

SEO EXPERTS REVEAL THE TRUTH ABOUT MARKETING



Introduction

Search engines have come a long way from the old days of **Yahoo!** and **Ask Jeeves**. Whereas the first search websites were a maze of links that may or may not have provided something remotely relevant to your query, today's search landscape is moving closer to understanding your intent on demand, and in some instances, delivering results before you even ask.

The number of search queries continues to grow. Based on data from comScore, **there were just under 20.4 billion searches from desktops alone in March 2013**. Those searches come from Google (with 13.7 billion searches), Microsoft's Bing (3.4 billion searches), and Yahoo! (2.4 billion).

And if you think those numbers are impressive, consider that search continues to shift away from the desktop and toward mobile devices. According to a Local Search Study with Neustar, Localeze, 15miles and comScore, **the number of U.S. searchers using mobile phones grew 26% between March and December 2012** from 90.1 million to 113.1 million searchers. Additionally, during a similar time period, search on tablets was up 19%.

Local business sites increasingly move away from desktop search. The average searcher, according to the Local Search Study, uses 2.5 different types of sources when looking for local business information, with portal sites such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo! listed as a first or second choice.

With all this in mind, how can companies use search (or more specifically, Search Engine Optimization, commonly known as SEO), and the different mediums of marketing, to further their business objectives? We spoke to a panel of SEO experts and asked them these questions:

- What is the future of SEO?
- What is the relationship between social media and SEO?
- How has content marketing changed SEO?

Meet the Panel

This ebook includes the answers from some of the biggest names in search engine optimization.



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What Is the Future of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?

With search growing at a rapid pace, we asked the SEO experts what was most important in search and what we could expect years from now.



"I see [search] merging with inbound marketing practices as a whole. Every inbound channel is connected – organic search, social media, content, community, email, etc. The future will bring less and less of an ability to do great SEO without embracing these other channels and practices."

- *Rand Fishkin, CEO/Co-Founder of Moz*

"I think we'll see more authority given to vetted authors/sites so Google returns results that matter to the person making the request. What "real" people search (ask) for and what's important to them is what Google makes a note of and strives to return. Their algorithms appear to be evolving to better understand relationships between content, the question asked and the person asking it. That's not to say they are more intuitive; it's still all about the math with Google, but they are able to cross reference more effectively since tapping into our Google profiles. Your Android, Gmail, YouTube, calendars, documents... all of it helps tell Google what we prefer. If you're plugged in, Google will pull out as much data as they can to tell you what you want and may want in the future.

SEO managers should keep all this in mind when developing SEO strategies. Google is more than just a search engine these days."

- *Debra Mastaler, President of Alliance-Link*



What Is the Future of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?



"I still think social media will play a stronger part in Google judging the authority of a link; however, social has been an aspect for a while. I feel that user data is where it is all going, what they are searching, where they are searching, when, and ultimately what they are clicking on and how they are engaging with the site after the click. It is such definitive data as to how a user interacts with a brand that I think it is going to be a major factor sooner than later."

- *Chris Bennett, Founder/CEO of 97th Floor*

"Mobile is going to be the most important factor in search, and will play a much bigger role in 2013. Computers are no longer encased in desktop or laptop coverings and search does not happen only on 1024x768 screens. We not only saw a rise in smartphone activity in 2012, but also significant activity in tablet computing. As tablets become more popular among consumers, more companies are redirecting their dollars to explore new opportunities in tablet marketing. With tablet computers, there will be different conversion metrics, different keywords to optimize for, and other considerations in the future."

- *Jim Yu, CEO of BrightEdge*



What Is the Future of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?



“On a broad scale, I see SEO becoming a normalized marketing tactic, the same way TV, radio and print are traditionally thought of as marketing tactics. Thus, it’ll need to simplify – which, to a degree we’ve already seen. Long gone are the days where altering tags worked for one engine, but not another. Everyone agrees meta keyword tags are defunct for search optimization, etc.

But what continues to plague search marketers is the adherence to old-think issues. ‘Content is too hard to create.’ ‘Links are too hard to build organically.’ ‘Links trump all else!’

This type of focus blinds you to more important things.

Traditional marketers long ago learned the virtue of listening to their customers. Search engines today say they listen, but do they really? When was the last time someone searching online for the best price on a common object, sold in multiple locations (a cordless drill, for example) uttered the phrase, wonder which site is best optimized for a cordless drill?’

Or when was the last time a search engine actually sat with the visitors to their website and asked them for input on a redesign, or feedback on their shopping cart, etc.?’

So the future of SEO is that it becomes an accepted, normal marketing tactic like all others. This means search engines will need to give up fretting over the hundreds of pointless details they love to fret over and start focusing on the bigger picture the rest of the business is focused on: what do customers want?’

- Duane Forrester, Senior Product Manager, Bing

What Is the Future of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?

"I believe the future of SEO is already here: understanding and marketing to specific and defined audiences through search engines. First we need to understand their intent, and search is amazing for that. Once we have that knowledge, which we gather through data, we can map it to a site to best fulfill their tasks and needs. What keywords people are using is only one aspect of SEO. A more important concept is the searcher persona: who they are, what they want to do, and how we can best help them (and surprise and delight them).

The days of SEO being a game of outsmarting algorithms are over. Today content strategy and valuable, sustainable strategies are essential, not just tricks and links.

In addition though, we need to be hyper-aware of the 'mechanical' side of technical SEO. How are the search engines crawling the site? Are important pages being crawled and indexed, or are duplicate, overhead pages taking crawl resources? Are pagination and faceted navigation problems causing headaches, and how are international and mobile SEO strategies impacting things? These are all more important than ever, and each requires deep technical knowledge. SEO will always be a technical discipline in addition to everything else."

- Adam Audette, Chief Knowledge Officer at RKG



What Is the Future of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?

The Future of SEO: Key Takeaways for Your Business

- Now more than ever, your marketing campaigns must be integrated. Ensure your website, TV spots, print ads, and even your website work together for optimal results.
- Customize your messaging to your audience. More and more consumers are getting a personalized experience when searching so consider how you can create relevant, custom content as well.
- Incorporate SEO and social media into your marketing efforts. Consider how search engines can be part of the plan.
- Everything about your brand – from your website and advertisements to your product and even your company logo – must be mobile friendly. Mobile search continues to grow as mobile use explodes.

What Is the Relationship Between Social Media and SEO?

The SEO experts mentioned social in relation to the future of search, but what about social media today?



"Social is the way our work gets discovered. Content that is truly exceptional, unique, and useful can earn tremendous awareness through social media, and that social amplification often leads to great links, which leads to great rankings. Even without the links, thanks to Google+, user data, personalization, etc., sites that perform consistently in social media can earn search visibility."

- *Rand Fishkin, CEO/Co-Founder of Moz*

"I believe we are only in the very earliest stages of seeing search benefits of social aside from it generating regular links... We should be thinking about social and search as channels that need a unified approach, because the best content should appeal to both channels and the cross-over benefits / economies of scale are potentially huge."

- *Will Critchlow, Founder of Distilled, Inc.*



What Is the Relationship Between Social Media and SEO?



"I feel social networks are an invaluable tool; they help me identify and target specific niches, which in turn helps develop and execute targeted promotions and content. Social networks are a terrific window into human behavior; you can judge what a niche responds to and market to it more effectively by watching for trends and interacting with influential people in the network.

Since people tend to share links (content) that affect them emotionally, it's more important than ever to understand the demographic you're selling to. Know your market, have access to them directly and provide content and promotions you know will evoke an emotional response."

- Debra Mastaler, President of Alliance-Link

"It's an ecosystem really – search results give way to links/mentions/shares which give way to more authority, and ultimately better ranking, and even more links/mentions/shares."

- Marshall Simmonds, Founder of Define Media Group, Inc., former Chief Search Strategist for the New York Times



What Is the Relationship Between Social Media and SEO?

"I think they go hand in hand. The right Tweet, share, like, or +1 is sometimes all you need to get a digital asset to gain exposure and links to the right people. I once got a RT from [Avinash Kaushik](#). Gizmodo saw it, and the next thing you know, **we got 1000+ linking domains to this asset at one point**.

I don't see social directly impacting search results personally. I do see the correlation between a string of likely actions from social and getting links. Things people like, they share, then their friends see it and they share it, and as that continues to happen, people put it in blogs and bookmarking sites, all of which build more links.

Take a look at searching for a company name like [Autodesk](#). [See box to the right.] Participation in Google+ is getting them real estate, or more pixels on the Google results page. It also gets them a number of circles, which shows they have some popularity. Lastly, there is a recent post, conveying a message. Combine all that together and I'd say I'd want that extra space (you get that by being involved in social). A company that builds a loyal social following has a built-in army to promote their content, day in and day out. That content will get shared, get links, send social signals... all of which can't be a bad thing."

- Wil Reynolds, Founder of Seer Interactive



A screenshot showing two parts of Autodesk's online presence. On the left is the Autodesk website homepage, featuring navigation links for Education/Community, Products (Revit, AutoCAD, Maya), Careers, Services & Support, and Inventor. On the right is the Autodesk Google+ profile, showing 12,820 followers, the company's logo, and a recent post about exploring 3D scenes with the new Autodesk #Maya 2014 plug-in.

What Is the Relationship Between Social Media and SEO?



"They are hand and hand. It is virtually the same thing now, as social has become a huge part of not only Google's algorithm but also how to spread content and drive traffic. You can't be an effective [organization] and not leverage social media."

- *Chris Bennett, Founder/CEO of 97th Floor*

"This relationship is fairly well known these days, but worth examining. The fact is that social signals alone don't boost your ranking on a search engine. They do help an engine understand more about you, which can affect ranking. Social sharing can drive direct traffic to you, which can also affect rankings over time, not to mention directly affecting your bottom line in a nearer timeframe.

Social media is about connecting with customers in a meaningful way - a way the customer determines is meaningful. How they view you through that scenario shapes how they share you, link to you, and talk about you. Thus, there ends up being an impact in the world of SEO; both direct and indirect. Directly, those shares, likes and links are signals to the engine. Indirectly, it's back to Marketing 101 where word of mouth spreads the good word through customers' own networks."

- *Duane Forrester, Senior Product Manager, Bing*



What Is the Relationship Between Social Media and SEO?



"If search is amazing for knowing a person's intent, social media is amazing for finding out what's important to people, and what's important to people they're connected to (or care about). It's the wisdom of the crowd, and we have these super complex networks, or channels, like Facebook, Pinterest, Reddit, Twitter, and many, many niche forum and community sites. Social is becoming increasingly important for SEO, too. Google+ is proof of that, and the way Google is incorporating personalized results into search from their social network. Authorship is proof of that, and Google understanding not just words on a page and the link graph, but social, contextual signals as well. Who someone is, as defined by where they write, what they write, their bio, and who they're connected to (and who's connected to them). And I haven't even talked about how Bing is incorporating all of the social networks into their search engine."

- Adam Audette, Chief Knowledge Officer at RKG

What Is the Relationship Between Social Media and SEO?

“Over the last two years, 90% of global data has been produced by digital, search, and social content. Integrating your online marketing efforts is all about breaking down silos and delivering amazing results. Social and SEO marketers are a big part of this.

Integrating your search and social efforts brings better brand visibility and higher conversion rates. The key is to present the right content to the users at the time they need it in an engaging manner, across all channels they visit.

Social media marketers now have a huge opportunity to impact SEO, improve search rankings, and increase revenue generated through organic search. Social media marketers that partner with their search marketer counterparts are finding success by focusing on the content that fuels social media activities and analyzing trends to unlock opportunities and maximize impact and revenue.

- Jim Yu, CEO of BrightEdge



What Is the Relationship Between Social Media and SEO?

SEO and Social Media: Takeaways for Your Business

- Create and share content on your social channels. Done well, it will help boost your search results.
- With social data at your fingertips, it's more important than ever to understand the audience you're selling to. Know your market, have access to them directly and provide content and promotions you know will evoke an emotional response.
- Integrating your search and social efforts brings better brand visibility and higher conversion rates. The key is to present the right content to your audience at the time they need it in an engaging manner, across all channels they visit.
- Focus on the content that fuels social media and do more of it. This boosts SEO results.

How Has Content Marketing Changed SEO?

From blogs to infographics to webinars and ebooks, content marketing is a great way to generate links to your website, grow your social following and provide your audience with helpful content. How does it impact SEO?



“Content marketing’s growth is going to make it harder and harder for content to stand out from the crowd. Organizations who can’t match up in content creation and promotion may find themselves losing out to content marketers who learn the basics of SEO. It’s a more competitive environment certainly, but those who have real empathy for web users and influencers AND have the SEO skills to infuse their work with great keyword targeting, search accessibility, etc., are going to have ongoing success.”

- Rand Fishkin, CEO/Co-Founder of Moz

How Has Content Marketing Changed SEO?

"I don't think SEO has changed. The basic components are still the same: optimize your pages with good content and get a lot of quality sites/pages to link to them. What has changed is the way the engines look and judge content and the fact that engines like Bing and Google are no longer the only platforms you have to optimize for.

Content comes in many forms; we tend to think of written content when the term is used, but the reality is, video and image content can be more useful when it comes to influencing search and social results. Video and image engines are slightly different than Bing and Google but can be optimized much the same way and should be part of the overall SEO campaign. I think it's a good idea to understand how to work these sites for maximum SEO and ranking benefit.

If there's a lot of buzz around one form of marketing, I tend to look for what makes it effective and use that information to branch into a different promotional area. Running with the herd is not always a great idea; be unique, and the links will come."

- Debra Mastaler, President of Alliance-Link



How Has Content Marketing Changed SEO?



"Here's the thing: the term "content marketing" is just a rebranding of what good digital marketers already know and have been acting on for years. It's not that "content is king," but content certainly is [The Hand of the King](#).

To be clear, good practitioners understand this means educating and executing on: knowing your audience, creating content, optimizing that content, and building community. That's a lot of moving parts involving metrics and research, editorial teams and scheduling, SEO, and PR/Social/Promotion."

- Marshall Simmonds, Founder of Define Media Group, Inc., former Chief Search Strategist for the New York Times

"Content marketing needs to be at the heart of your SEO efforts. It has always been that way, but is even more so now because Google is so much more effective at understanding the context of content and how it is shared, etc. People will come to your site because you have good compelling content. You need to hit it from all angles: blog posts, articles, graphs, data, infographics, interactive content - even short pictures when you Tweet. Everything you do has to drive content, and the rest takes care of itself."

- Chris Bennett, Founder/CEO of 97th Floor



How Has Content Marketing Changed SEO?



"Content is what people are searching for... They search because they have a need. That need, be it product, service or information, appears to them as content in some form or another.

Stay focused on creating engaging content experiences and impress visitors with thoughtful usability, making their job (answering their question) easier.

People complain that it's tough to create unique content. While I agree it takes time, I also think the key is knowing what content to produce. Keyword research is a start, but layering on things like watching conversion pathways through your site, consumer insights based on feedback sessions, and watching broader trends can help you understand where to begin and narrow the workload a bit. On top of that, you need to take the important step in clearly defining the value of every URL on your site. In doing so, you'll come to understand which areas to focus marketing efforts on first. Things you thought of as high profit margin areas may not perform as well as expected when compared against all areas across your site.

- Duane Forrester, Senior Product Manager, Bing

How Has Content Marketing Changed SEO?



"Today it's not about "get the traffic" -- it's about "get the targeted and relevant traffic." This is the era of less is more SEO. Content is the key, because it's how a website creates an online experience. Content is ANYTHING that creates a compelling experience. But it's so much more, because you quickly realize that you can't really know which content types to create until you understand which content types people want. You have to understand them: their needs, their desires, their intent. Understanding this means informing keyword research and content ideas with a backdrop of searcher personas. Companies are rushing headlong into content today, and rightly so. It's a battle to get noticed online amidst the noise and crowds. You have to stand apart by offering high quality, relevant experiences to audiences that you truly understand."

- Adam Audette, Chief Knowledge Officer at RKG

How Has Content Marketing Changed SEO?

“Since John Deere published “The Furrow” in 1895, content marketing has been right in front of the consumer eye. Fast forward to 2012 to Coca-Cola’s Content 2020 vision and we begin to see the fusing together of content marketing and digital marketing (of which SEO is a part) with its “liquid and linked” strategy.

As Google shifts its focus to quality and relevancy, content marketing adoption has soared. It is no coincidence that the increasing focus on content marketing closely follows the significant Google algorithmic changes aiming to give users a better search experience.

The relationship between social, search and content has changed, and several forces are behind this transformation. Content, now a large part of this equation, is now consumed and distributed locally and globally, across multiple devices (PC, mobile, tablet) and in multiple formats (text, video, images, etc.). It has become easier than ever for nearly anyone to create, share and consume content, leading to an overwhelming abundance of content on the Web.

As a result, social engagement is becoming increasingly dependent on high quality content, and search engines have begun to take social into account. It is essential that marketers dig deeper into search, social, local and mobile data to understand how they all work in tandem to impact rankings. Content related to social engagement is the type of content that marketers are prioritizing now in 2013. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the marketers surveyed stated that social engagement will be the most valuable type of content in 2013.

If you create something unique, insightful and compelling, people will share. Content marketing improves SEO performance as Google looks to rank high quality and relevant content. As a result, Content Marketing has become the catalyst that fuels search and social media activity.

- Jim Yu, CEO of BrightEdge



Content Marketing and SEO: Takeaways for Your Business

- Create unique, insightful and compelling content and people will share it. This will improve your SEO performance.
- A website built around the needs of the consumer will be a successful one from the content on the site to the SEO keywords to the user-friendly navigation.
- Stay focused on creating engaging content experiences and impress visitors with thoughtful usability, making their job (answering their question) easier.
- Create a content strategy that hits from all angles: blog posts, articles, graphs, data, infographics, interactive content - even short pictures when you Tweet. Everything you do has to be content-driving for better SEO performance.
- Be unique and the links will come!

Conclusion

The way consumers continue to use social media, the rise of content marketing, and the improving technology of search engines all play a factor in the way search moves forward and the way your business moves forward.

Create content, listen to your customers, have fun and you will not only succeed in the search world, but in your business as well.

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