Google UX Playbooks and Ranking Effect by @martinibuster

There are some who focus too much on perceived ranking factors at the expense of overlooking indirect factors. Indirect factors like a good User Experience (UX) are the hallmarks of a high quality website. In the long run, a good UX helps sites gain traffic, popularity and ultimately begin ranking. This is the point that John Mueller confirms.

In a Google hangout, Google's John Mueller was asked if the recently leaked UX Playbooks had an effect on ranking. Mueller answered that the UX Playbooks were a product of the Ads team not the search team. He then added that the UX recommendations in the UX Playbooks could have an indirect effect on ranking.

UX Playbook and Ranking

There have been a series of UX Playbooks marked proprietary and confidential that were leaked and made available via Google search. Search Engine Journal first discovered these playbooks in December 2018.

The UX Playbooks provide best practices for encouraging a better user experience that studies show leads to more sales.

This is the question:

> *"Google has this UX Playbook for best practices to delight users for different niches, are these considered part of ranking or can you give insight on that?"*

John Mueller downplayed the UX Playbook as containing anything useful for ranking in Google:

> *"So those UX playbooks as far as I know are put out by the ads team and it's more a matter of well these are UX best practices and good things to do on a website and not necessarily something that we'd say well these play into ranking."*

John Mueller paused then added that user experience factors could have an *indirect effect on ranking*.

> *"But obviously if you make a good website that works well for users then indirectly you can certainly see an effect in ranking. But it's not that we would say look at these UX Playbooks and specifically use those as factors for ranking."*

There are some user experience (UX) factors that are called soft ranking factors. Page speed and HTTPS are examples of soft UX ranking factors. Yet though they are ranking factors, they are considered less impactful than regular ranking factors.

A soft ranking factor more or less means that it is a minor factor in comparison to known ranking factors such as links.

Indirect Effect on Ranking

What John Mueller was referencing was an indirect effect on ranking. An example of an indirect effect could be the enthusiasm that a web page or product may generate, which in turn may result in links and increased popularity. Those are two side effects of a good user experience that can indirectly affect rankings.

Another example is a personal anecdote about entering a niche that was dominated by a site that was ranking number one for many years. The owner of the site was not actively promoting the site, which in my opinion made it vulnerable.

What I did to beat the competitor was to create a better product, a better web page that was easier to navigate, and a better conversion funnel that made it easy to convert. That web page generated enthusiasm and it was vigorously promoted by influencers and customers through social media. Word of mouth is a powerful way to promote a product. There is no better promotion than one friend praising your product to another friend.

The ability to stimulate this kind of enthusiasm, an indirect factor, was why I was able to surpass the industry heavyweight. I pushed it hard to industry influencers to get them on board.

That eventually helped the site gain links, people starting searching for it by name and my website eventually ranked in the number one spot, quickly overtaking the bigger and older site. I didn't do any link building, I just created something that people could be enthusiastic about.

Watch the Webmaster Hangout here.

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