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CEO’s take on emerging industry trends and strategies: Q&A with Moz’s Sarah Bird

30-second summary:

- Hyperlocal SEO will help struggling communities salvage their local businesses.
- Moz surveyed over 1,400 local business marketers and more than half said they plan to implement Google’s new features to support COVID-19 affected businesses.
- Five under-rated yet crucial parameters marketers need to stay on top of.
- Sarah Bird’s special tips to optimize audience engagement at various marketing touchpoints.
- The best things you can do for landing pages is….?
- Dive in for these golden nuggets and a lot more.

2020 has hit the reset button for the world in many ways adding more wheels to digital marketers’ and brands’ “car of struggles” for success. SEO is somewhat looked at as a game of Russian roulette where you win some and you lose some, and COVID-19 hasn’t made this any easier. To help you hit bull’s eye and add an extra push to your digital strategies, we caught up with Moz’s CEO, Sarah Bird to uncover emerging trends in the search scape, SEO, audience behaviors, and more!

Sarah Bird, CEO of Moz

Q. What technologies, tools, and audience behaviors do you see shape up as 2020 progresses. If you were to draw a line between the temporary and ones that are here to stay, what would it be?

Sarah Bird: Hyperlocal search has been important for years. 2020 has only increased its merit.

COVID-19 has made active local business listings management more vital than ever before. Communities struggling to keep themselves supplied and cared for in changed conditions must depend on the internet as a crucial resource, and when business listings can quickly communicate to them what's available, where, when, and how, that's truly important.

With Google rolling out new features that allow business owners to share updates about curbside pickup, home delivery, or special hours for vulnerable populations directly on their listings, customers can access convenient information with a simple search. We surveyed over 1,400 local business marketers and more than half said they plan to implement such services permanently. Aside from being absolutely necessary this year, businesses recognize that the investment in ecommerce should

not simply be for the short-term, but should be able to accommodate their business and customers in the long-term.

Q. If you were to pick the hero of Moz's local and international SEO strategy for the rest of 2020, what would it be?

Sarah Bird: Reputation management will be crucial for local SEO strategy during 2020. We offer reputation management features through Moz Local that we urge users to leverage.

Some of the most valuable features of Moz Local at this time are review alerts that allow you to quickly facilitate complaint resolution and response rating for quality control. During hectic times, customers are more emotional – this can either work for or against you. Should you receive a poor review during this time, it's imperative that you respond quickly and empathetically.

Moz Local also offers a sentiment analysis feature that shows the most commonly used words for each of your star ratings. This can be useful in deciphering exactly what customers are finding important during this time.

Q. What five under-rated yet crucial parameters do marketers need to stay on top of to ensure that their brand has positively influenced their customers/target

audiences?

1. **Keywords:** Understanding your own keywords and those of your competitors ensures marketers have a plan in place to secure visibility on a brand's offerings or content.
2. **External links:** These are an important source of ranking power in a SERP.
3. **Differentiation:** Framing content correctly is key to reaching target audiences. Sometimes that means presenting contrarian ideas, as described by Caroline Forsey of HubSpot.
4. **Omnichannel communication:** Not all of your readers are going to read and engage via laptop or mobile, but be sure to consider how SEO is involved in your social media strategy.
5. **Outcome alignment:** SEO goals don't always have to focus on clicks. Ensure your marketing team is aligned on how content or a topic should be engaged, as it could mean that your ideal outcome is answering your customer's question directly within the SERP.

Q. What are the best ways to use entities that can leverage BERT, add more dimensions to keyword strategy, content, and the overall digital presence?

Sarah Bird: I don't encourage SEOs or marketers to optimize for BERT. There are too many variables to develop an effective strategy toward this model.

Instead, marketers should continue the focus on the overarching goal of creating excellent content that holistically understands and meets the intent of users. This is no small feat and requires an intense understanding of your

business, your audience, and how the two intertwine. Creating world-class content that's data-driven, timely, and empathetic to the audience will prove to be far more effective than focusing on this specific component of an algorithmic change from Google.

Q. Tips to optimize audience engagement at marketing touchpoints like emails, landing pages, and social media?

Sarah Bird: Each of these touchpoints are important for a business's SEO strategy. These aren't tactics that can be tacked on – they all have a powerful impact.

Email marketing delivers some of the highest ROI, generating $38 for every $1 spent. When it comes to emails, call-to-actions must be clear. Consider which landing pages you're sending people to and whether they're appropriate to improve bounce rates.

Social shares of a brand's content have a high correlation to ranking (as described by our own Cyrus Shepard.) As with everything in SEO, a focus should be put on the keywords used as well as the medium of the content being put out and whether or not it's optimized.

High-converting landing pages may lead to high bounce rates, which could negatively impact SEO. Rand Fishkin actually addressed this exact issue in a Whiteboard Friday. The best things you can do for landing pages is – focus on high-conversion long-tail keywords and to provide keyword-based content.

Feel free to share your thoughts on our interview and the emerging trends, drop a comment!

More about:

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Five excellent tips to optimize SEO for Bing – not Google

30-second summary:

- Bing isn’t the search engine with the largest market share, but it still serves millions of users every day. One-third of U.S. online queries are powered by Bing, most notably in terms of voice-assisted searches.
- The five effective and easy-to-follow Bing SEO tips below will help you rank for the secondary search engine quickly.
- A Bing SEO vs. Google SEO mindset is not productive, especially since both search engines use the BERT algorithm. Many optimization initiatives meant for Bing also work for Google, and vice versa.

You read that right: we’re focusing on Bing SEO in this

article.

Did you know that Bing is the second biggest search engine worldwide? It also powers Yahoo!, the third biggest. In July 2020, Bing captured nearly 6.5% of the global search market.

In any discussion about SEO, mentioning Google is unavoidable. However, the industry giant isn't the only search engine that can send traffic to your website. You can make Google SEO your primary focus, but it shouldn't be the only one in your marketing toolkit.

A global market share of less than 10% doesn't sound like much, but it translates to millions of users. Bing powers one-third of online searches in the U.S., counting direct searches and those done through Yahoo! or AOL. And as of August 2020, Bing controls over 13% of the U.S. desktop search engine market.

How Bing is different from Google – and why it matters

There are certain things that Bing does better than Google.

For example, doing an image search using Bing is preferable due to the higher quality results. You can search for different layouts and see licensing information for each image without having to figure out where to look. Bing also pioneered infinite scrolling for image search results, though it's no longer unique – Google now offers this feature, too.

Video search is also more hassle-free with Bing, despite YouTube being a Google brand. When you search for a video on Bing, the results come up as a thumbnail grid. You can then watch the videos without leaving the SERP.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Bing and Google is their amount of influence in a fast-growing subsection of

online searching: those done through voice-assisted devices. In 2017, an estimated 35 million Americans used one of these devices at least once a month. Of those millions, more than 70% were Amazon Echo users – and Amazon's Alexa is powered by Bing.

Five Bing SEO tips to implement for optimization

You will often find that optimizing for Bing SEO is much like optimizing for Google SEO. Both search engines use the BERT algorithm – which means keyword stuffing, manipulative link-building schemes, and other questionable tactics won't work.

However, there are certain things you can do to take your search engine optimization a notch up with Bing. Below are five tips you can apply to your current marketing initiatives.

1. Claim and list your business on Bing Places

Google has Google My Business, Bing has Bing Places. The goal of these two is similar: to deliver the best and more useful local search results to its users. Claim your business on Bing Places and create a listing to improve your local SEO ranking performance.

Note that Bing rewards websites that put their location details on prominent display. Bing's algorithm also considers information from third-party sources, such as social media platforms like Facebook. To optimize your Bing SEO presence, make sure you're ranking in Facebook's local search engine, too.

2. Improve SEO through Bing Webmaster

Tools URL indexing

After claiming your business, use Bing’s Webmaster Tools to index your website.

You will need to sign in to your Bing business account – which may use your Outlook, Hotmail, or Microsoft login – and verify ownership of your website using a back-end XML sitemap.

Like any other search engine, Bing’s algorithm will better handle and understand your content if you employ categories and tags to make your website’s pages more discoverable. Should you work on this, you can expect Bing to deliver better search results and ad experiences involving your brand.

3. Pay extra attention to on-page SEO for Bing

While backlinking still helps with Bing SEO, clever and contextual keyword utilization is much more relevant. To rank for Bing, concentrate your efforts on on-page SEO rather than off-page SEO.

However, certain tricks will work better than others. For instance, Bing seems to prioritize content with exact keyword matching in page titles, meta descriptions, and web content. You may want to sacrifice smooth readability occasionally for long-tail keywords verbatim.

Using keywords in URL slugs, subheadings, and in the first paragraph of your content are also good practices to follow if you want to see your website nearer the top in Bing SERPs.

4. Maintain a genuine online social media presence

Bing’s webmaster guidelines tell us that social signals weigh heavily in its ranking algorithm. What this means is that your

social media presence matters more to Bing than it does to Google. We touched on this briefly when we talked about claiming your business on Bing Places.

How your social media performs helps Bing judge the quality of your content. So, make sure you're not buying likes or follows, or posting without a clear brand voice.

What does Bing mean by "social signals"? These are social media shares and interactions, typically on industry-leading platforms like Twitter and Facebook. However, you also need to match your social media presence to your target audience. Law firms probably won't have much use for Pinterest or Instagram, for example, but these platforms could be indispensable for photography studios.

5. Consistently produce great content

Make sure that anything you publish is trustworthy, scannable, readable, and well-researched. Lots of related images to illustrate your points throughout the text content will help, too.

Focus on quality and not quantity. Don't try to maximize your content by splitting it into several short blog posts. In 2020, the ideal blog post length should be between 2,100 and 2,400 words – enough to thoroughly discuss a topic with authority, but not too long that fluff would be inevitable.

Not yet convinced? Here's why marketers should focus on Bing

Bing, the second most influential search engine in the world, can be a very lucrative channel. You shouldn't ignore opportunities for increased reach and growth. Besides, Bing SEO tips may often coincide with what you're already doing for Google SEO.

If you’re ambivalent due to Bing’s runner-up reputation, consider its parent company. Did you know that more than 1.5 billion devices worldwide are powered by Windows, and over 900 million of those use Windows 10? That last part is important because Windows 10 devices direct traffic to their built-in search engine: Bing.

More than 85% of desktop computers run on Windows. When you ask Cortana a question or search from your lock screen, you’re using Bing. Bing also powers search functions with applications like Microsoft Office, Skype, or Outlook.

One of the most overlooked audiences is over 65 million gamers on their Xboxes. Microsoft’s gaming console uses Bing, too. When players pause their games to search for something, they’re typically using Bing and not Google.

Wrapping up: Bing SEO vs. Google SEO

It’s not a good idea to think of optimizing your online presence in terms of Bing SEO vs. Google SEO. As we’ve touched on consistently throughout this piece, Bing is more similar to Google that many realize. Their algorithms may not be the same, but with delicate balancing, it’s not difficult to come up with a strategy that satisfies both Bing and Google.

Any savvy marketer will find it a good idea to get in on both market shares. Despite the low percentage of people using Bing and Yahoo!, you’re still looking at a potential audience numbering in the millions.

Justin Staples is a business entrepreneur who provides companies with results-driven SEO, custom web design, digital marketing, and content development. He can be found on LinkedIn.

More about:

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