Voice search optimization: The why and how

Voice search optimization is a hot topic in the digital marketing industry. A few years ago, voice search seemed like a far fetched idea that was limited to some science fiction movies. But today, its popularity is increasing day by day.

If you're a Star Trek fan, you would definitely recall the scenes when actors used to speak to computers for answers. It all looked like something that would never come into existence. Yet here we are.

Today, voice search has become so common that, according to Google, it is the fastest-growing form of online search.

So what does this new search trend mean to marketers and business owners? Why should business owners focus on building voice-search-optimized websites? Let's see.

Whitepaper

The rise of voice search in numbers

Voice search basically allows users to say their queries out loud rather than typing them into the search box to get the results.

The speech-recognition technology precisely understands what users are saying and then delivers the best-matching results orally.

Reports estimate that about 41% of adults perform at least one voice search every day. According to ComScore, 50% of the total searches will be voice searches by 2020.

Let’s check out some of the critical voice search statistics:

- 61% of 25-64 and 57% of 18-24 age groups say they’ll use voice search more actively in future (PwC Research)
- Almost one-third of 3.5 billion searches performed on Google every day are voice searches (TheeDesign Research)
- More than 30% of the web browsing will be done without a screen by 2020 (Gartner)
- 55% of households will own smart speaker devices by 2022 (OC&C Strategy Consultants)
- More than 53% of smart speaker owners say that it feels natural talking to smart devices (Google)

Well, stats don’t lie. It is quite clear that consumers are getting more and more familiar with voice search and using it for day-to-day online searches.

Google Now, Alexa from Amazon, Siri from Apple, and Cortana from Microsoft are some of the major trendsetters in the voice search. Considering the increasing popularity, Google and other tech giants are investing heavily in voice-operated digital assistants.

How voice search impacts your website’s ranking?

So how does voice search affect your rankings (and ultimately the business bottom line)?

You see searchers want faster answers to their queries, and Google heavily values user experience.

Voice search improves user experience by delivering faster and more accurate search results at convenience. This is the main reason why Google has started really emphasizing voice search optimization.

Although the search engine giant hasn’t officially confirmed it yet, it’s just a matter of time until Google adds voice search to their algorithm, and starts prioritizing websites that incorporate the voice technology.

The role of SEO and voice search optimization

The primary goal of SEO is to rank a website for specific search terms so that users can get the best information as fast as possible. However, you need to understand that voice search SEO and conventional SEO are quite different.

Optimizing your website and content for voice search can help you increase your website’s visibility and credibility. This ultimately improves your website’s ranking and traffic through Google.

How to optimize your website for voice search?

Users who perform voice searches typically want to complete a particular action such as playing a song, finding a restaurant, or finding information on a specific subject.

When people use voice search on mobile, Google will only deliver one top result. This top result is known as “position zero” or “featured snippet” or “answer box”.

Reports estimate that half of the searches will be voice searches. It means that roughly 50% of your potential customers won’t be able to see your website even if you’re ranking in the third or fourth position.

The solution here is to rank for number one and secure position zero.

How to secure position zero, so your website appears in voice search results? Here’s how. But, before we start, here’s a pro tip for you.

Pro-Tip

In addition to the tips mentioned below, here’s an alternative way you can try to feature in the answer box.

It’s lately noticed that Google favors websites that provide interactive web tools such as BMI calculators, recipe guides, price estimators, etc to the users. If you’re an enterprise business, you can develop an interactive web app for your corporate website to increase your chances of hitting the answer box.

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1. Implement Structured Data

Structured data or schema markup is one of the ranking factors used by Google search algorithm to determine the relevancy and position of a page in the search results.

It’s a code or metadata that’s added to the website’s source code. This code helps search engines better understand your

content and classify it accordingly.

It also gives you more control over how you provide specific blocks of information to search engines and how machines interpret it.

Implementing structured data doesn’t guarantee top ranking, but it gives you a competitive advantage for sure. It increases your chances of getting into the answer box or featured snippet, and thus in voice search results.

Here’s an example of how a rich snippet looks like. The highlighted sections of the search are automatically picked up by Google with the help of schema and shown in the search results.

How do you implement structured data? If you’re using WordPress, search for “schema” plugins, and you’ll see hundreds of plugins that enable structured data functionality in WordPress.

You can also implement structured data manually on your website using specific schemas from the schema.org library.

2. Improve the page speed

You might find this tip in almost every SEO guide out there.

Page speed is one of the most significant ranking factors. It decides whether or not your page will rank in the top search results.

If you want to rank for position zero and appear into the voice search results, you need to ensure that your website loads quickly.

People use voice search to get faster results; thus, Google gives high importance to page speed when it comes to voice search.

Use Google’s PageSpeed Insights tool to check your website’s loading time. The best thing about this tool is that it gives numerous suggestions on how to improve the page speed.

Make sure you

- Minify HTML & CSS
- Prioritize visible content
- Optimize images
- Remove unwanted theme elements and plugins
- Enable data compression
- Implement browser caching

One way to drastically increase your mobile website speed is by implementing an AMP (Accelerated Mobile Pages) feature. It helps your mobile pages to load instantly by pulling only a few necessary blocks of content.

3. Understand the user’s search intent

Optimizing your content around user intent is crucial for ranking high in voice search results.

You need to understand whether people are looking to buy something or want some information when they type in a search query. User intent or search intent helps you understand why the person typed a specific question in the search engine.

The user intent is often clearly expressed in queries using words such as “price,” “buy,” “download,” “how to,” “what is,” and so on. Other times, the intent is not clearly expressed at all.

But, thanks to the Hummingbird update, Google can now find out the context behind a search query and then deliver the best matching results.

For example, when a user searches for “Oscar winners,” he/she is most likely interested in the latest award ceremony, not

the one that happened ten years back. Google understands this context and ranks the websites that provide information about the most recent award ceremony and news from the latest Oscars.

Therefore it’s crucial to structurize your content around the user intent. It increases the relevancy of your page for specific search queries.

So how do you write and optimize your content around user intent? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you provide the most accurate and immediate answer?
- Is the answer structured in a proper format?
- Is the content on your website easily accessible by Google?
- Is your website credible enough?

If you work towards the outcome of the above questions, it might help you increase your chances of getting into the answer box for specific search terms.

4. Target long-tail keywords in the content

Long-tail keywords are quite specific in nature. As the name suggests, these are the search terms and phrases that are longer than a typical search query.

People act like they’re talking to real humans when they perform a voice search. They’ll naturally ask longer questions rather than short keywords. For example, while typing a search query, a person might use highly relevant words and enter something like – “best pizza in NYC”

Whereas to perform the same search using voice, a person might ask – “Hey Siri (or Ok Google), where can I eat the best pizza?”

Therefore, it’s important to find out and use the conversational search terms that people would use while speaking. You need to treat these terms as the long-tail keywords and incorporate them into your content.

You can use tools like Answer the Public or KeywordTool.io to find out long-tail search terms and questions.

Targeting long-tail keywords is one of the effective strategies for voice search optimization.

The fun fact is that 70% of all search queries are long-tail, yet the majority of the sites tend to overlook these keywords while chasing shorter and more competitive search terms. Long-tail keywords are less competitive, yet they are equally important.

Again, make sure you answer the searcher’s question as accurate and direct as possible. You can create H2 or H3 headings of the questions (long-tail search terms) and provide answers in the body text.

To wrap up

Voice search is slowly becoming mainstream. People have already started using it, and more will join this trend soon.

The potential of voice search is yet to be fully uncovered.

There are many ways marketers and business owners can take advantage of voice search, build and optimize a voice-friendly website, and drive traffic and increase sales. Whatever you do, make sure that voice search is included in your SEO and website campaigns going forward.

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