

SEO survival in 2019: Words of wisdom from Moz's Dr. Pete Meyers

Search engine optimization is a never-ending process that is frequently subjected to rule changes and playbook adjustments – many of which tend to come seemingly out of the blue.

The past year was certainly an interesting and transitional time for organizations in their mission to rank well on Google's search engine results. Many of the changes we've recently seen have forced many to return to the drawing board and refine their tactics.

In December, Kevin Svec and I sat down with Moz's data scientist Dr. Pete Meyers to discuss some of the best SEO practices and mindsets to adopt in the foreseeable future. Throughout the podcast, Meyers shared a lot of valuable insight into big data, E-A-T Score and how to make it work in your favor and highlights from Google's 2018 algorithm changes.

Making sense of Big Data

Over the past decade, the monster known as Big Data has taken on a monumental role in the business world and everyday life. Experts claim that around 2.5 quintillion bytes of data are produced every single day. If harnessed correctly, an organization can find amazing insights to improve their SEO, predict relevant trends, create proactive strategies and much, *much* more.

However, with so much data out there, the challenge is finding those tiny needles in the gigantic haystack that translate to SEO success and avoiding data overload.

When it comes to making sense of website data and how it translates to SEO, Meyers offers this advice.

“Focus more on the science part and a little less on the data part some days.”

As marketers and business managers, it's tempting to emphasize data collection as if it's important just by itself. Meyers recommends taking preemptive measures before gathering data. Most importantly, take the time to understand the kinds of questions you are trying to ask and the kinds of problems you are trying to solve, then let these factors guide the data you search for.

For example, in terms of SEO, you want to understand metrics related to website traffic. However, you need to get more granular with questions like:

- Where is it coming from?
- What keywords are pulling in traffic based on data from Google Search Console?
- What pages are driving traffic?
- How can I repeat this success?

Moreover, in the case you are *losing* keywords your site is ranking for, look into questions like:

- What have I recently changed in my strategies?
- How has Google changed?
- How have similar sites been affected?

If you are asking these types of questions before you start gathering data, you can do a lot to cut down on the sheer volume you are working with, as well as the time and effort you are spending trying to make sense of it all.

Addressing the latest changes

There were many changes to Google's algorithms throughout 2018. Perhaps the biggest one came on Aug. 1 with the Medic Core Update. Based on most observations, this update had the largest impact on *Your Money Your Life* (YMYL) industries – e.g., finance, law, healthcare, etc.

Meyers had some theories about the update and found one of the most common threads was a content-related update.

Based on his findings, it seems the healthcare industry was hit the hardest. While some websites certainly saw big gains following the update, many saw big drops. Meyers strongly believes there is a “tie-in about Google trying to deal with bad advice or poor information” in YMYL information. Shortly after the update, Meyers released a list of the top 30 winners and losers of the algorithm change.

Top 30 Winners (Jul 31-Aug 7 % Change)

Subdomain	7-Day %	Max %	Share
www.glassdoor.com	+74.7%	+53.7%	0.31%
www.spendwithpennies.com	+70.7%	+52.5%	0.05%
www.linkedin.com	+47.9%	+2.6%	0.17%
dinnerthendessert.com	+43.1%	+41.7%	0.06%
www.amctheatres.com	+40.2%	-9.7%	0.05%
www.bhphotovideo.com	+34.3%	+18.8%	0.09%
www.harpersbazaar.com	+33.3%	+16.1%	0.06%
www.gamesgames.com	+31.6%	+17.7%	0.07%
www.ebay.com	+30.5%	+25.1%	0.57%
www.costco.com	+29.5%	+6.5%	0.10%
www.carid.com	+28.0%	+15.5%	0.05%
www.orientaltrading.com	+27.7%	+11.6%	0.09%
www.rent.com	+26.9%	+13.5%	0.07%
www.businessinsider.com	+26.5%	+22.1%	0.14%
support.google.com	+26.3%	+9.3%	0.05%
www.carfax.com	+26.0%	+21.9%	0.04%
www.ziprecruiter.com	+25.8%	+13.2%	0.05%
www.urbandictionary.com	+25.7%	+11.2%	0.08%
cooking.nytimes.com	+24.8%	+10.9%	0.05%
www.usatoday.com	+24.7%	+10.4%	0.13%
www.opentable.com	+24.3%	+0.7%	0.08%
foursquare.com	+23.3%	+22.0%	0.04%
www.academy.com	+21.5%	+14.1%	0.09%
www.worldmarket.com	+20.8%	-10.0%	0.05%
www.mapquest.com	+20.2%	+0.8%	0.05%
www.rxlist.com	+19.7%	+13.6%	0.06%
time.com	+19.5%	-54.4%	0.06%
www.remax.com	+19.2%	-1.9%	0.04%
www.latimes.com	+18.7%	+5.5%	0.07%
www.kohls.com	+18.7%	+7.7%	0.17%

For instance, if a user wanted to learn more about a specialty diet or health plan, reading a piece of content that came from a less-than-expert source could potentially be dangerous to the reader. While this is especially true in healthcare, this

concept certainly applies to personal finance, law and other industries that have a direct impact on people's lives.

There are many things YMYL organizations can do to improve their rankings post-Aug. 1, 2018. At the core level, they need to prioritize the process of creating highly credible content that offers meaningful and actionable insight. Furthermore, they need to make an effort to improve their E-A-T Score.

What exactly is E-A-T score?

The E-A-T score, which stands for Expertise, Authority, and Trustworthiness, is showing to be a critical factor for YMYL industries to rank well on the SERPs.

Expertise refers to the ability to demonstrate your skills in the field as the creator of the main content. In a nutshell, expertise is about consistently producing content that is truthful and valuable to readers.

Authority is about having the *validation* that you are an expert. Your credentials play a huge role in establishing authoritativeness on the web. Moreover, a lot of it comes down to your online reputation and how you manage it.

Trustworthiness deals heavily with the platform the content lives on. The website needs to make users feel safe, especially if it involves the transaction of any personal information.

While E-A-T Score has played a role in Google rankings for a long time, the definition behind this acronym has always been quite ambiguous.

According to Meyers, it seems as if the individual name attached to a piece of thought leadership content is now of key importance to how it ranks in Google. As the specifics are not crystal-clear, measuring the exact formula that goes into E-A-T score isn't a straightforward process.

How can you play by the rules?

Abiding by Google's complicated rules in 2019 is certainly a complex undertaking. Given Google's never-ending quest to provide the best possible content to users based on their queries, it's a safe assumption that continued focus on E-A-T Score is going to be very important.

The tricky part is trying to make sense of all the rules in the Search Quality Guidelines.

In regards to establishing Expertise, there should be a focus on personal branding and creating content that provides an accurate picture of the topic. For example, let's say you are writing about the keto diet. There needs to be clear proof that you are qualified to create content about this topic. Next, your claims need to be backed with highly relevant data from reputable sources in the wellness and nutrition industry. Overall, the readers should have all the information they need about the keto diet after reading the content. **Expertise** is something that takes a very strong effort to establish. In most cases, this will likely require a great deal of time to build from the ground up.

According to Meyers:

"Some of the sites we saw that improved had a very clear topical focus. They are very clearly themed within their niche. One author talked to me and she noticed that she is not only well-themed in her industry, but she tackles things in terms of sub-themes. She'll publish an article about a sub-theme, then publish two or three more articles within that same sub-theme over the next few weeks. She noticed that the third or fourth article would rank much quicker than the original content. We've seen many sites follow that pattern."

Google wants a clear sense of topical focus as a writer

continuously contributes to a defined niche.

When it comes to building **Authority**, it involves much more than just establishing an online reputation. From what we know, a big aspect is using expert-level content to build a reputation within a specific field. This involves making sure your online presence is increasing and your reputation is steadily improving.

- Make it a point to seek out Google verified reviews
- Interact with the community/influencers of your industry.
- Gain relevant, high-quality links.

These are just a few things you can do to keep moving in the right direction.

In terms of **Trustworthiness**, step one needs to be getting an SSL certificate, if you haven't already. Additionally, try to get trust seals incorporated on to your website – like the Better Business Bureau and Google Checkout logos.



In terms of playing by Google's rules in 2019 and beyond, this is just the tip of the spear. Keep in mind, the rules are always subject to change. As we dive further into 2019, there will certainly be plenty of algorithm updates and adjustments on the horizon.

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