What impact will voice search have on SEO in 2020?

With every year seeing new technological developments that shift the boundaries of business, working to take advantage of the new opportunities can be a challenge in digital marketing. One of these transformations in the market has been caused by the widespread adoption of voice search technology and its effects on internet usage.

As a consequence, this has had an impact on search engine optimization, where following SEO best practices is essential for most businesses in the current era. Internet voice search could be set to disrupt SEO conventions, so businesses would be well-advised to stay informed of the changes and plan accordingly.

The rise of voice technology

The introduction of IBM's Watson in 2010 paved the way for voice technology devices. Watson is a powerful voice recognition question-answer computer system that stunned the world as a super-intelligent, thinking, and speaking robot that was able to beat Trivia grandmasters on the TV quiz show, 'Jeopardy'. In the following year, Google launched its Voice Search and Apple released Siri for the iPhone 4S, the first digital personal assistant.

This was followed in 2014 by Cortana from Microsoft and Amazon

Echo, a voice speaker powered by the personal assistant, Alexa. Google Assistant was launched in 2016, as well as the smart speaker Google Home. Initial figures showed Amazon Alexa to be leading the market, though Google Home is forecast to take the lead by 2020. Other prominent digital assistants on the global stage include Alice from Yandex, and AliGenie from Alibaba.

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Voice recognition technology has significantly improved since its inception. Google claims 95 percent accuracy, while the Chinese iFlytek speech recognition system has an accuracy of 98%.

Voice technology has also spread to devices that fall under the umbrella term, the Internet of Things (IoT), such as a smart TV, a smart thermostat or a home kit. While it may be possible, internet voice search doesn’t have direct applications for most of these devices yet, and by far the greatest share of searches are currently made on either a smartphone or a smart speaker.

Twenty percent of queries on Google’s mobile app and Android devices are made with voice, while 31% of smartphone users use voice at least once a week, according to Statistica.

Media analytics firm Comscore predicts that half of all online searches will be made through voice by 2020, while Gartner predicts that in the same year, 30% of online searches will be made on devices without a screen. This suggests an enormous rise in voice search, as well as the increased adoption of smart speakers. Earlier this year, Juniper Research predicted that 3.25 billion voice assistants were in use – a figure they forecast to reach eight billion by 2023.

The effects of voice on SEO

Voice is, therefore, transforming our approaches to technology and the internet, but what impact is it having on search engine optimization?

Natural language

With improved and reliable voice recognition systems, voice technology is well adapted to follow everyday language use, so users can give commands as if they were speaking to a human. For any areas of potential confusion, emerging technologies are seeking to improve the user experience. The 2018 Internet Trends Report by venture capitalist and internet trends specialist, Mary Meeker, found that 70% of English language voice searches were made in natural or conversational language.

Keyword length

Spoken language usually isn’t as concise as the written word, so queries will be longer than the three or four keyword searches more common to graphical user interfaces (GUI). Voice searches currently average 29 words in length, according to Backlinko. SEO strategists will need to adjust by using more long-tail keywords, with the added benefit that the longer the keyword phrases are, the higher the probability of conversion.

Source: Neilpatel.com

Question words

Voice searches will more frequently include the question words who, which, when, where, and how, that are usually omitted in written searches. Marketers need to ensure content can deliver accurate and relevant answers to voice search queries, and distinguish between simple questions and those that require more comprehensive answers. Queries that can be answered with very short responses typically won’t generate traffic to a website because Google will often provide the required information via featured search snippets.

According to SeoClarity, 20% of voice searches are triggered by just 25 keywords. These include question words and other commonly used verbs, such as make, do and can, as well as key nouns and adjectives, including a recipe, new, easy, types and home. These can be worked into SEO strategies, and question-form queries can show user intent to a higher degree. Marketers are therefore able to optimize content according to questions of a higher value.

Source: Brightlocal.com

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Semantic search

As opposed to lexical searches that look for literal matches of keywords, semantic searches attempt to find the user’s intended meaning within the context of the terms used. This understanding can be aided by user search history, global search history, the location of the user and keyword spelling variations.

Google’s RankBrain is an artificial intelligence system designed to recognize words and phrases in order to improve internet search outcomes. This independent thinking quality of RankBrain helps it take query handling to a more sophisticated level. Hummingbird is another Google technology that helps natural language queries. It helps search result pages be more relevant based on context and intent, causing relevant pages to rank higher.

Local search

Voice technology has brought an increased emphasis on the use of local search. Consumers are three times more likely to search locally when searching by voice. Research carried out over the last year shows that 58% of consumers find local businesses using voice search, and 46 percent use voice technology to find information on local businesses daily. Marketing strategies should account for this change and optimize for “near me” queries.

SERPs

Around 75% of voice search results will rank in the top three positions in search engine results pages (SERPs). Most voice searches are answered by Rich Answer Boxes shown at the top of results pages. Featured snippets are included in 30 percent of Google queries. These are extracts from any website on the first page of SERPs, and brands are given credit in voice search as well as usual GUI searches. Brands only need to be on the first page to be used in featured snippets, rather than position zero.

Ecommerce

Ecommerce is especially impacted by voice, as consumers are much more likely to use voice to make purchases. Sixty-two percent of voice speaker owners have made purchases through their virtual assistant, and 40 percent of millennials use

voice assistants before making online purchases. Digital assistants – and the best ways to optimize for them – should, therefore, be a priority for online retailers.

Adapting to voice search

With voice technology impacting SEO in various ways, here are a few recommended steps brands can take to adapt accordingly.

1. Google Voice prioritizes quick-loading websites, so brands should ensure images are optimized, files are compressed, response time is reduced, and the site is fully responsive.
2. Content should be optimized with long-tail keywords that reflect popular queries used in voice search. Focus on natural language.
3. Featured snippets are summary answers from web pages that may be used in position zero. To optimize content for this, include identifiable extracts to be featured and make content easier for Google to read by using H-tags and bullet points.
4. Structured data and schema markup provide more information about a brand and drive traffic. They help pages appear in rich snippets, which will increase the chances of being the first result delivered in voice searches.
5. Local information for your brand should be provided to meet the increased search volume for local businesses with voice – using Google My Business will help.
6. Increasing domain authority will help with search rankings – this can be improved by including high-quality links.

The impact of voice technology on SEO is certain. Given the huge rise in the adoption and use of voice, the impact on businesses will be considerable. Those brands that can anticipate and stay ahead of the changes before they happen

will surely reap the benefits in years to come.

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d
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“Semantics” refers to the concepts or ideas conveyed by words, and semantic analys

is is making any topic (or search query) easy for a machine to understand.

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