How did the 2018 SERP changes impact organic search?



Search industry has seen its share of updates over the years. The folks that have been in the industry long enough know Google introduces multiple changes in its search algorithm yearly.

These changes range from being minor to major changes. Panda, for instance, affected the search engine result page (SERP) in substantial ways.

When such changes happen, there tend to be various articles in the industry notifying the trend and changes.

Usually articles are news based in nature: “Google launched this change or those changes.” But they lack an informative recommendation on how the reader should digest this information.

In this article, we’ll review the major SERP changes brought to us in 2018. For each update, we’ll discuss a practical tip to respond accordingly.

2018 SERP changes and recommendations

2018 was not a dull year! Google released several SERP feature updates.

As Google updates its algorithm to better align with users, the SERPs have gone through a look and feel makeover.

These changes always create new challenges for the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) professionals. We must constantly develop new SEO strategies to ensure that our content is still optimized to be featured in SERPs.

Let’s take a look at some of the changes we see in today’s SERPs.

One of the biggest changes that has occurred? Gone are the traditional text-only SERPs.

Today’s SERPs highlight video, images, featured snippets, knowledge graphs and related products.

Therefore, one has to consider the different content format that are being displayed in the SERPs. And develop strategies to create and optimize these group of content types.

1. The HTTPs rigmarole

In July, it was confirmed that chrome security warnings were really happening.

After the initial warnings, Chrome 68 began marking all non-HTTPS sites as “not secure.” The idea behind this change was that HTTPs provided more encrypted connections and more security.

This also altered the way the SERPs looked. The regular HTTP sites started to fall behind.

On plain HTTP, your connection is not encrypted when you load a website. This means that anyone on the network can see, gather, and alter all and any information.

Recommendation

The recommendation here is simple one. Make encryption easy – migrate or build your site on HTTPS.

2. Mobile first

Mobile first has almost become a buzz word.

The mobile first update was more geared towards recognizing the mobile content consumption and ensure that the mobile speed were taken into account for the SERP.

Today adults in the US spend an average of 3 hours and 35 minutes per day on mobile.

The mobile page speed update takes into account the page loading speed for mobile results. These changes were rolled out in July.

In an effort to deliver the best experience for searchers across all devices, mobile-first indexing means Googlebot will only crawl and index the mobile version of a page. And of course, this has directly affected the SERP we see.

The better the page load speed, the higher the performance in SERPs.

Recommendation

As a business owner you can leverage Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP), Google’s open source project. It will allow you to dramatically improve the performance of the mobile web.

Secondly, leverage the user intent in the keyword used for content and tags. Even image alt attributes have become more relevant in mobile search.

3. Featured snippets and knowledge panels

Technically speaking this one came in December 2017, but its impact resonated throughout last year.

Google made changes to the way SERPs are laid out. Primarily, we started seeing expanded Featured Snippets, improved Knowledge Panels, and suggested content.

All three of these elements align with user intent and improve the user's search experience.

Featured snippets

Let's take the feature snippets first.

Most featured snippets are triggered by long-tail keywords.

There are several kinds of featured snippets – numbered, bullet points, tables, and paragraph.

For larger B2B enterprise clients, the paragraph snippets are most relevant.

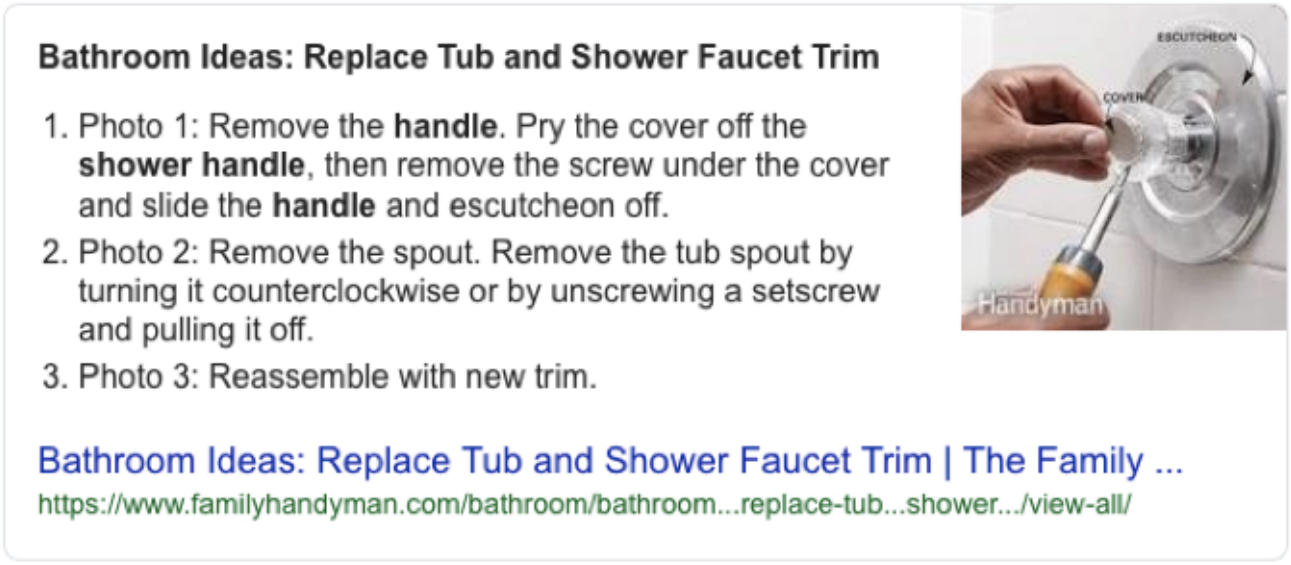
Paragraph featured snippets result from the content that Google pulls straight from your website. This content can best attempt to answer the searcher's question directly within the SERPs.

Paragraph types are the most prevalent category of featured snippets.

These snippets usually provide answers to question queries, such as "how to," "what is," or "why is."

However, these are a double edged sword. They cannibalize organic search clicks because user queries are often answered directly in the SERP and the user doesn't have to click the

link.



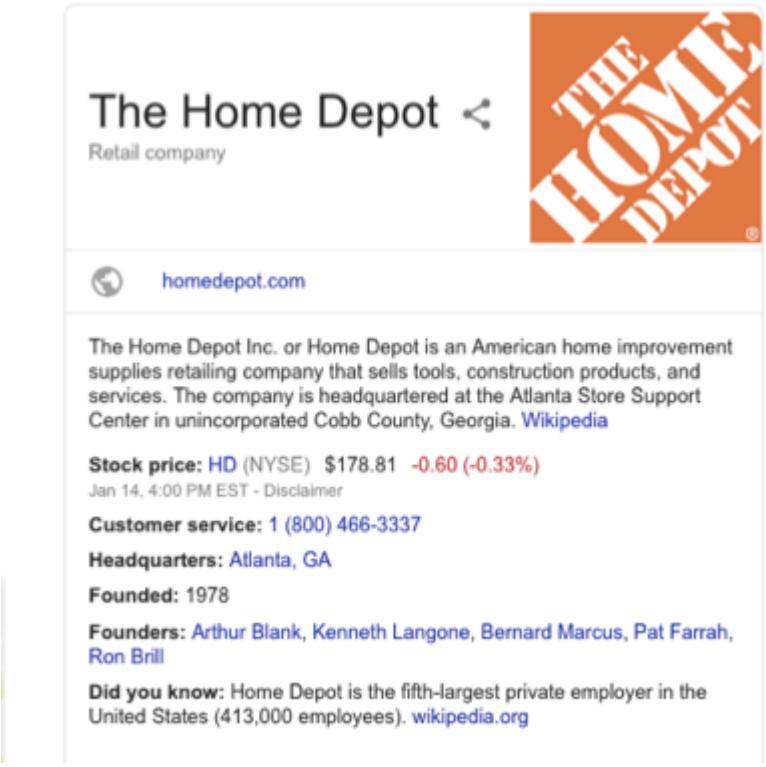
Recommendation

If your page already ranks on the first page for your target keywords, you can increase your chances of being featured by optimizing the content to give a better answer and organize information and facts.

Knowledge panels

Google leverages Google Maps or Google My Business listings for these.

Therefore you see such panels related to brands, businesses, or organizations. These can include images, facts, social media links, and related searches.



Recommendation

Ensure that your image tags are appropriately optimized, and that business listings are up to date. Doing so will allow for accurate and desired information to display.

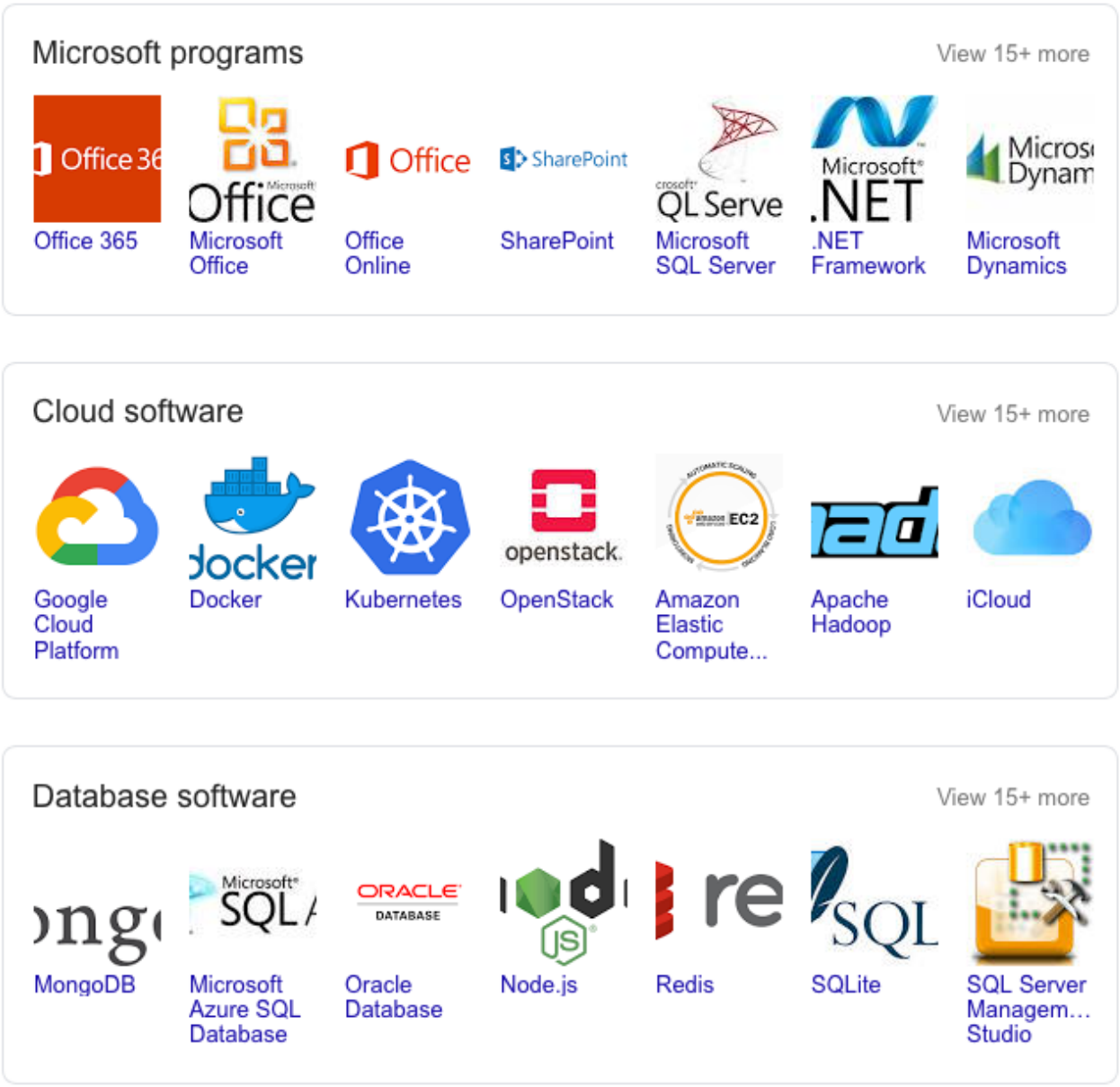
Share this article

Related articles

4. Related products

Google has also started providing related products within the SERPS.

They display brand logos that are clickable. However, there is no defined statement by Google on how they are selecting these featured products.



There is a theory that Google observes the users making consecutive searches for similar entities and the related tweaks they then make in their quereis.

One can say that Google provides the user with not just the related search query, but almost deliver the best search suggestion.

They take the user behavior and intent into account to generate the best SERP.

Recommendation

How can we as business owners influence this SERP?

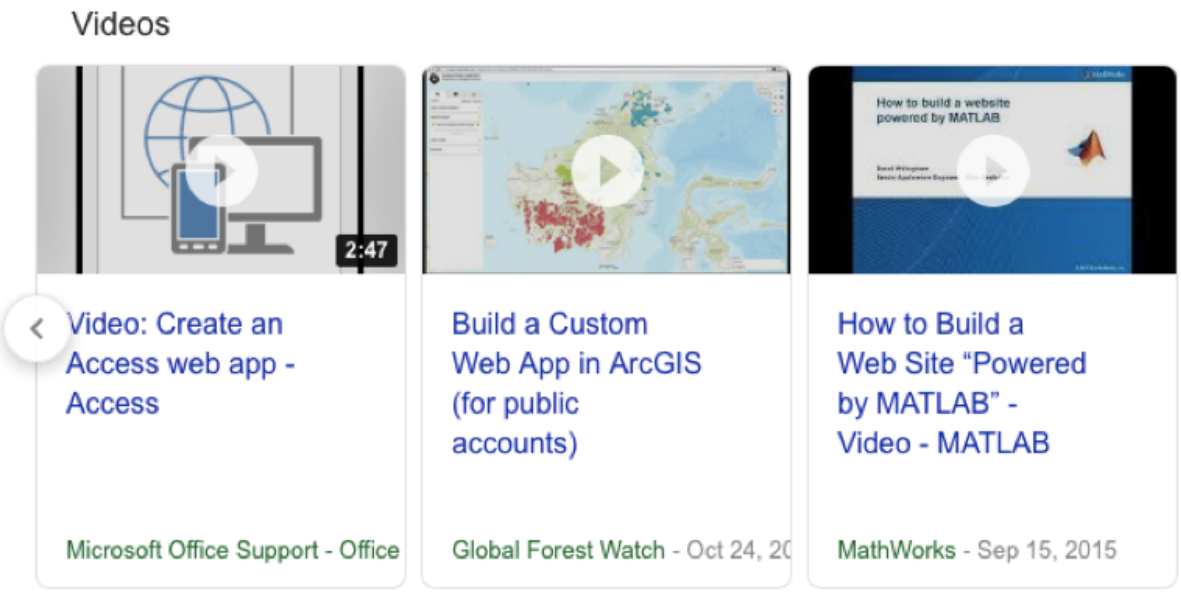
If we make an educated guess, we can leverage internal links. These links signal to the search engines about a site’s navigation, architecture, hierarchy, page authority, and product relationship.

All of this will allow Google to display the related products.

5. Video optimization

One of the more visual changes in the SERPs has been the inclusion of video carousel in the search result. There seems to be absolutely no competition between the carousel and any of the other SERP features. The video carousels solely compete with organic results for SERP space and can appear next to any combination of other features.

Which URLs Appear in the Video Carousel? When it came to the vast majority of the accompanying URL are from YouTube. That said accompanying URLs is another element that is changing. Now Google is actually giving weightage to video on the domain than YouTube. Of course, they have to be an optimized asset to be featured. This change rolled out in June.

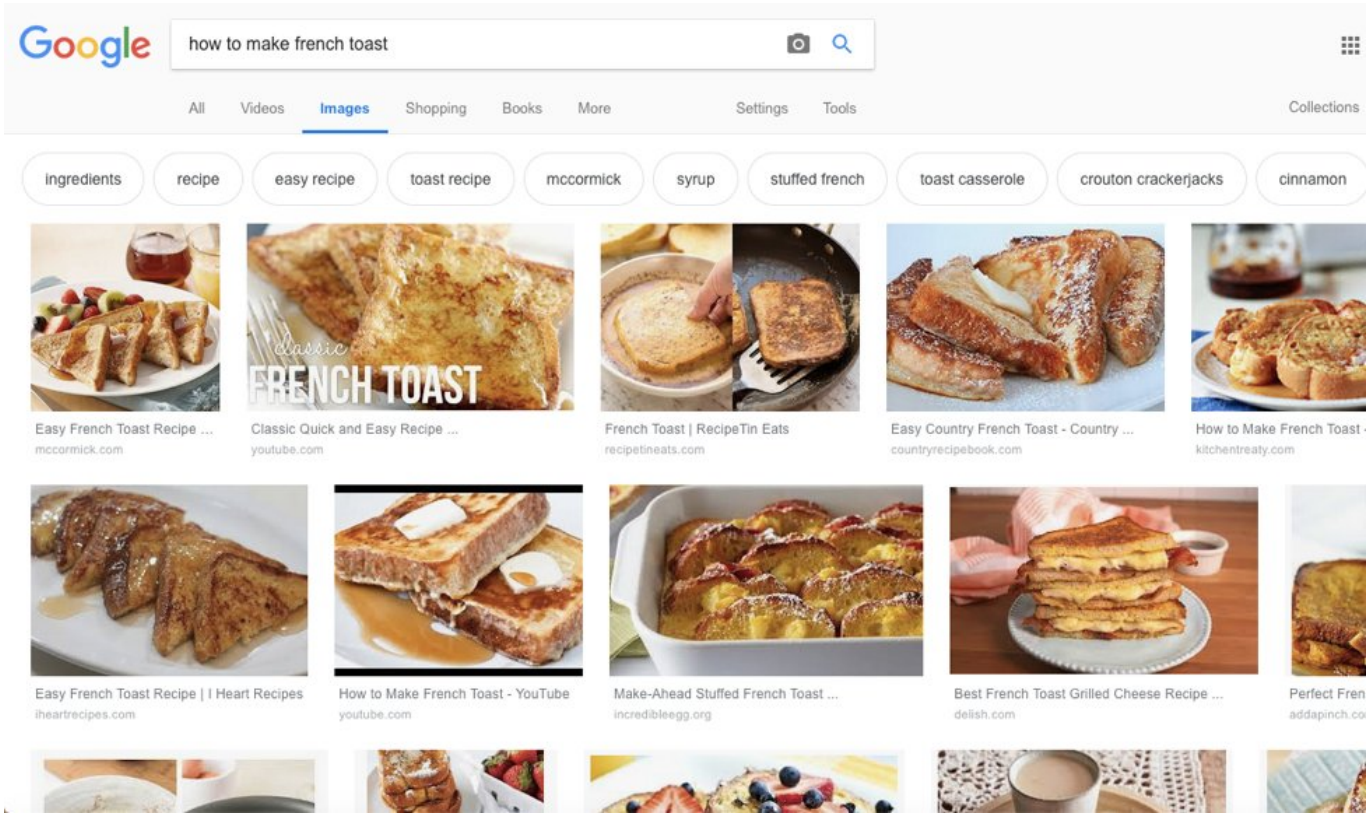


Recommendation

As a business owner you can enhance your URL's reach by ensuring the video is embedded on your page and you have applied the traditional best practice with regards to video optimization. Such as, providing the appropriate tag and having relevant textual content around the video that describes it.

6. Image search

Images have had multiple level changes. One the image packs are now part of the traditional SERPs. Second, when a user clicks on an image, they'll be taken to Google Images. Do note that the user is still not taken to the website directly. Third, the image search now displays filter options right on the top the results. Lastly, the images itself have a short tag line below it.



Recommendation

This makes use of image alt tags and relevant keywords within the tag a critical step in image optimization.

7. Extension of length of titles and descriptions

This one had two level of changes, one where the character limit was increased and second when the changes we rolled back and the older character limits were restored.

This change actually is a good warning for all.

Recommendation

Don’t give a knee jerk reaction to any changes. Test them out. View your result and plan a more comprehensive roll out.

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