The real-time SEO shift: Research, ranking and recommendations

Evolving consumer expectations driven by the breakneck speed of technological advancements are pushing marketing teams to the brink. Companies of all sizes strive to become "data-driven," but few are doing so successfully – in fact, 72% of C-level technology and business leaders with some of the world's largest brands recently reported that they have not yet been able to forge a data culture [pdf] within their organizations. What's more, 53% said they aren't even treating their data as a business asset.

SEOs have perhaps been able to realize and capitalize on the opportunities consumer data offers better than most, given how fundamental clean data is to success in search. However, consumers' voracious appetite for content is generating many touchpoints across any number of devices and platforms – and a massive amount of data, as a result.

Consumers expect that data to be deployed immediately, to meet their needs; 63% expect personalization as a standard of service and believe they are recognized as an individual when sent special offers. Today's SEO needs to understand the customer journey as it is happening and be able to adapt in real-time, optimizing content out of the gate. It's an impossible pursuit with the technology necessary to activate data across the SEO lifecycle.

It's time to get real, with real-time SEO that incorporates consumer data, your understanding of the buyer's journey, and Google's dynamic and visual search landscape. Here are three areas you need to focus your efforts.

Research intelligently in real-time and optimize with speed

Data has become the currency that drives competitive advantage, but point solutions are causing chaos and confusion for brands. Data silos have resulted in massive quantities of static data lacking in quality and actionability. Brands are unable to extract the value of this data, despite significant investments in technology.

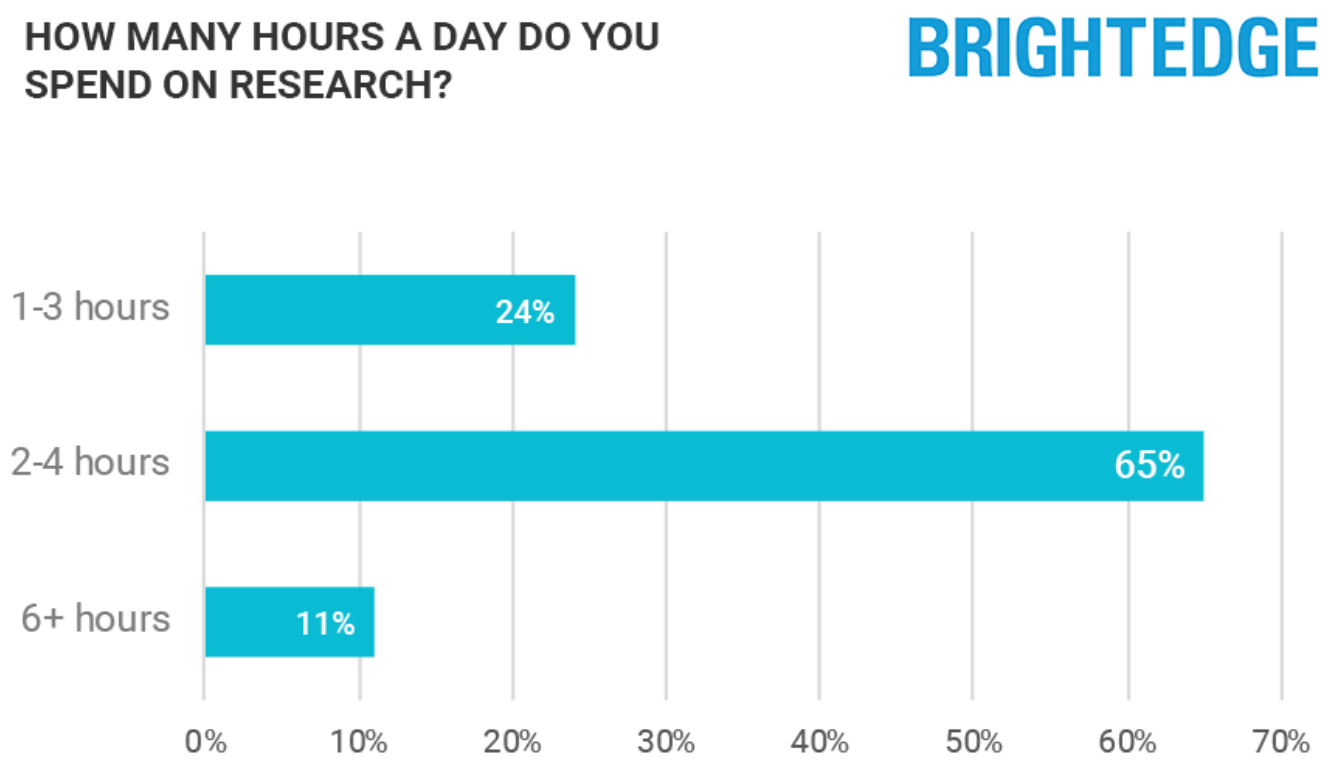
SEOs can help drive the change that needs to happen by focusing first on improving workflow and operational efficiency. Your technology must be intelligent, to recognize optimization opportunities, the very moment they arise – and to act, creating the customer experiences your prospects crave.

The way SEO has been done since its inception looks something like this…

A category manager for a retailer approaches your team requesting a report on the current season, and recommendations on how to optimize for the upcoming one. As the head of SEO, you report on last month's trends. You provide an overall report on rank, keyword volume, keyword trends, keyword ideas and recommendations. It's a multi-step, arduous, time-consuming process which utilizes numerous tools and Excel analysis – and still, you're presenting historic data and making recommendations based on previous performance.

According to BrightEdge market research, typical organic search practitioner uses an average of six tools and can spend up to four hours a day on research, reporting and analysis. In the past, it was difficult for search marketers to truly understand the customer journey as it happens and maximize revenue. But today, the real-time SEO shift allows SEOs to provide real-time recommendations with real-time data, driving

even more revenue to their organization.



Point solutions are valuable depending on your business type, but for large enterprises unnecessarily complex and time-consuming. They are not scalable. They limit your reach. Marketers need to embrace automation to maximize SEO performance, but the quality of the solution will make or break your campaigns. Site audits, competition research, rankings monitoring and analysis and more are made both efficient and effective with automation. Today, you can have access to real-time, on-demand data which empowers you to ask specific questions and discover quantitative, data-driven answers with rapid speed, ease and accuracy.

For large enterprises and global marketers:

- Utilize platforms to automate these tasks and make good use of the data when it is coming from multiple sources and in various formats.
- Use intelligent automation to schedule tasks, analyze and activate data, and even perform optimizations in

real-time.
- Utilize real-time research to answer questions and uncover opportunities as they happen.

Make voice a reality

Know that consumers looking for instant answers to their needs are more and more often searching hands-free. Gartner predicted some years ago that by 2020, consumers would be performing 30% of searches by voice – and we are almost there. It is critical though that the results consumers are finding via voice search and relevant and trustworthy. Research from Higher Visibility suggests that consumer confidence in voice search results fell from 2017 to 2018.

As an industry, we've been talking about voice, but no one is doing anything about it. Even so, SEOs at large organizations are expected to have a voice search strategy and understand the conversations that are happening in the market.

The challenge is that conversational queries change so fast that it's near-instantaneous. When strategizing for voice, the SEO must understand the conversational journey as well as the next three follow-up questions someone is going to ask. Your current strategy may involve wading through a list of keywords from keyword planner manually looking for conversational searches, or turning to a point solution with display-only capabilities and lacking in search volume, as it's completely disconnected from your SEO workflow.

A data-driven approach to voice means understanding conversations *as they are happening in your space*. SEOs need technology to help identify top-of-funnel, awareness-generating question keywords with search volume and to analyze the keyword landscape. Understand which portion of your keywords are quick answers, and which percentage you are winning. Listings and business data accuracy are crucial in both regular and voice search. In every result it brings back,

Google aims to provide users the best solution to their problem.

Making it happen:

- Enable voice search on your site by incorporating speech recognition. In doing so, you can extend the hands-free functionality that brought a consumer from search to your website as they continue their journey with you.
- Make sure that your content is optimized, structured, and marked up properly to show Google you are the best answer – and then to deliver on that promise to searchers with top quality content, whether the query was text or voice-based.

Improve local rankings on a global scale

Large organizations need to be able to rank on any search engine or device, and often across countries, languages and regions. Local search is a critical facet of the overall experience you provide your customers. However, there is a scalability problem. You may have different inventory and content in the various regions in which you operate and as an SEO, need to understand location for every part of your business worldwide. For organizations with thousands of locations worldwide, it’s impossible to accurately research and report on keyword performance in each of your key markets if you are trying to manage it manually, or with disparate tools.

Google is constantly testing and launching new features in the SERPs. It’s not a static space, and you cannot afford to sit still. Use automation to regularly analyze your search presence, as well as that of your most important competitors. Ensure that you have properly formatted, optimized and marked up content in place to take advantage of new SERPs features.

Don’t forget: YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world, and it’s a great discovery and engagement tool for brands. Consumers increasingly turn to YouTube as part of their shopping process. According to Google, 80% of shoppers who watched a YouTube video related to a planned purchase did so at the start of their shopping purchase. Once your brand videos are published, they are live, and the goal is immediate engagement and traction. Marketers need to be set up to measure their video performance and rankings in real-time.

Make it happen:

- If you cannot understand how you’re ranking for any keyword in real-time, on a global level on the most popular local search engines, your technology is not supporting your SEO needs.
- Over 80% of Google search queries return universal results. Properly mark up your content to trigger these enhanced results and increase your visibility in the SERPs.
- Make sure that video optimization and performance tracking are part of your SEO platform.

Tanu Javeri, Global SEO Strategist at IBM, advises that, “Responding to changes in the customer journey with speed and agility begins with identifying and understanding even the most subtle shifts in search patterns in real-time and optimizing accordingly.”

SEOs cannot afford to stand still. You have a real opportunity right now to emerge as leaders in the race to realize and maximize the value of organizational and customer data. Today, you need to be in a position not only to respond but to anticipate searcher needs and have technology in place to trigger the optimizations to deliver the experience your customers expect – in real time, every time.

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About The Author



Jim Yu is the founder and CEO of BrightEdge, the leading enterprise content performance platform. He combines in-depth expertise in developing and marketing large on-demand software platforms with hands-on experience in advanced search, content and digital marketing practices.
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