Google’s internal SEO strategy: Make small changes, embrace change, consolidate

Sean O’Keefe, a data scientist at Google, on Thursday shared how Google thinks about their own internal SEO efforts for the 7,000 websites they manage. O’Keefe said Google makes on average over 200 changes to these sites on a daily basis and managing the SEO for those changes can be complex.

It’s a rare glimpse inside Google’s own SEO practices.

Small changes make a big impact. Google’s first point is that often with large sites, making small changes can make a big impact and return when it comes to search rankings. Google plotted the growth of one of the 7,000 websites, the Google My Business marketing site, showing how adding canonicals, hreflang to their XML sitemaps, and improving their metadata all resulted in gains in their organic traffic in search.

Here is that chart:

Embrace change. Google also recommended that webmasters do not fear making changes to their sites. Google gave AMP and Progressive Web Apps, both Google-backed projects, as two examples of changes Google embraces.

Google said they “found that the more we embrace them [change] and experiment with them, the better our SEO results.” Google said they fixed Google Search Console errors, implemented structured data, and added AMP to the Think with Google site, it helped impressions increase by 200 percent. They also improved a lot of the content on that site, which they said led to an “additional 1,000 impressions a day.”

Here is the chart showing the improvement after making the AMP error fixes:

Consolidation. For the past several years, many SEOs have been saying “less is more.” Meaning, having fewer sites and fewer pages with higher quality content often leads to better SEO results. Google says that works for them and they have been working on consolidating their sites. Google said they found a “large number” of near duplicate sites across their properties.

“Duplicate content is not only confusing for users, it’s also confusing for search engines,” Google said. Google added, “Creating one great site instead of multiple microsites is the best way to encourage organic growth over time.”

In one case study Google provided with the Google Retail site, they took six old websites and consolidated the content. They

made “one great website” and it lead to them doubling the site’s call-to-action click-through rate and increased organic traffic by 64%.

Why it matters. All companies, even large search engines, need to worry about their SEO efforts. In this rare Google post, Google shares some case studies of how some SEO strategies have helped them succeed with their organic traffic improvements. Google also recommended you check out their SEO starter guide and while you are at it, check out our SEO section.

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