New key insights from Google’s John Mueller at SMX

At SMX Tuesday, John Mueller, the lead of the Search Relations team at Google, gave a talk named “Google Search #2020: What’s New That Matters To SEOs.” You can still watch the talk on demand at SMX Virtual if you missed it. Mueller gave an overview of what has changed in Google Search this year and what to expect in 2021. We then dug in during the Q&A where we learned some new tidbits we have not heard before.

What changed with Google Search in 2020

Mueller explained that Google is constantly making changes and noted it implemented 3,600 changes in 2019 with over 380,000 tests over the year.

Google launched a rebranded Google Search Central site to replace the old Google Webmaster Central. Google continued its efforts on mobile-first indexing; the deadline is March 2021. Note, Mueller clarified in the Q&A that Google will still index sites that are not mobile-friendly, so if you do not have a mobile site, you will be fine. He also touched on all the structured data changes to support COVID-19 events – there was a lot of this, the Search Console updates and changes over the years. And of course, the various Google search ranking updates.

Page Experience Update

Mobile search ranking signals only. Mueller explained that the Page Experience Update is going to roll out in May 2021. A couple of the things we learned is that this ranking factor will only apply to mobile search. I asked Mueller in the Q&A

about this and he clarified that specifically the core web vitals (LCP, FID and CLS metrics) will be for mobile-only search ranking signals. The other aspects of the page experience update, like HTTPS, safe browsing and others are already ranking signals on desktop and will remain. But the core web vitals signals will only be applied to mobile search.

Will it be a big update? I asked if this will be a big and noticeable update. He said he was not sure. Mueller said he doesn't know, but he said that the search team is working on these ranking changes. He said that since they are spending a lot of time on this ranking factor, he assumes it will be a noticeable update but he said it is hard to know at this point.

FAQ schema scaled back

Google added FAQ schema back in 2019 and in 2020 it tightened up the guidelines around that structured data. Mueller explained that over the year, Google began to scale back which sites would show the FAQ rich results in search. He said that some people were going overboard with it and adding it to everything, so Google needed to get pickier with who they show it for in the search results. Google has done this before with previous rich results.

Request indexing tool status

About two months ago, Google temporarily suspended the request indexing tool in Google Search Console. We thought it would be back by now, but it is two months later and it is still not back. Mueller told us in the Q&A that he forwarded the messages to the Search Console team recently that showed how upset the SEO community was that the feature is not fixed yet. He said the team is taking these report to heart and he hopes it will be back in before the end of the year. He did add that, "things can come up and delay things," but is

optimistic it will be back soon. Mueller said he is personally pushing the team to find a solution.

Diversity

Diversity and inclusion was a theme around SMX, and Mueller explained that diversity in SEO is critical. It is important to hear from new and different people for those perspectives and insights. It will help your sites function and rank better in search he said. The bottom-line, said Mueller, is that it is the right thing to do. Be proactive about diversity in your workforce, your speakers at events and support organizations like Women In Tech SEO and UnitedSearch.

So much more…

The presentation and talk is packed with so much SEO goodness. Not just including what we summarized above but also topics like Google Shopping going free, JavaScript SEO, Google Discover, Web Stories and so much more. Register to watch the talk on demand at SMX if you missed it.

About The Author

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