to match to those queries. Google offers rich snippets and cards that enable you to expand and enhance your search results, making them more visually appealing but also adding functionality and opportunities to engage.

Google has experimented with a wide variety of rich results, and you can expect them to continue evolving. Therefore, it’s best practice to properly mark up all content so that when a rich search feature becomes available, your content is in place to capitalize on the opportunity.

You can use the Google Developers “Understand how structured data works” guide to get started and test your structured data for syntax errors here.

2. Increasingly automated actionable insights

While Google is using AI to interpret queries and understand

results, marketers are deploying AI to analyze data, recognize patterns and deliver insights as output at rates humans simply cannot achieve. AI is helping SEOs in interpreting market trends, analyzing site performance, gathering and understanding competitor performance, and more.

It’s not just that we’re able to get insights faster, though. The insights available to us now may have gone unnoticed, if not for the in-depth analysis we can accomplish with AI.

Machines are helping us analyze different types of media to understand the content and context of millions of images at a time and it goes beyond images and video. With Google Lens, for example, augmented reality will be used to glean query intent from objects rather than expressed words.

Opportunities for SEOs include:

- Greater ability to define opportunity space more precisely in a competitive context. Understand underlying need in a customer journey
- Deploying longer-tail content informed by advanced search insights
- Better content mapping to specific expressions of consumer intent across the buying journey

3. Real-time response and interactions

In a recent “State of Chatbots” report, researchers asked consumers to identify problems with traditional online experiences by posing the question, “What frustrations have you experienced in the past month?”

As you can see, at least seven of the top consumer frustrations listed above can be solved with properly programmed chatbots. It’s no wonder that they also found that 69% of consumers prefer chatbots for quick communication with brands.

Search query and online behavior data can make smart bots so compelling and efficient in delivering on consumer needs that in some cases, the visitor may not even realize it’s an automated tool they’re dealing with. It’s a win for the consumer, who probably isn’t there for a social visit anyway as well as for the brand that seeks to deliver an exceptional experience even while improving operational efficiency.

SEOs have an opportunity to:

- Facilitate more productive online store consumer experiences with smart chatbots.
- Redesign websites to support visual and voice search.
- Deploy deep learning, where possible, to empower machines to make decisions, and respond in real-time.

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4. Smart automation

SEOs have been pretty ingenious at automating repetitive, time-consuming tasks such as pulling rankings reports, backlink monitoring, and keyword research. In fact, a lot of quality digital marketing software was born out of SEOs automating their own client work.

Now, AI is enabling us to make automation smarter by moving beyond simple task completion to prioritization, decision-making, and executing new tasks based on those data-backed decisions.

Content marketing is one area where AI can have a massive impact, and marketers are on board. We found that just four percent of respondents felt they were unlikely to use AI/deep learning in their content strategy in 2018, and over 42% had already implemented it.

In content marketing, AI can help us quickly analyze consumer behavior and data, in order to:

- Identify content opportunities
- Build optimized content
- Promote the right content to the most motivated audience segments and individuals

5. Personalizations that drive business results

Personalization was identified as the top trend in marketing at the time of our survey, followed closely by AI (which certainly drives more accurate personalizations). In fact, you could argue that the top four trends namely, personalization, AI, voice search, and mobile optimization are closely connected if not overlapping in places.

Across emails, landing pages, paid advertising campaigns, and more, search insights are being injected into and utilized across multiple channels. These intend to help us better connect content to consumer needs.

Each piece of content produced must be purposeful. It needs to be optimized for discovery, a process that begins in content planning as you identify where consumers are going to find and engage with each piece. Smart content is personalized in such a way that it meets a specific consumer's need, but it must deliver on the monetary needs of the business, as well.

Check out these 5 steps for making your content smarter from a previous column for more.

How SEOs are uniquely positioned to drive smarter digital marketing forward

As the marketing professionals have one foot in analysis and the other solidly planted in creative, SEOs have a unique opportunity to lead smart utilization and activation of all manners of consumer data.

You understand the critical importance of clean data input (or intelligent systems that can clean and make sense of unstructured data) and differentiating between first and

third-party data. You understand economies of scale in SEO and the value in building that scalability into systems from the ground up.

SEOs have long nurtured a deep understanding of how people search for and discover information, and how technology delivers. Make the most of your current opportunities by picking your low-hanging fruit opportunities for quick wins. Focus your efforts on putting the scalable, smart systems in place that will allow you to anticipate consumer needs, react quickly, report SEO appropriately, and convey business results to the stakeholders who will determine budgets in future.

Jim Yu is the founder and CEO of leading enterprise SEO and content performance platform BrightEdge. He can be found on Twitter .

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