What Is Search Engine Optimization in 2018 by @MrDannyGoodwin

Search engine optimization (SEO), according to our definition, is:

> *The process of optimizing a website – as well as all the content on that website – so it will appear in prominent positions in the organic results of search engines. SEO requires an understanding of how search engines work, what people search for, and why and how people search. Successful SEO makes a site appealing to users and search engines. It is a combination of technical and marketing.*

But there is no single definition of SEO.

That's why I reached out to more than 60 SEO experts and asked them how they would define what search engine optimization is now.

All of their answers and perspectives are unique – and not one of these definitions of SEO is wrong.

Here's how these SEO professionals say we should answer the question, "what is SEO?" in 2018.

Benj Arriola / SEO Director, Myers Media Group

Google continuously develops and improves upon their algorithm to create a sophisticated machine that learns as it grows; the more it learns, the less humans can comprehend. Over the years, SEO strategies have evolved in attempts to keep pace with Google's algorithm changes and updates with the use of

machine learning and data science, and this is SEO in 2018.

Yet some things never change, one factor remains constant: Google has always focused on quality, beneficial content that users love to read, watch, listen to, and share. With quality content that benefits the user as a focal point in Google's ranking algorithm, it is imperative to also make that the priority of the SEO when producing content.

Loren Baker / Founder, Search Engine Journal

SEO is the encompassing definition of putting together a three-part strategy which includes:

- The ongoing tehnical optimization of a website to make sure that Google is able to properly read and index the pages which are meant for Google, its desktop and mobile rankings, and other engines. Also, it's ongoing innovation for search and consumer usability via solutions like AMP, Schema, and rich snippets.
- The inclusion of content on the transactional, informational, and publishing level on websites so consumers and engines can easily define a page or section of the site, its importance and relevance to natural search queries and subject matter. Navigation is a part of content strategy, so interlinking plays a big part here.
- The ability to promote content which is shareable and supports the above mentioned SEO goals. Sharing content via outreach, PR, link building, and amplification initiatives lead to signals from authority sites in the same topical neighborhood of the site being optimized, which in simple terms means you get great links that Google loves.

Aleh Barysevich / Founder & CMO, Link Assistant

SEO today is about making the right choices based on tons of accurate SEO data, the latest Google trends, and common sense. Simple but not easy!

There's also this tendency for SEO to merge with performance marketing and lose its role as a standalone discipline.

Seth Besmertnik / CEO, Conductor

There is one simple answer to this: **give your customers value**. If you know what your customers need/want and give it to them, you will win in SEO tremendously in 2018 and beyond.

There is only one algorithm that matters: Your customers – and their hearts, minds, and souls.

This picture says it all:



Andy Betts / Executive and CMO Adviser

SEO in 2018 has a real opportunity to redefine its role as a pivot point in the modern-day marketing stack. There is a very real opportunity for search marketers to align and integrate themselves across content, digital, and marketing communication channels.

The convergence of content and SEO presents a massive opportunity for brands to evangelize organic search success and tear down the silos and stigma once associated with the dark side of the industry.

SEO, alone, is not enough to guarantee success and content marketing, alone, is not enough to guarantee success. Search and content together builds a better customer experience and there is massive market opportunity for marketers who are connecting the dots.

Alan Bleiweiss / Alan Bleiweiss Consulting

SEO in 2018, is the process of helping search crawlers and algorithms gain maximized access, understanding, and formulaic confidence that “this page is the best choice for this search query.”

Ultimately, even that too, is really about helping searchers discover your content and doing so in a way that instills confidence to them that “this is what I was looking for.”

Chris Boggs / Founder, Web Traffic Advisors

SEO in 2018 continues to be about forcing the “blocking and tackling” basics to be fully optimized – processes, channel-understanding, and politics are often in the way.

Communication continues to be a problem on the mid-sized to enterprise side, with teams either unwilling or unable to work together efficiently to accomplish 90+ percent of SEO recommendations.

On the SMB side, there is a high expectation of SEO performance yet often an inability to complete (or pay-to-complete) hours dedicated toward improving content, links, or “online branding,” which are all important to growing performance.

The “unwillingness” at both ends of the spectrum comes from a general naiveté about the level of effort required for SEO to

work, especially in moderately to competitive spaces.

Michael Bonfils / Global Managing Director, SEM International

On a global and multilingual standpoint, when doing SEO in multiple languages and cultures, only a native language SEO specialist would truly understand the behaviors, usage, and types of keywords that respond to their market. Outside of the implementation of hreflang and market/language rich keywords, all the same rules apply to multilingual SEO as in regular English SEO.

Katya Bovykina / Digital Marketing Manager, Resolver

SEO to me is about valuable content and meaningful partnerships. To win the SEO game in 2017, you need to provide useful, relevant, accurate and recent information.

If you combine that with building relationships online, you get a very strong competitive advantage. There is very little room left for “get rich quick” schemes, and that’s a good thing.

Clark Boyd / Digital Marketing Consultant

Searching implies the requirement for an answer. As long as people have questions, those that provide the best, quickest answers will prosper.

What has changed in 2018 is that technology is allowing us to deliver on the purest essence of SEO. Whether via a mobile screen or a digital home assistant, our job is to ensure that our content can be discovered and served as seamlessly as

possible. The addition of AI and machine learning into search algorithms means that there are no shortcuts to success; the best content starts to rise to the top over time.

Success no longer means just working toward high rankings on Google, as the proliferation of data and devices serves to de-centralize the source of many searches. We therefore need to adapt our perspective on SEO as an acquisition channel and our ways of measuring campaign impact.

In 2018 and beyond, those that keep their eye on the fundamental, enduring truths of SEO while adapting to so much flux will achieve the best results. People still need answers, after all.

Winston Burton / VP of SEO, Acronym Media

SEO is all about providing end users with a positive content experience at the right moment in their user journey across different platforms and devices.

Doc Sheldon Campbell / Founder, Intrinsic Value SEO

Understanding what's effective in SEO today requires a deeper understanding than ever of how search works. Obviously, everyone isn't a search engineer, so that can be simplified to understanding what the primary goal of the search engines is.

Sure, "relevant results" is true, but it goes much deeper than that. More than ever before, we need to know the audience:

- WHO are they.
- WHAT are they searching for.
- WHEN are they searching.
- WHY are they searching.
- WHERE are they searching.

- HOW are they searching.

This isn't new… it's just more critical now. We used to be able to achieve results focusing on just one or two of these. Now we need to nail them all.

Christine Churchill / President & CEO, KeyRelevance

SEO is the science of getting eyeballs to the page through search. It's a multi-discipline approach to helping web pages get found by humans and search engines.

It involves a balancing act between technical components (the ability to find server and code issues that could block or limit search engine crawling and the inclusion of on-page ranking factors) and a thorough understanding of psychology of user motivation and user behavior. Ignore conversion optimization at your peril.

Catfish Comstock / Director of SEO, Business OnLine

SEO is maximizing findability, user experience, and engagement by ensuring that content and messaging is aligned and organized based on the language that potential customers and visitors are most commonly using to describe the products, solutions, services or information that a website is offering.

It means ensuring that your site is designed, built, maintained with SEO best practices to ensure that search engines don't have any technical limitations with indexing or understanding your content. This includes using structured data constructs whenever possible to ensure maximum portability of your content.

Additionally, search engine optimization is infusing keyword focus and SEO best practices across other digital marketing

channels, including social, paid, display, and PR to produce optimal results and benefit.

Anna Crowe / Features Writer, Search Engine Journal

We may be living in the age of artificial intelligence, where SEO marketers are building more personalized websites with a few tweaks to UX and spending hours creating content for RankBrain.

SEO in 2018 is giving us a new concept: Instead of typing keywords on a computer, consumers are asking questions. Sure, it sounds like a pretty basic idea, but AI is reshaping how users engage with your brand, not just your website. And, your first-position ranking – not to mention your organic traffic – will become even more valuable.

Dave Davies / CEO, Beanstalk Internet Marketing

We're currently at a turning point in the industry and the strategies we use, making 2018 one of the more difficult times to work in.

Many of the classic SEO elements still hold a lot of weight, things like incoming links and internal structures so we're having to optimize for those but at the same time most see the writing on the wall – AI is pushing its way into the algorithm and with it an increased ability for Google to understand a user's intent and whether a page meets that intent and deliver that as a result that irrespective of many of those classic signals.

Essentially, SEOs today (and for the next year or two) need to optimize for two sets of signals, the ones that have worked historically and the ones we can see working in the near

future – and the same content and strategy isn't necessarily ideal for both.

Stoney deGeyter / President, Pole Position Marketing

SEO has become a catch-all phrase that represents all organic marketing. In fact, my preferred phrase is "Web Presence Optimization" because that's really what we do, optimize all aspects of a business' web presence.

Pratik Dholakiya / Co-Founder, E2M

To me, today, SEO has two important facets:

- **A specific branch of inbound marketing:** One that is designed to bring in traffic, attract attention, and spread your reach, even in the absence of search engines. But those efforts are made with the search engines in mind and carried out in such a way that they will maximize your potential to bring in long-term organic search traffic.
- **Technical SEO:** Assuring all links are up to date, performing keyword research, setting up redirects when pages are moved, fixing errors, using proper markup, and so on.

These two facets must then be integrated in such a way that they enhance the brand's overall marketing efforts. It's a very exciting field and I'm happy to be a part of it.

Eric Enge / CEO, Stone Temple Consulting

In 2018, some aspects of SEO remain the same. Building a solid site architecture, and creating content that users want. But

there is so much more now.

Optimizing for the Amazon store, optimizing for digital personal assistants (Amazon Echo & Google Home), implementing AMP, developing PWAs. The landscape has diversified dramatically, and as a result, the complexity has scaled.

Last, but not least, the process for attracting links has changed as well – now it's about crafting content and web presences that make your site a magnet for links. The result is that SEO is more fun (and impactful) than ever!

Erin Everhart / Senior Manager, Media Strategy & Mobile, The Home Depot

SEO today hasn't really changed from SEO yesterday. We're still optimizing for search engines, but now, there isn't just one search engine we're optimizing for.

People have more options than ever on where they're starting their research, both in the traditional website sense (i.e., Google, Amazon, Pinterest, Facebook, Next Door, Trivago, Houzz), but also in new ways with voice search on Siri, Alexa, or Google Home. Tactically, of course, everything is different, but that's the case with all marketing: the "how" will constantly evolve.

Gianluca Fiorelli / Senior SEO & Inbound Marketing Consultant

SEO in 2018 is not that different in spirit from what it was 5, 10, or 15 years ago: a means for having our own and our clients' websites the most visible possible to potential customers in the search engine results.

What has changed is that, now, it seems finally clear that our

job must be a perfect balance between deep technical knowledge and equally deep marketing expertise.

- **Technical knowledge** because technology plays a huge role in creating, optimizing, and taking advantage of every available search marketing opportunity (e.g., AMP, PWA, rich results, angular SEO).
- **Marketing expertise**, because the ability to define our audience, understand their behavior, and anticipate their needs with proper answers and solution is tied directly (keyword and topical research) and indirectly (search user experience and users' metrics) to earning the widest SEO visibility.

Casie Gillette / Senior Director, Digital Marketing, KoMarketing

For me, the goal of SEO hasn't changed in the 12 years I've been doing it. SEO is about getting your website found in search results by your target audience.

I know there's the whole concept of "search experience optimization" and making sure you are optimizing for platforms beyond search but when it comes down to it, SEO is about being found in search engines. Of course, how we do that and what we actually give customers has changed, but that's a result of the changing search landscape vs. SEO itself.

Damon Gochneaur / Founder, Aspiro Digital Agency

SEO, while still search engine optimization, encompasses so many more disciplines in 2018. SEO is more than just on-site optimizations to increase search ranking. It's user experience and conversions rate optimization, it's part PR and part traditional marketing.

SEO today is a multi-disciplinary marketing channel, that continues to evolve and mature as both a profession, and as a marketing channel. At its heart, SEO is still about getting people who don't know your brand, to your website. But the manner and methods in which that task is accomplished is a dynamic process and endeavor.

Jenny Halasz / President & Founder, JLH Marketing

SEO is all about information retrieval. Studying and responding to the needs of relevance, timing, variety, and simplicity.

The customer is the core; are you providing them with what they need in that moment? It goes so far beyond web, apps, and even voice.

SEO is the discipline that allows people and websites to access the potential of the internet. It's about knowing when your site is the right result, and admitting to yourself when it is the wrong result. SEO is making your company and services more accessible to your prospective customers by studying what they need and creating the resources to serve them.

Brian Harnish / SEO Specialist, ymarketing

SEO is about the user experience and creating great websites for your users. Technical SEO, content, and links should continue to be the focus of SEO campaigns, tailored to your users and the type of customer you are targeting.

Identifying your user base, and custom-tailoring everything about your SEO campaign (from keyword research to Schema markup to content creation) should help you come out on top.

Just a minimum amount of effort (only changing meta tags, for example) is not enough to cut it in today's competitive environment.

Bill Hartzer / SEO & Digital Marketing Consultant

SEO, for me, in 2018, is still on-page (and on-site) and off-page optimization. With so many changes and additions to website code in the past few years, on-page SEO and technical optimization have become more of a priority.

From Schema to AMP to canonical tags, it's really easy to screw up a website so that it won't rank well in search. Add HTTPs to that, along with redirects and site migrations, SEO has become more important than ever. I see it as more of a need now for SEOs to make websites search engine friendly.

Marie Haynes / Owner, Marie Haynes Consulting

SEO means helping businesses do everything they can to make more money from people who are visiting their website via organic search.

This might include obvious things such as improving rankings on the most important keywords for this business. But, there are other things that can be done too such as:

- Determining which long-tail searches could bring business.
- Tracking conversions properly so that we know which of our efforts is helping the most.
- Taking advantage of recent changes in local search.
- And much more.

Adam Heitzman / Managing Partner, Higher Visibility

Everyone knows that SEO is an acronym that stands for Search Engine Optimization. But in 2018 that description is dated. It makes us sound siloed and that we optimize specifically for search engines.

I like to refer to SEO as Search Experience Optimization. The work we do as SEO professionals is more about improving our websites to provide a better experience for users, which subsequently makes the search engines want to reward us.

Jon Henshaw / Director of Digital Marketing, TapClicks

SEO in 2018 is a mixture of art and skill that blends multiple disciplines.

A modern SEO needs to:

- Know how to architect the structure of their site and its content for search bots and humans.
- Focus on user experience as it relates to site speed, stickiness, and the device being used.
- Know how to do proper outreach and promotion to help increase mentions, referrals, and backlinks.

When those disciplines are combined and done well, the result is increased organic exposure and traffic from search engines for their site.

Dixon Jones / CMO, Majestic

I think by now, most of the principles of SEO are more or less well understood by people that have done their time in the

trenches since 1999, although new platforms and data types arrive all the time keeping the need for ongoing practice or testing even more important than in the past. The need to learn about new entrants like Siri, Alexa, Facebook, Linkedin, and specialist search engines (like Booking.com, for example) will keep SEOs on their toes for years to come.

But there is more… there is also the need to blend what is "optimal" with what is "realistically acceptable" in a basket of digital marketing tools. In particular, SEOs have a tendency to think and often work in isolation. They do not appreciate many of the issues surrounding development processes such as Agile, Scrum, and Lean methodologies. Not understanding these wider engineering concepts, SEOs' implementations continually lose out to other "more urgent" projects.

The modern SEO needs to be – above all else – a rational communicator.

Kelsey Jones / Founder, MoxieDot

SEO in 2018 means greeting the user with the exact information they are looking for at the exact time they are looking for it. This can be on a variety of platforms, from voice search to local businesses and online shopping.

By always thinking user-first, businesses can better cater to what their target audience is looking for. This helps them better predict trends, meet expectations, and grow their online presence.

Kristopher Jones / Founder & CEO, LSEO

SEO is all about reverse engineering and replicating the

organic search success of market leaders.

If you are looking to capture market share, use a competitive analysis tool to find out information about the competition, such as total backlinks, domain authority, and top organic rankings.

Once you have competitive data in hand, the next step is to aggressively leverage proven SEO strategies such as content creation and link building, to replicate and extend the success of market leaders.

- **Julie Joyce** / Owner & Director of Operations, Link Fish Media Inc.

SEO today is what it's always been: making sure your website both ranks well and converts traffic.

What has changed of late, and continues to change for the better, is that we're realizing that over-optimization can be just as bad as under-optimization. We're trying to make sites more user-friendly rather than focusing only on search engines. That includes the practice of building links.

More of our clients finally understand that the most desirable links are the ones that have the potential to convert for you and not just help you rank.

- **Jordan Kasteler** / SEO Director, Hennessey Consulting

SEO in 2018 is different! We're taking mobile *very* seriously. We're ramping up for a mobile-first index, and trying to predict what that exactly means to us and our clients.

SEO today is making sure a user's experience is optimal in terms of the content they're consuming, how they're consuming

on various devices, and what action they're lead to take next. Optimizing this entire journey is far beyond optimizing keywords for pages like we've been used to.

Technical SEO doesn't lose its importance, though, as we need a sound structure to facilitate all this.

Michael King / Managing Director, iPullRank

SEO is a cross-functional marketing activity that gives visibility to content in the organic search channel. It's the confluence of development, content, and strategic marketing initiatives to drive qualified traffic from search engines.

SEO is the calculus of marketing.

Jeremy Knauff / CEO, Spartan Media

SEO today, particularly link building, is all about relationships because ranking highly requires quality links from authoritative websites.

Search engines have been pretty effective at stomping out low quality, paid, and machine generated links, forcing site owners to get back to interacting with other human beings in order to earn worthwhile links, and this is one of the best things to happen to the industry in a long time.

Casey Markee, Founder, Media Wyse

SEO, in its simplest form, is defined by one word: usability. As a professional site auditor, my goal for any client is to investigate, assess, and define the usability of a website to its target audience.

- Does the site ask and answer questions that the user finds helpful?
- Will Google consider this site a high-quality representation of the overall niche as a whole?
- If Google didn't exist, would this site still be easy to discover, navigate, and convert its target audience?

Debra Mastaler / President, Alliance-Link

A good SEO in 2018 understands optimizing a webpage is less about tweaking titles and tags and more about understanding user intent. Basic SEO can still influence website performance but instead of being a reactive strategy, success is more likely to be achieved by being proactive.

Is this really any different than the past? Are building links a waste of time? No and no, link popularity and on-page content are still two of the three main components used to determine page rankings.

But Google has championed machine learning as its future and seems 100 percent focused on growing this segment of the algorithm. Going forward, SEO practitioners will need to be proactive and invest in analyzing data and understanding search behavior across a variety of search and social platforms. This way they can develop the type of content that will motivate and influence user/search behavior which will in turn influence rankings and traffic.

While understanding and conquering the new and more technical aspects of Google's search engine will be key in the future, SEO's should also create marketing programs that reach customers directly. Lessening your dependence on Google and utilizing cross-channel platforms as a way to generate traffic and sales is just smart marketing.

Josh McCoy / Lead Digital Marketing Strategist, Vizion Interactive

SEO is now an un-siloed approach in 2018. Marketers are thinking about SEO as more of an omni-channel partner and not simply as “oh… and SEO.”

As we concentrate more on the customer journey we have to consider how content is created and marketed to rank well for organic searchers who are in the information-seeking phase – long before users may return and convert in the future through an alternate traffic channel.

Jesse McDonald / Director of SEO, Geek Powered Studios

In 2018, SEO can be defined as helping a website be easily found across the entire internet and not just focusing on rankings in search engines. More so than ever, it’s crucial to keep your user in mind when making SEO decisions. Everything from on-page targeting to link building should be considered for their impact on the potential users.

Corey Morris / Vice President of Marketing, Voltage

SEO today is in many ways still a focused and specific discipline requiring experience and expertise. However, it has become much more dependent on, and integrated with, other digital marketing channels which is a good thing allowing for the scaling of content and resources. As most marketing is now digital, SEO has a proper seat at the table and place as a lead organic traffic driver contributing to end business goals.

Britney Muller / SEO & Content Architect, Moz

SEO in 2018 sits upon the foundation of old best-practice SEO while growing into new personalization, machine learning, and entity authority heights.

As Google acquires more off-site information about businesses, SEOs need to be thinking more about optimizing a business for both online and offline success.

Brock Murray / Co-founder, seoplus+

To me, SEO is all about continually trying new and cutting-edge methods to stay sharp. You need to have a hunger for knowledge, but an individual person can only digest, process, and do so much.

Don’t be afraid to invest in that new keyword research tool, tracking tool, or heat map software that gives you the info you need to take action. Automate everything you can and focus on being the eagle eye decision maker, it’s the only way to go in an industry that’s evolving at breakneck speed.

SEO changes so rapidly, the minute you stop devouring new information is the minute you’re obsolete. It’s also no longer about search engines only. It’s about web presence optimization – optimizing across multiple channels for online success.

Lee Odden / CEO, TopRank Marketing

SEO is a methodology that technically and topically aligns brand content and engagement with searcher intent.

As long as content can be searched, its performance can be optimized to help make a company “the best answer” for customers, wherever they look.

Beau Pedraza / Senior Digital Marketing Manager, Forthea Interactive

Regardless of the year, SEO goes where people go as they search and find answers that apply to the world around them.

The “Ten Blue Links” still exist for a brand website, but so do a large number of social and third-party profile links that appear for branded and non-branded search terms. Not to mention, voice search and emerging frontiers across new mediums.

If an end-user opts to avoid a website listing and migrates to a review site such as Houzz, TripAdvisor, or ZocDoc, we want to make it easy for those organic results to convert.

If a client responded to this effort with “But those aren’t organic leads, they’re referral!” I would remind them about their bottom line with “If it touches organic search and can benefit your brand, I’ll take conversions, leads, and revenue however I can.”

Chuck Price / Founder, Measurable SEO

SEO in 2018 is all about the user experience. This increasingly includes the delivery of a positive voice search experience.

Creating useful content and earning topically related backlinks remains the key to reaching the top of the SERPs.

Bridget Randolph / Freelance Consultant

More than ever, SEO today is about understanding your ideal customer and what they search for – and, by extension, identifying and establishing key relevance signals as they relate to that ideal customer. As search becomes increasingly personalized, we are finding ourselves optimizing for a customer persona alongside optimizing for algorithms.

This greater alignment between Google's stated goals and the real world outcomes is an exciting shift, especially for those of us with a keen interest in human behavior.

That being said, I also appreciate the ways in which the principles of SEO have remained so stable as technology and tactics iterate and develop at a dizzying pace. At the end of the day, we're still just trying to:

- Make sure Google can access our content.
- That they know what it's about.
- That other people reference it as such.

And I don't expect that to change significantly anytime soon.

Adam Riemer / CEO, Adam Riemer Marketing

SEO today is the same as it was before, but with some advances in code, devices to optimize for, and a few small alternate tags. You need to provide solutions, a great user experience, and attract links.

If you've been keeping your code, content, and UX up to date, you've already seen that the only thing that has changed is the way we serve this experience to different devices, through robots and voice commands.

Dave Rohrer / Founder, NorthSide Metrics

If you were to think of your overall marketing plan as a workout, SEO would be one of the exercises that you would want to do daily. On its own, it can make you stronger, but when tied to other exercises (i.e., tactics and strategies) SEO has an even bigger impact.

Now, more than ever, SEO should be thought of a daily exercise that you do – not just that "thing" you think about for a few days or weeks following January 1.

Eli Schwartz / Director of Marketing, SurveyMonkey

SEO in 2018 is the process of increasing organic traffic by creating content and optimizing webpages that match what search engine users are seeking. Search engine algorithms are closer than ever to mimicking a human understanding of query intent based on artificial intelligence; therefore the focus of all aspects of SEO need to be biased toward users with an emphasis on relevancy, quality, and engagement.

Chris Sherman / Partner & VP, Third Door Media

SEO means exactly what it meant in 1997, right about the time I started writing about it. Easily expressed: Creating good, readable, content that people feel compelled to share (a definition just as frustrating now to those who want overcomplicated answers as it was 20 years ago).

Of course, today there are additional, finer mechanical nuances that need to be addressed. But these can be handled by competent technicians – no special magic involved, just a journeyman's practical knowledge and skill applied to make

sure everything is in compliance with the current set of "rules."

An apt comparison is to computer science. Brilliant computer scientists are inventive masters of algorithms, but not necessarily great coders. Great coders can create killer apps, but not without first-rate algorithms to use as blueprints.

I'll never forget an early 2001 visit to Google when my host said, "Oh, we never let Larry and Sergey touch the code any more. Too dangerous." Enough said, I think.

 **Grant Simmons** / VP of Search Marketing, Homes.com

From site speed and availability to user context and satisfaction, SEO in 2018 is a user-centric discipline that requires an understanding and mastery of the following:

- How (methodology and device) and where (location) the user is searching.
- Why the user is searching (query meaning and context) and how to best satisfy that reason (content and medium).
- What the optimal user experience is that meets or exceeds user expectations (and the delivery of such).
- How to completely satisfy the user's query so they provide signals of satisfaction through SERP engagement and/or social and link-based methods.

All this in an ideally perfect balance with developers, product folk, designers, and stakeholders!

 **Bill Slawski** / Director of SEO Research, Go Fish Digital

Many changes have come to SEO in the past few years.

For instance, the use of structured data on websites and XML sitemaps show that search engines are looking at machine readable content to generate search results.

SEOs are able to access much more information than we ever could before directly from Google using Google Search Console (like mobile friendliness of content, and validation of structured data), and tools like the automated assistant in the mobile Google Analytics app, which provides machine learning insights to Google analytics data.

We still seem to have PageRank as an important ranking factor from Google, but have been told that Google is using a machine learning approach called RankBrain. The focus of this RankBrain approach is to help the search engine understand the meaning of queries better, and provide answers that (still) focus upon meeting the situational and informational needs of searchers.

We've been told by search engineers, such as Paul Haahr, more about how Google works, which now involves recognizing whether an entity is in a searcher's query.

Much of what I do in optimizing a site involves finding ways to improve how well it functions in terms of site speed and user experience, and application of pagination markup and canonical link elements and site architecture; and improving the likelihood that a searcher will click on a link to that page from engaging and persuasive search results.

As we've been told by the Google rater's guide, we ideally want to focus upon building sites that raters might see as involving Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness. A recent Google patent told us that it might look at search results to gauge the authoritativeness of pages in search results, and if pages within those results don't meet a specific threshold of authoritativeness, Google may perform a search on a related query to find other authoritative search

results, which could then be blended into search results for that initial query.

Authoritativeness is an important metric for SEO these days, and if you read that Google rater's guide, it means a lot more than just having lots and lots of backlinks.

Aleyda Solis / International SEO Consultant, Orainti

SEO is the process of maximizing a site's organic search visibility to connect with its potential users and customers during their search journey.

Shari Thurow / Founder & SEO Director, Omni Marketing Interactive

SEO is optimizing digital documents for *people who use search engines*. SEO involves communicating "aboutness" in a specific context to both human users and technology.

People locate and discover desired content by browsing, searching, and asking. Therefore, SEO is certainly a part of the user experience (UX). In Peter Morville's User Experience Honeycomb, SEO falls under the Findable facet.

SEO has never been about rankings only.

Bas van den Beld / Founder, Speak with Persuasion

SEO in 2018 is a mature business. Your website needs to be ready on many levels.

"Just doing the SEO thing" isn't enough anymore. You need to

understand who you are targeting. You need to be ready for mobile and security.

But most of all: SEO is all around and everywhere. That means it should be on a manager's desk so he or she makes sure everyone is aware of the need of good SEO.

Jennifer van Iderstyne / Senior Strategist, Overit

To me, SEO in 2018 encompasses all aspects of how a business exists as it relates to presenting information and being found online.

Today's SEO is about understanding and responding to all aspects of how search results are sought, viewed, and rendered. It involves analyzing how people search, what they search for, and what they find. But also following the science behind how search engines, crawl, perceive and assign authority and relevance to websites and pages.

SEO, in an ever-changing technological landscape, means an ongoing process of re-imagining how we view search and what we can learn from it. It's not just seeing rankings as an end, but as a means of studying how search engines use our content to serve their users.

It means expanding our definition of what search is. It is the channel that most people use to begin an exploration of goods, services, and information. But it's not just through search engines as we know them, search is happening on social platforms and inside websites.

Search data is insight into the heart of human behavior. This information, paired with other forms of business intelligence, can be used to shape overall marketing strategies.

Frank Watson, CEO, Kangamurra Media

SEO, like how we use the internet, has changed. Mobile devices, voice search, and location linked searching are much more dominant than a couple of years ago.

Understanding that plus the influence of schema and Google's push for use of HTTPs are the major areas SEOs must master to gain presence in the SERPs.

Mindy Weinstein / Founder & CEO, Market MindShift

It's more than just trying to get links and create content. As an SEO, you have to think about the entire web presence:

- Are you quoted, featured, or interviewed on reputable websites or online publications?
- Are people sharing your content and talking about you?

These are some of the things that make a more natural SEO campaign. What hasn't changed is the need for a search-friendly website that is properly optimized and free of technical errors.

Amelia Wilson / Content Marketing Manager, HostGator

In the early days, SEO was all about serving Google. Then, it grew to be about serving Google, by way of the user.

Now, you should be thinking user first in everything you do, from site speed to content quality. If you're making users happy, Google's smart enough to notice and will reward you in the rankings.

It used to be a lot more about gaming the system. Now, SEO is

mostly good marketing with some extra magic thrown in.

Rob Woods / SEO Consultant, Riseform Digital Marketing

SEO today is difficult to define because it's so entwined with so many other marketing techniques. Gone are the days where much of what one did for SEO was purely for SEO (link building, highly optimized content, content only for the search engines, etc).

Today, I would say that SEO is the practice of making your site as technically sound as possible, according to the search engines' guidelines, while also making your content the best possible answer/resource for a particular user's needs.

Technical SEO is becoming more and more complex with mobile, semantic data, and page speed layered on top of more traditional on-site issues. At the same time, the engines have become, and will continue to become, more attuned to truly understanding what a searcher's needs are and returning the most useful answer, rather than the best optimized, most linked to page.

Tony Wright / CEO & Founder, WrightIMC

It might be easier to say what SEO isn't. It isn't magic. It isn't proprietary. It isn't a stand-alone tactic. And it isn't easy.

Our agency has had to consult on so many areas of business, because search touches all those areas. When we see something is amiss, the client expects us to have answers – even if it is well beyond the realm of what we were hired to do.

Sure, the technical and advertising aspects are still there, but must be able to talk about recruiting, sales, accounting,

security, and customer service, just to name a few.

SEO to me is the new business consulting. Long live SEO.

Wells Yu / SEO Analyst, Williams-Sonoma

SEO, today, means what it always has: creating a website that can be properly understood by a search engine. The thing that changes every year, however, is how we do that. This is why it is important to understand that as new technology is created in this world it will change our industry.

Understanding user behavior – and how to create a great website experience for those users – will solve most, if not all, of your SEO problems moving forward.

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