Google On Generic Top Level Domains For SEO via @sejournal, @martinibuster

Google's John Mueller answered a question about whether a generic Top Level Domain (gTLD) with a keyword in it offered any SEO advantage. His answer was in the context of a specific keyword TLD, but the topic involves broader questions about how Google evaluates TLDs in general.

Generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs)

gTLDs are domains that have a theme that relates to a topic or a purpose. The most commonly known ones are .com (generally used for commercial purposes) and .org (typically used for non-profit organizations).

The availability of unique keyword based gTLDs exploded in 2013. Now there are hundreds of gTLDs with which a website can brand themselves with and stand out.

Is There SEO Value In gTLDs?

The person asking the question on Reddit wanted to know if there's an SEO value to registering a .music gTLD. The regular .com version of the domain name they wanted was not available but the .music version was.

The question they asked was:

> *"Noticed .music domains available and curious if it is relevant, growing etc or does the industry not care about it whatsoever? Is it worth reserving yours anyways just so*

> *someone else can't have it, in case it becomes a thing?"*

Are gTLDs Useful For SEO Purposes?

Google's John Mueller limited his response to whether there gTLDs offered SEO value and his answer was no.

He answered:

> *"There's absolutely no SEO advantage from using a .music domain."*

The funny thing about SEO is that Google's standard of relevance is based on humans while SEOs think of relevance in terms of what Google thinks is relevant.

This sets up a huge disconnect between SEOs on one side who are creating websites that are keyword optimized for Google while Google itself is analyzing billions of user behavior signals because it's optimizing search results for humans.

Optimizing For Humans With gTLDs

The thing about SEO is that it's search engine optimization. When venturing out on the web it's easy to forget that every website must be optimized for humans, too. Aside from spammy TLDs which can be problematic for SEO, the choice of a TLD isn't important for SEO but it could be important for Human Optimization.

Optimizing for humans is a good idea because the signals generated by human interactions with the search engines and websites generate signals that Google uses at scale to better understand what users mean by their queries and what kinds of sites they expect to see for those queries. Some user generated signals, like searching by brand name, can send Google a signal that a particular brand is popular and is

associated with a particular service, product, or keyword phrase (read about Google's patent on branded search).

Circling back to optimizing for humans, if a particular gTLD is something that humans may associate with a brand, product, or service then there is something there that can be useful for making a site attractive to users.

I have experimented in the past with various gTLDs and found that I was able to build links more easily to .org domains than to the .com or .net versions. That's an example of how a gTLD can be optimized for humans and lead to success.

I discovered that overtly commercial affiliate sites on .org domains ranked and converted well. They didn't rank because of they were .org, though. The sites were top-ranked because humans responded well to the sites I created with that gTLD. It was easier to build links to them, for example. I have no doubt that people trusted my affiliate sites a little more because they were created on .org domains.

Optimizing for humans is conversion optimization. It's super important.

Optimizing For Humans With Keyword-Based gTLDs

I haven't played around with keyword gTLDs but I suspect that what I experienced with .org domains could happen with a keyword-based gTLD because a meaningful gTLD may communicate positive feelings or relevance to humans. You can call it branding but I think that the word "branding" is too abstract. I prefer the phrase optimizing for humans because in the end that's what branding is really about.

So maybe it's time we ditched bla,bla,bla-ing about branding and started talking about optimizing for humans. If that person had considered the question from the perspective of

human optimization they may have been able to answer the question themselves.

When SEOs talk about relevance it seems like they're generally referring to how relevant something is to Google. Relevance to Google is what was top of mind to the person asking the question about the .music gTLD and it might be why you're reading this article.

Heck, relevance to search engines is what all that "entity" optimization hand waving is all about, right? Focusing on being relevant to search engines is a limited way to chase after success. For example, I cracked the code with the .org domains by focusing on humans.

At a certain point, if you're trying to be successful online, it may be useful to take a step back and start thinking more about how relevant the content, colors, and gTLDs are to humans and you might discover that being relevant to humans makes it easier to be relevant to search engines.

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