The new YMYL guidelines and what this means for marketers

30-second summary:

- Your money or your life (YMYL) guidance has been updated to give more clarity on what Google is looking for within its quality rater guidelines
- Focusing on reputation, both of the person creating the main content and the website hosting the main content, is key
- YMYL trust isn’t just built on-site, off-site digital PR and link acquisition can also play a key role in building trust
- Google also helped to clarify which websites/content might fall into the YMYL categories and how this is defined
- E-A-T continues to play an important role across the board, alongside matching user intent and purpose and creating great, reputable content for users

In late July, Google updated its Page Quality Rater Guidelines. It does this from time to time to reinforce the key principles that it looks for when evaluating the quality of a page. While Google has held the concept of expertise, authority and trust close to the center of these guidelines for a long time, one of the major changes or updates was related to the definition of “Your Money or Your Life”

websites. There was also more insight into how these pages are rated, which is ideal for anyone working in these sectors looking to better understand how Google rates their websites.

The concept of Google having very high Page Quality rating guidelines for ‘Your Money or Your Life’ (YMYL) websites isn’t new, but the definition of what falls into this category has changed. Previously the definition covered “pages (which) could potentially impact the future happiness, health, financial stability, or safety of users.” This has been updated to cover “pages (which) have a high risk of harm because content about these topics could significantly impact the health, financial stability, or safety of people, or the welfare or well-being of society.” This is a much broader scope of websites with potentially a much more significant impact.

As such, for many SEOs this means re-examining the guidance to ensure that our websites are ready for potentially enhanced scrutiny.

So what are the new guidelines and what does it mean?

The new guidelines for YMYL go much further than just the definition update above. They actually go into detail around how a particular topic could and couldn’t fall into the YMYL categorization, Google has even put it in a handy table for us so we can clearly understand:

Source: Google Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines

It’s also not just YMYL categories that have seen the updates, but many elements that go into rating YMYL pages. Along with enhancements to key E-A-T definitions and what Google is looking for, we can also see key updates to sections that focus on “low-quality pages” or what we should try to avoid. As marketers, we’ve never had so much information available to us about what Google is looking for in a quality website. This means that Google is likely to be getting very serious about its Page Quality Rater Guidelines and as SEOs, we should be too.

Content is as important as ever

Content will already be at the forefront of many SEO minds given that Google's "Helpful Content" update has already started rolling out. Additionally, the updates to the YMYL guidance have demonstrated that your on-site content is a key contributor to how the pages are evaluated for expertise, quality, and authority.

Google highlights in section 4.2 that the "quality of the MC is one of the most important criteria in Page Quality rating." So we know that the main content on the website is something Google is looking at with close scrutiny, especially if your website falls into that YMYL category. Having a reasonable amount of good quality main content plays a key role in this, but so do the page's functionality and features. Don't just rest at making sure your content is great, ensure that any features on the website such as calculators, checkouts, and interactivity are also created to a high standard.

Content that falls into YMYL sectors is, of course, held here to a higher standard. Google gives the example that, "high E-A-T medical advice or information should be written or produced in a professional style and should be edited, reviewed and updated, on a regular basis."

If you find yourself in a YMYL category, then regularly updating, reviewing, and editing your content to ensure that it's up to date will play a role here.

Enhancing key E-A-T signals

For most businesses refreshing your 'About Us' page might seem like the most unimportant task, but when you are trying to tell users about who you are, showcase your expertise and give users that sense of trust and security, this can actually be one of the most important elements of your website. In section

2.5.3 of the guidelines, Google highlights that this can be one area of your website where raters go to find information about who owns the site, which can be a key element of establishing a good reputation.

Your reviews also fall into this category and that's not just reviews on your own website, but also reviews on external sources. In fact – the word "reviews" is mentioned 66 times in the guidelines alone. While reviews on your own website are important and it's definitely worth promoting these, one tip I picked up from the guidelines (section 2.6.4) is to do a quick reputation search. You can then evaluate if there are any other external website reviews or reputation signals that you need to be aware of. You can do this by using a negative site search i.e. for Google you would use [google -site:google.com] which would search for the term "Google" on all sites except google.com. Doing this for your business can help identify how others may view your reputation.

Reputation matters

Two of the five most important factors in Page Quality Rating relate to reputation and information; that is, information about who is responsible for the main content and the reputation of that person and the website itself..-We knew from the Medic Update that authoring and author profiles have grown in importance, and as the guidelines now turn to focus on the reputation of both the websites and the authors, this has become an even more important facet of showcasing your expertise and authority.

In sections 2.6 and 2.6.1 of the updated guidelines, Google talks about reputation research around both the user and the website which has provided the main content. It also talks about the type of reputation information that is available and how applicable it is within certain industries, for example, how applicable product reviews would be in the finance sector.

It’s clear that building strong reputation information that is relevant to your brand/industry would add value here.

Finally, for websites that are smaller or perhaps don’t have a huge amount of visible reputation information, Google does state that “this is not indicative of positive or negative reputation… for these smaller businesses and organizations, lack of reputation should not be considered an indication of low page quality.”

Trust is built on-site and off-site

Trust and authority are two of the key elements which go into rating a page’s quality and these are key for great YMYL. However, this doesn’t just come down to content and updates on the site, it’s also very much about what is available off-site. Digital PR has seen unprecedented growth in recent years as a great way of growing a website’s reputation as well as building high-quality, authoritative backlinks back to a website.

Whether it’s looking for reputation information or key signals about your brand, one of the biggest places people are searching is on websites that aren’t yours. That’s where digital PR can have the biggest impact on improving your reputation, expertise, and overall authority. Digital PR can help to build your website and your author reputation by sharing thought leadership or data expertise. This is a great way to build up these core YMYL factors while also gaining great coverage for your brand.

Keeping the user in mind

Regardless of whether you are looking to devise a digital PR strategy, improve your on-site content or make changes to the structure of your website, with the new guideline updates and YMYL changes, it’s clear that Google wants to see and

understand the reputation of your website and its content creators.

Keeping these elements and the user in mind will help to ensure that you're creating a great user experience that naturally demonstrates expertise, authority, trust, and any other signals that Google is looking for. As Google continues to improve and update its guidelines, this will become more important than ever.

Amanda Walls is the founder and Director of Cedarwood Digital, an award-winning Digital Marketing agency specializing in SEO, PPC, and Digital PR.

With 12 years of Digital Marketing experience under her belt, Amanda founded the business six years ago which was recently named the UK Small Ecommerce Agency of the year in 2021.

An expert in all things digital, Amanda has worked as a trainer for Google's Digital Garage in the North West and has delivered digital marketing training to thousands of marketers across the region.

Subscribe to the Search Engine Watch newsletter for insights on SEO, the search landscape, search marketing, digital marketing, leadership, podcasts, and more.

Join the conversation with us on LinkedIn and Twitter.

More about:

https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2022/09/08/the-new-ymyl-guidelines-and-what-this-means-for-marketers/