

Why (and How) You Should Optimize Your Website for Voice Search



It's essential that businesses invest in optimizing their sites and apps for the trending tech.

December 5, 2019 8 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

A few years ago, voice search seemed like a far-fetched idea limited to *Star Trek* and science-fiction movies, but today, its use as a digital-marketing tool has become so common that, according to Google, it's the fastest-growing form of online search. So what does this trend mean to marketers, and why should business owners focus on building voice search-optimized websites? Let's see.

The Rise of Voice Search By the 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 percent of adults perform at least one voice search every day. According to ComScore, 50 percent of total searches will be voice searches by 2020.

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

- 61 percent of 25-64-year-olds and 57 percent of 18-24-year-olds say they'll use voice search more actively in future, per PwC Research.
- Almost one-third of 3.5 billion searches performed on Google every day are voice searches, according to TheeDesign Research.
- More than 30 percent of web browsing will be done without a screen by 2020, reveals Gartner.
- 55 percent of households will own smart speaker devices by 2022, surmises OC&C Strategy Consultants.
- More than 53 percent of smart speaker owners say that it feels natural talking to smart devices, shares 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, with Google Now, Alexa from Amazon, Siri from Apple and Cortana from Microsoft standing out as the major trendsetters in the voice search.

Related: Voice Search: Your New SEO Secret Weapon?

Voice Search Can Impact Your Website's Ranking

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 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. 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 known as "position zero," "featured snippet" or "answer box."

Reports estimate that half of the searches will be voice searches, meaning 50 percent 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. (Pro Tip: Google tends to favor websites that provide interactive web tools such as BMI calculators, recipe guides and price estimators. 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.)

Here's how to secure position zero so your website appears in voice search results.

1. Implement structured data.

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

How do you implement structured data? If you're using WordPress, search for "schema" plugins, and you'll see hundreds that enable structured data functionality. You can also implement structured data manually on your website using specific schemas from the schema.org library.

2. Improve page speed.

You might find this tip in almost every SEO guide out there. Page speed is one of the most significant ranking factors. If you want to rank for position zero, 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 and 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.

You need to understand whether people are looking to buy something or want some information when they type in a search query. 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 10 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.

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.

Related: Should You Worry About Voice Search?

4. Target long-tail keywords.

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.

A fun fact is that 70 percent 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...

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.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/343036>