No Trauma: We Need to Make Agencies Safer

The global pandemic has provided the opportunity to talk about what it means to share space. Within marketing and advertising agencies, space is important—and we have felt the loss of no longer bouncing our ideas off neighbors in real time or hunkering down in war rooms until inspiration strikes.

But another conversation about sharing space is required too. The reaction to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery is a pivotal reckoning centuries in the making—and a long overdue moment of brutal honesty for entire industries. Like never before, people are stopping and listening. And the word we're hearing too often is trauma.

Our agency workplaces tend to be full of buzzy energy, looser and absent the clearer boundaries you'd find in other professions. Egos and bluntness are not only tolerated, but celebrated. We call this atmosphere "culture" but rarely pay attention when that culture robs employees of a sense of safety, an expectation of control or our very worth.

A common misunderstanding is thinking trauma only occurs with horrifically violent events, or it's an obvious one we can see and name. But trauma is much sneakier and more sinister. It's often the small warning shot that reminds us our workplaces can be as dangerous to our emotional health and physical safety as the outside world.

While advertising and marketing is meant to reflect real people and their lives, our agencies are overwhelmingly white, run by men and can be hostile to power structures being challenged. Traumatic moments can be the comment during a creative review meant to put another in their place, or the cultural norms meant to "other" certain groups of people,

hinting at potential pain or danger.

> *We can no longer afford to ignore the real and sensed danger in our industry.*

If trauma can live under the line, operating in the gray areas and crevices we can’t always name or see, then how do we deal with it?

What you don’t know about trauma

We can track it through a concept called fault lines, earthquakes and tsunamis.

Fault lines are the cracks in our foundations that make our work cultures unstable. When we tolerate a lack of inclusivity or when practices elevate a specific type of employee or behaviors, working styles and even dress, it sends a signal that some may not be valued and therefore not protected. You don’t have to look further than agency leadership makeup and the male-oriented perks like beer taps and foosball tables to see this. If you’re a part of a community that experiences trauma in the outside world regularly, internal detectors go on high alert.

Earthquakes are those events that confirm our suspicions. Like real earthquakes, there are small tremors along with the unmissable ones. When agencies don’t fully trust the experience as described by a victim and instead protect the reputations of others, especially their high profile leaders and creative stars, they fail to understand that people who have experienced harm are the best detectors of traumatic events, not the other way around.

Finally, just as an earthquake can lead to more devastation in the form of a tsunami, trauma tends to build, not resolve. Whoever said “time heals all wounds,” didn’t understand how open-ended events take on additional gravity. Agencies may

want speedy and quiet resolutions, denying an employee the time and space to fully recover. For people who know about an event, there is dissatisfaction and distrust that people really matter. And it further emboldens bad actors who see how much of the status quo will be tolerated and defended.

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How the Racial Inferiority Myth Is Still Holding Back Black Employees

Despite corporate America’s decades of diversity and inclusion efforts and its stellar business case showing greater revenue, profitability and innovation, these efforts have failed rather spectacularly. When has a business practice, sponsored by powerful CEOs that results in more revenue, ever failed so colossally? And why is it happening?

Let’s acknowledge the stubborn role of racism and how the false racial inferiority narrative factors into employment decisions, or we have little hope of disrupting it and achieving our nation’s promise of equal employment and a just society.

Science-based theories of racial inferiority, created to justify slavery and oppression that was then codified into law and public policy, have long been scientifically discredited and, by most people’s beliefs, safely in the past. However, the racial inferiority narrative—the belief that Black people are not as intelligent or competent because of their race—lives on.

This reality is in stark display in the Nextions study where law partners found more errors and rated Black associates more poorly than white associates when evaluating identical work. The study shows that ingrained racist expectations are alive and operating today, undermining Black employees’ opportunities and success.

> *The goal is equity and an inclusive cultural environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.*

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White employees are assumed to be competent and are trusted to do their jobs effectively, whereas Black employees are unfairly deemed inept and often micromanaged.

For white workers, failure is also often considered a way

to grow, and they are allowed to use their mistakes as learning opportunities and teachable moments. When Black workers make an error, it reinforces the misconception that they were a risky hire, and often, a performance correction plan is not far behind. This only makes it harder for the next Black applicant since Black employees aren't seen as individuals but as representatives of their race.

The racial inferiority narrative additionally shows up when a company asserts that it is going to hire more Black employees, usually to be more in line with their representation in the population. When this occurs, companies frequently declare that they will hire qualified Blacks. If the company fails to use this qualifier, you can count on someone asking if the standards will be lowered. It is often said with no apparent awareness of the speaker's deep feelings of racial superiority.

Development and mentoring are often lacking for Black employees across the industry. When provided, it is informed by an unconscious superiority/inferiority framework, which is often invisible to the white manager.

While corporations can help dismantle structural bias in their management and HR processes, white individuals can stoke their curiosity and step into the discomfort of recognizing their power and prejudice, interrogate it and use their privilege to disrupt bias.

It starts with asking self-reflecting questions such as:

- Who do you turn to when assigning interesting projects?
- Who can persuade you to change your mind?
- Who do you make eye contact with in meetings?
- How many promotions have you given to white employees in comparison to Black employees?
- Do you mentor or sponsor your Black employees in a comparable manner to your white employees?

- Do you provide constructive, timely feedback to your Black employees? If not, why not?
- How would you feel if a Black employee were hired or promoted over you? Why?
- How many Black employees have you personally hired over your career?
- Have you ever stepped in and helped when you saw discrimination occur at work?
- Is it possible that, like in the Nextions study, you are evaluating your Black employees or colleagues more harshly and negatively than your white employees and colleagues?

These simple yet uncomfortable questions are necessary to address racism at work. While they can raise feelings of blame and defensiveness, that is not the goal and is ultimately unproductive. What is productive is the learning that comes from the inquiry and the change in behavior that can come once patterns are revealed. The goal is equity and an inclusive cultural environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

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How to Construct the Famous ‘P&G Memo’

Want to be a better strategic thinker? For most businesspeople, the time-tested P&G (Procter & Gamble) memo is a great place to start. At its core, the format of a classic P&G recommendation memo forces you to sequentially structure your thoughts, which in turn forces you to sequentially structure your communication. The clarity provided by this disciplined approach to thinking is invaluable, and its ability to help scrutinize ideas is unmatched.

Here's the variation I use to begin packaging my ideas to sell.

Overview

We start with a template. You can download your free copy here. It's a simple pre-formatted word processing document with spaces for each section. I read several of these memos daily, edit at least a few and most importantly, start every single product idea with a template just like this one. No matter how much I think I understand about what I want to do and why, I still take the time to write a document that will stand alone, without me there to explain or present the contents. This virtually ensures that I'll be able to communicate the idea when I have to "sell it" to someone else.

The idea

What are you proposing? Make it short. One sentence is best. Wordsmith this for a bit. If you work in a large organization, this will become the "hallway handle." (That's the way people passing in the hallway will refer to your project.)

Imagine the following: Two colleagues pass each other in the hallway, purposefully walking in opposite directions. They spot each other, and without stopping to chat, they begin a very short dialogue: "Hey Joe!" "Yo! John." "What are you working on?" "The XYZ project." "Yeah, I heard about that. That's awesome!"

Not every idea lends itself to a hallway handle, but if yours does, give it a great hallway handle as a title. It will stick.

Background (Sometimes labeled ‘Perspective’)

This section has two specific functions: It connects the idea(s) being presented to the prevailing brand or corporate strategy, and it sets up the problem that the recommendation will solve. Go deep here. This is the place where you will state your assumptions, cultural insights, product insights and market insights. What conditions have coalesced or converged that led to this recommendation?

This section comes with a warning: Be sure that any assumptions you make in the background section are axiomatic to your audience. If a reader of your memo disagrees with your assumptions, the recommendation will instantly die. If there are questions about certain conditions—there usually are, and should be—add a bullet in the Next Steps section that outlines the research you will do to get the required data. If you think you must make an assumption that is questionable, the memo has done its job. Rethink the foundational ideas upon which your recommendation is based. In success, all readers will immediately agree with the background and understand why your recommendation needs to be considered.

How it works (Sometimes labeled ‘Recommendation’)

This is where you put the details of your recommendation or idea. Start with how. Then support it with what, who, when and where.

There is some mythology about P&G memos being “one page.” Ignore this. You are going to write a two- to four-pager, and there is no limit on the size or amount of supporting documentation. However, as this memo matures (and it will be rewritten dozens of times), it will get shorter and tighter. The best practices final memos I’ve seen are usually two-ish

pages in length with a few pages of supporting exhibits (such as spreadsheets, graphics or videos).

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What Chadwick Boseman and Bruce Lee Taught Us About Work and Purpose

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Voice search SEO guide: Trends and best practices

30-second summary:

- An optimized content and voice search SEO is crucial to rank higher in search engines.
- Long-tail keywords are the backbone of voice searches.
- Mobile optimization goes hand-in-hand with voice search optimization.
- FAQ sections are your best friend.

Voice search is fast gaining popularity among online users. It is easier, faster, and more conversational as compared to traditional search.

As per ComScore, by 2020, 50% of all searches will be voice searches. Google also reports that 27% of online users are using voice search on mobile globally.

But to make it work, you will require optimized content and focus on voice search SEO. In this article, we will be digging into the eight best practices of optimizing just that.

Before that, what exactly is voice search SEO?

In simple terms, voice search SEO is a technique that optimizes the content, phrases, keywords, metadata, and more to enable your voice search to rank on top whenever a user asks questions. It mainly focuses on the natural language of users and delivers them answers accordingly.

The new 2020 voice search trends

1. Smart speakers are driving voice search adoption

As per emarketer, smart speaker usage is estimated to grow at a compound yearly growth rate of approximately 48% to meet the demands of more than 76 million users by 2020.

And it is said that 40 million Americans currently possess a smart speaker. Clearly, more and more households are using smart speakers these days.

Earlier, only a handful of products such as Alexa and Siri were popular. But over the years, voice technology has improved tremendously. As a result, many tech companies are

releasing their own smart speakers.

2. Improvement in voice AI and machine learning (ML)

There is a remarkable improvement in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), and it has changed how users interact with their smart devices and search the internet.

For instance, with Google’s RankBrain, you can recognize words and phrases to predict forecast results more accurately. When it encounters a new phrase, it makes its best guess and gives answers accordingly.

3. Used to search for local products and services

People are increasingly using voice search to search for local products and services. According to statistics, 58% of people have used voice search while finding information about a local business.

Also, as per Google reports, searches for “near me” business has increased drastically over the last few years. It is indeed great news for local businesses.

4. Increase in popularity of voice SEO

To emerge at the top, marketers are regularly fine-tuning their SEO strategy to optimize for voice search. Considering that Google’s voice recognition has 95% accuracy, businesses wanting to attract more inbound traffic to their site have to implement voice SEO.

And Google alone is not working on perfecting voice recognition to make the most of voice search. China’s iFlytek speech recognition system has an accuracy rate of 98%, and the team is working to achieve 99% accuracy.

5. Voice search is more mobile than ever

Google’s voice search is now available in more than 100 languages on mobile devices.

Moreover, statistics suggest that mobile phones are used nearly 40% more than smart speakers for voice search.

And with mobile phones, people usually use voice search in different environments like at the office alone, at a restaurant, at a party, or any other location.

This trend of voice search on smartphones continues to rise – all thanks to advances in speech recognition technology.

Here are some best practices to optimize voice search SEO

1. Use long-tail keywords

Long-tail keywords are specific keywords that your target audience is likely to enter (and in this case speak) to the search engine.

People have been using long-tail keywords for a long time and seeing brilliant results with their search rankings.

Thus, it’s a great idea to use long-tail keywords to optimize voice search for a website.

In fact, according to statistics, they make up 70% of all web searches.

In voice search, you can add long-tail keywords in a more conversational tone and specify what users are looking for.

The good news is that you can use plenty of online tools to search for relevant phrases and add them to your content. Some of them include:

- Ubersuggest
- SEMrush
- HubSpot Content Strategy Tool

2. Implement schema markup

Also known as Structured Data, Schema Markup is a code that you can add to your website. It will allow search engines to

understand your site’s content, what it means, and why it is there.

Schema Markup can also help search engines robots crawl and make it rank higher on search engines. Further, you can use it for improving and getting comprehensive search results that boost the user experience.

Just have a look at the example below

The second search result has a star rating and a publication date, which has been added using Schema Markup. Since the result is illustrated, the users are likely to click on it readily.

You can also implement schema markup SEO best practices to provide more information about your site to the search engines and rank higher.

3. Curate content that gives direct answers

Users don’t do voice search like they do a text search. Instead, they will probably be making longer and more specific queries.

As per research, there has been a 61% growth in question keyphrases.

The statistics reveal how people are using question keywords to ask queries through voice search.

Thus, it’s an excellent idea to curate your content to answer their queries. However, make sure that you write great content that is valuable to your target audience. It will satisfy your user and, at the same time, increase the chances of appearing in featured snippets.

4. Optimize your Google My Business page

Another way to rank higher for voice searches is to optimize your Google My Business page.

Actually, it’s one of the easiest ways to get discovered by your target audience when they voice out their queries in Google. You just have to make sure that your content, images, and information are complete and precise.

Additionally, implement your prevailing local SEO strategy along with targeting how users are phrasing their queries. As per reports, 76% of smart speaker-users carry out local searches at least once a week. Thus, local SEO is as crucial as entering relevant info and images.

5. Work on increasing domain authority

Websites with many links pointing to them rank higher in regular search. And it is the same for voice search.

A study by Brian Dean, which examined 10,000 Google Home search results, found that sites with more links rank more often in voice search.

As soon as you put in your voice query, the Google search engine will provide results from high authority websites.

Here are some of the ways to increase your domain authority to rank higher in voice search:

6. Make your site mobile-optimized

Everyone surfs the internet via smartphones these days since it’s convenient and accessible. It is only evident that most users will do their voice search from mobile.

The graph below shows the different environments where people use voice search.

Since voice searches are mostly done via mobile phones, mobile optimization is crucial.

Some useful tips for mobile-optimization site include:

- Optimizing your mobile pages with AMP
- Checking your site’s speed using GTMetrix and working to boost it
- Creating mobile-responsive web pages
- Taking advantage of responsive landing page builders
- Creating content to be more readable on smartphones
- Regularly testing your website with Google’s mobile-friendly test tool

7. Optimize site speed

Your page speed is going to play a significant role in voice search SEO. Studies show that the pages that rank higher in search engines after doing a voice search load in 4.6 seconds. They are also 52% faster compared to average pages.

Thus, optimizing your site speed is essential if you want to rank higher in search engines.

To increase your page speed, you can implement tricks like:

8. Create voice search FAQ pages

Crafting voice search FAQ pages will benefit you a lot since question keywords are very popular.

According to statistics, voice search results come more from FAQ pages than desktops.

The best part is that FAQ pages can rank for several voice search queries. Moreover, they are concise and answer precisely what the users are looking for.

Therefore, Google usually pulls out the answer from your FAQ page whenever users do a voice search.

Wrapping up

Voice search is convenient and straightforward to use. No wonder it is gaining popularity among online users. But unless you optimize your voice search for SEO, users won’t be able to find your content.

Implementing all the eight tips mentioned in this article to optimize your site for voice search SEO can help you a great deal. These are tried and tested tips and will definitely work.

Plus, when you optimize your site for voice search SEO, you will be optimizing your website in general and rank higher in search engines either way.

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More about:

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