How to use Schema to create a Google Action

Google recently announced that publishers can now create Google Actions from web content using schema markup.

For brands, Google Actions can be a great way to get more mileage out of your SEO strategy and offer another opportunity to reach searchers organically. Optimizing for newer SEO features like Google Actions and rich results are becoming increasingly critical when it comes to pleasing the algorithm.

While the option isn't available for every content type, this new capability is a big deal for less technical users looking to, ahem, get in on the Actions.

What Are Google Actions?

Actions are apps designed for the Google Assistant. They range from apps like the Dominos delivery action to health and fitness apps to personality tests and ride-hailing services.

Actions work when the user prompts the Assistant with a phrase like, "OK, Google, talk to [Action]."

Source
According to Google, here's a representation of what happens "behind the scenes" during an interaction:

Source
It's important to understand that all Actions take place inside the cloud, though users can access them on any device

with the Google Assistant enabled. Each action is also tied to a specific intent and is programmed with a corresponding fulfillment process to complete a given request.

Speaking of intent, let’s move on to the next section, where I’ll go over the link between schema markup and Google Actions.

Google Actions + Schema

Schema markup is a type of microdata that gives Google more context about the intent of any given piece of content.

When you add schema markup to a webpage, it creates an enhanced description – aka a rich result – which appears on the front page of Google. These rich results include everything from “book now buttons” for local businesses to recipe instructions, contact information and events.

Search engines need to match content to search queries, and part of assessing the quality of a search result depends on intent.

Schema is a way for websites to let search engines know more about the intent behind the content. It’s also a requirement for websites that want to be eligible for Google’s rich results – which increasingly account for the lion’s share of the first page in the search results.

Of course, adding the markup alone won’t guarantee position zero. You’ll need to make sure you follow Google’s recommendations perfectly, that you choose the right schema for the page you’re targeting, and that your content is useful, credible and engaging.

It’s a tall order, but Google’s latest announcement brings schema to Google Actions, offering an additional channel for earning some of your SEO share back.

For content creators is, this means that they now have the ability to create Google Actions, regardless of whether or not they know their way around Dialogflow or the Google Actions Console.

Instead, Google automatically generates an Action when users add specific markup to eligible content types.

Google Actions schema: Content types

Source
The main benefit of using schema for content actions is that it provides an opportunity to increase brand awareness in a format with limited advertising opportunities.

Using schema markup, Google can create a variety of Actions based on six types of content that you might publish on the web. Here’s a look at the supported content.

Podcasts

Last May, Google announced they would be adding podcasts to the search results screen through a new structured markup option.

For podcasters long reliant on clunky search features on platforms like Apple Podcasts or Stitcher, the option to improve discoverability in the Google Search results is huge.

The markup allows podcasters to improve their showing in the Google Search results and on Google Podcasts, with individual episode descriptions and an embedded player for each right there on the first page. Another new feature, Deeper Podcast search, lets users search for the actual audio directly inside

the podcast using Google transcriptions.

Connecting podcasts to a Google Action takes things to the next level, making it easy for users to find your podcast in the Assistant directory and play episodes directly from their phone, smart speaker, or Google Home display.

Here’s how to turn podcasts into a Google Action:

FAQs

Per Google guidelines, you can apply FAQ schema to any site that features a list of questions and answers on just about any subject. Meaning, the option isn’t limited to the official FAQ pages included on a company’s website; instead, you can create FAQ pages for any resource or topic relevant to your business.

What’s nice about FAQ schema – whether it’s linked to an Action or not – is those brands that earn position zero can take up a ton of real estate on the SERPs.

As with all other types of schema, FAQ content needs to match what’s on your website 100%. Otherwise, Google may hit you with a manual action. It’s also important to note that FAQ content is purely informational in intent – and as such, you can’t use markup as a free advertising channel.

By turning your FAQ pages into Google Actions, the Google Assistant can read your answers out loud when searchers enter a related voice query.

Here’s what you’ll need to know.

Valid vs. invalid use-cases

FAQ pages must be written from the perspective of the website, with no option for users to submit alternative answers.

This can take the form of either a product support page where, again, users don’t have the option to offer additional answers. This means that forum pages or pages where users can submit questions and provide answers don’t count.

In those instances, you’ll need to add the QAPage markup instead (keep in mind, this will not automatically create an action).

Markup the entire thing

When you add FAQ schema to your page, make sure that you include all text associated with both the question and the answer. Notice how this Booking.com example includes the question as a complete sentence and a conversational answer—they don’t just say, “it’s $167.”

Source
Additionally, all FAQ content must be accessible to the visitor on the source page. So, if you click through to Booking.com based on that answer, you’ll see that exact same text on the official website.

Here’s an example of FAQ markup in JSON-LD format:

Source

Recipes

Recipe markup allows users to promote their content through rich cards presented in the Google Assistant and learn about your content in the Assistant directory. Use it to highlight nutritional information, prep time, and ingredient lists,

along with images that get searchers interested in your food.

What's more, you can use the recipe schema together with the guidance markup, which gives consumers a way to follow along with audio instructions for your recipes.

As it stands, you'll need to fill out a Google Form to get started with the feature. It's pretty short, requiring only your name, email, domain, and company name.

It's also worth pointing out that you'll need to make sure your page features both the recipe and guidance markup to be eligible for rich search results and as a Google Action.

Additionally, you'll need to make sure that you set up your structured data correctly.

A few things to consider:

- Use recipe structured data if your content focuses on showing users how to prepare a specific dish. Google also mentions that things like "facial scrub" don't qualify as recipes, as they're not something you would present as an edible dish. In those cases, your content is probably a better fit with the HowTo schema.
- If you want your recipes to show up in a host-specific list (a summarized recipe collection) you'll need to include the following:
    - Use the ItemList structured data to summarize the recipes you'd like to feature. You can opt to provide ItemList schema together with recipe structured data or on its own.
    - Your site must also have a summary page that lists out all recipes in a collection, like a round-up of summer cocktail recipes or a collection of Thanksgiving recipes. The idea is, when a user clicks a summary link from the SERPs, they'll then be directed to a website that shows each of these recipes in their entirety.

Here’s an example of recipe schema in JSON-LD format:

Source

How-to guides

How-to schema can be used to markup articles that contain instructional information that show users how to do something new.

As is the case with the other content types I’ve mentioned, there are some guidelines you should know about before applying the HowTo markup to your site.

According to Google Developers, HowTo markup applies to content where the main focus of that page is the how-to. In other words, it doesn’t count if you write a long-form article that includes a short how-to section along with several different elements. The content must also be read sequentially as a series of steps.

How-to content must also abide by these guidelines:

- You cannot markup offensive, explicit, or violent content.
- Each step must be marked up in its entirety.
- You cannot use HowTo markup for advertising purposes
- HowTo does not apply to recipes—as they have their own schema.
- If applicable, include images, along with a list of materials and tools needed to complete the task.

Here’s an example of HowTo markup in JSON-LD format:

Source
Right now, HowTo Actions are only available for Google Assistant, not for Smart Displays.

However, Google is working to sign up more publishers interested in creating how-to content for smart displays. Sign up here to let Google Developers know you're interested in this option – and perhaps we'll see this feature roll out sometime in 2020.

News

Adding markup to your news content helps you increase visibility in the SERPs and gives users the option to consume your content via Google Assistant.

Users can apply this schema to blog content, articles, and news articles, though they'll need to be a registered publisher on Google News to take advantage of this tool.

The News markup makes stories visually stand out in the SERPs. Features like the host carousel, top stories carousel, visual stories, and large thumbnails and headlines allow users an opportunity to attract more organic traffic to their sites by giving them more real estate to share content.

To add voice compatibility to the list of features, you'll need to choose between AMP and non-AMP formatting, which I've laid out for you here.

AMP with structured data

Google recommends that users opt for AMP, as its fast load times mean there's less of a chance that the Assistant will experience a delay when "reading" an article aloud. It's also worth pointing out, AMP articles come with a few more requirements than non-AMP content.

To set it up:

Recommended properties:

- Author
- Author Name
- Date Published
- Headline
- Image
- Publisher
- Publisher Logo
- Publisher Logo URL
- Publisher Logo Height
- Publisher Logo Width
- Publisher Name
- Date Modified
- Description
- Main Entity of Page

Non-AMP with structured data

While Google encourages users to embrace AMP, you can add structured data to Non-AMP articles, as well. And like their AMP counterparts, those news stories that include markup have a higher likelihood of appearing in the search results with rich results features.

To set it up:

- Add structured markup to the page
- Make sure you follow the guidelines to ensure Google can crawl your page.
- Test the page using the Structured Data Testing Tool

Recommended properties:

- Headline
- Image
- Date Published
- Data Modified

Keep in mind, you will need to mark up your content as

structured articles for it to show in the news result.

Here’s an example of article markup in JSON-LD form:

Source

Before you apply markup

To turn News content into a Google Action, you’ll need to meet the following requirements.

Have a dedicated news site:

- Use static, unique URLs
- Content must be original
- Ads, affiliate links, and sponsored content should be kept to a minimum
- Consider using a news-specific XML site map for easy crawling

Here’s an example of News markup in JSON-LD:

Markup vs. templates

In addition to markups, Google introduced another simplified way to create Actions for the Google Assistant: templates. While this option isn’t automated like the Google Action schema approach, there’s no code involved in the template process, either.

Users can quickly create an action by filling out a Google Sheet, although this option only extends to four content types: personality quizzes, flashcards, trivia and how-to

videos. How-to videos must be uploaded to YouTube to be eligible.

According to the developers' page, getting started is relatively simple. All you need to do is complete the following steps:

- First, select the type of Action you'd like to create (in this case, let's assume it's a how-to video).
- Indicate what kind of personality you'd like to have
- Add steps via Google sheets. These are written instructions that correspond with the steps followed in the video. It should look like this:

Source

Claim your new action

If you've already published your content with relevant structured data, Google may automatically create a page in the Assistant directory.

If this happens, the site owner will receive an email prompting them to claim the page. You can also do this by visiting the directory itself and clicking the link to claim the page.

Remove your action

Because Google auto-generates content Actions, you may end up with some unwanted Actions in the directory. To remove them, all you need to do is follow these three quick steps:

1. Log in to the Actions console and select the unwanted project from the displayed tiles.
2. Head over to the Versions section, found on the Overview

page. Find the published version of your project and click on the Overflow menu.
3. Select “Unpublish” and that’s it.

Wrapping up

Smart devices and voice search are becoming increasingly valuable pieces of the SEO landscape, and Google Actions offer a new point of entry for brands looking to increase visibility in the organic search results.

This latest update makes Google Actions accessible to a broader range of marketers who may not have the time or the know-how to build an Action from scratch.

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the guest author and not necessarily Search Engine Land. Staff authors are listed here.

About The Author

John Lincoln is CEO of Ignite Visibility, a digital marketing teacher at the University of California San Diego and author of the book Digital Influencer, A Guide to Achieving Influencer Status Online. Throughout his career, Lincoln has worked with hundreds of websites, ranging from start-ups to household names, and has won awards in SEO, CRO, analytics and Social Media. In the media, Lincoln has been featured on sites such as Forbes, Entrepreneur Magazine, Inc. Magazine, CIO magazine and more.
http://feeds.searchengineland.com/~r/searchengineland/~3/DGQeC

dpHlHs/how-to-use-schema-to-create-a-google-action-325753