

Server-Side vs. Client-Side Rendering: What Google Recommends via @sejournal, @MattGSouthern

In an interview with Kenichi Suzuki from Faber Company Inc., Google Developer Advocate Martin Splitt recently shared key information about JavaScript rendering, server-side vs. client-side rendering, and structured data.

The talk cleared up common SEO confusion and offered practical tips for developers and marketers working with Google's changing search systems.

Google's AI Crawler & JavaScript Rendering

When asked how AI systems handle JavaScript content, Splitt revealed that Google's AI crawler (used by Gemini) processes JavaScript well through a shared service.

Splitt explained:

"We don't share what Googlebot sees for web search, but Google's AI crawler that Gemini uses also renders. It uses WRS [Web Rendering Service], but it's basically like we have a service Googlebot uses, and Gemini uses the service as well."

This gives Google's AI tools an edge over competitors that have trouble with JavaScript.

While one study mentioned in the interview claimed rendering sometimes takes weeks, Splitt explained that it usually happens much faster.

“The 99th percentile is within minutes,” Splitt noted, suggesting that long delays are rare and might be due to measurement errors.

Server-Side vs. Client-Side Rendering: Which is Better?

Part of the discussion covered the debate between server-side rendering (SSR) and client-side rendering (CSR).

Instead of saying one is always better, Splitt stressed that the right choice depends on what your website does.

Splitt stated:

“If you have a website that is a classical website that is basically just presenting information to the user, then requiring JavaScript is a drawback. It can break. It can cause problems. It will make things slower. It will need more battery on your phone.”

Splitt suggests SSR or even pre-rendering static HTML for websites focused on content. But CSR works better for interactive tools like CAD programs or video editors.

Splitt clarified:

“It’s not one or the other. It is two tools. Do you need a hammer or do you need a screwdriver? That depends on what you’re trying to do.”

See also: Understand the Difference Between Client-Side and Server-Side Rendering.

Structured Data's Role in AI Understanding

The talk then moved to structured data, which is becoming more important as AI systems grow in search.

When asked if structured data helps Google's AI understand content better, like Microsoft claims about Bing, Splitt confirmed it helps.

He stated:

"Structured data gives us more information and gives us more confidence in information. So it makes sense to have structured data."

However, Splitt clarified that while structured data adds context, it "does not push rankings" directly. This is an important difference for SEO professionals who might think it directly boosts search positions.

What This Means

Here are the key things we learned from this interview:

1. Google's rendering usually happens within minutes, so the old fear of JavaScript-heavy sites being at a disadvantage is less of an issue now.
2. Non-Google AI tools may still have trouble with JavaScript, making SSR possibly more critical for visibility across all AI systems.
3. Use SSR for content sites and CSR for interactive tools. Don't use one solution for everything.
4. Though not a ranking factor, structured data helps Google understand your content better. This matters more as AI becomes a bigger part of search.

In his final advice to SEO professionals, Splitt highlighted basic principles over technical tricks:

“Think about your users. Figure out what is your business goal, how to make users happy, and then just create great content.”

As AI changes search technology, understanding these technical details becomes more important for marketers who want to optimize content for people and search algorithms.

Hear the full discussion in the video below:

[embedded content]

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