SMX Overtime: Optimize ranking in AnswerBox and People Also Ask

After the session at SMX West where Paxton Gray and I spoke about “Optimize Ranking In AnswerBox/People Also Ask,” attendees asked some great followup questions around how to optimize for featured snippets and about the strategy recommendations we’d make. Below are some of our answers to those questions.

How do we find opportunities and gauge efforts if we don’t have access to the resources mentioned? Are there other ways, or do you recommend investing in these?

One of the best methods I know, aside from what was shared in the presentation, is to utilize the data that we have access to, for instance in Search Console, specifically the search performance report. With the transition to the new Search Console, Google seems to have opened the floodgates when it comes to data that would be important to our overall SEO strategies. I highly recommend becoming familiar with all the reports Search Console has to offer. In the performance report found in Search Console’s dashboard, you can zero in on a query’s click, impression, and average search ranking data.

To isolate possible featured snippet opportunities you want to do the following:

1. Use a query filter to isolate the common beginning of question-based queries (ex; how, when, do, where, does, etc.),
2. Add a filter for the average position to isolate the queries with an average rank of 2 and below.
3. Spot check the queries that come up in this filter to verify that they are snippets worth going after.

4. You can also repeat this same process but only look at the queries that only have an average ranking of 1 in order to look at the possible **f**eatured snippet opportunities where you are currently winning.

I'd also recommend looking at the CTR and total clicks in order to make the determination on whether or not a featured snippet opportunity is going to be worth your while. For example, if you have an average ranking of 3 for a featured snippet query and you're getting a decent number of clicks in comparison to the rest of queries, it might be worth pushing up in rank to see if that brings you more clicks once you pass into the featured snippet.

Can you elaborate more on your backlink acquisition strategy?

During the presentation, I described an example of how a certain URL's backlink profile contributed to their ability to rank for certain featured snippets. This demonstrated that when building out a backlink strategy for featured snippet opportunities, we recommend folding in some anchors that emulate the target keyword/featured snippet opportunity that you're trying to rank for.

I specifically recommend *emulating* your focus keyword rather than *match* so that these additional backlinks will be better able to organically signal the relevancy your page has for your focus keyword. You would, of course, still fold in exact match anchors, but I'd keep that as a secondary focus of your backlink anchor text strategy.

For example, if you are going after the featured snippet opportunity 'how to run a marathon', Here is the anchor text distribution I'd recommend:

- Partial match: 40%
    - how to run a marathon in a month
    - how to run a fast marathon
    - how do I run a marathon

        - learning how to run a marathon
    - Exact match: 25%
        - how to run a marathon
    - All other anchor variation (naked links, generic anchors, branded anchors): 35%
        - example.com/running-a-marathon/
        - brand name
        - click here

Any additional tips/tricks on synching Ahref with Stat?

The process I described in the presentation can also be done with the data output from the content gap analysis tool (described here). Once you have your final keyword list, you'll then import them to Stat.

The main difference between this process and the originally featured snippet isolation process is that you have to do the featured snippet segmenting in Stat by looking at the SERP features distribution visible on the SERP Features tab. Once there, you'll be able to see which keywords contain featured snippet opportunities that your competitors are ranking for that you could also be ranking for as well.

One other tip that comes to mind relates to how you monitor the organic competitors. By default, Stat will pull 'Share of Voice' organic competitors, but if you'd like to deepen that list based on who you're seeing most in the SERPs you organically compete in from a domain level, you can pull those organic competitors from the Competing Domains report in Ahrefs.

How can you keep the featured snippet to local SERP and not go global? We have seen a lot of global traffic with pages that have featured snippets.

The reach/localization of a featured snippet, unfortunately, is something that Google controls. Your best bet for keeping your focus on local SERPs/featured snippets is by ensuring the

featured snippets you target in your keyword research are as hyper-localized as possible.

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