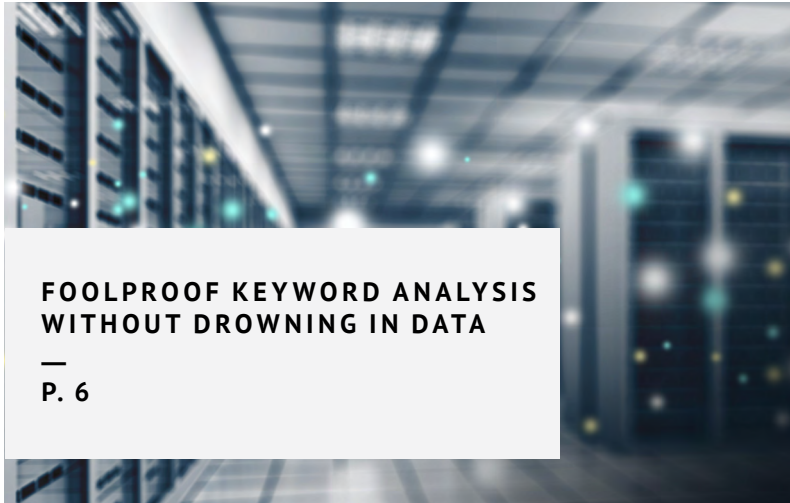


SEO STRATEGY

DEVELOPING A HOLISTIC APPROACH

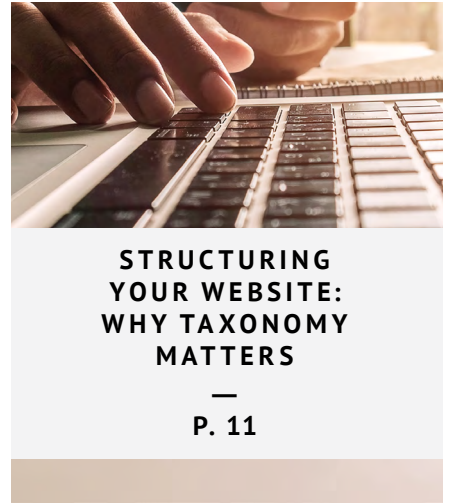
JUNE 2017
SEO Strategy

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IT'S TIME FOR A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SEO



BEA PATMAN,
HEAD OF SEO



IT'S VALUABLE TO PAN BACK FROM TIME TO TIME AND HAVE A LOOK AT THE WAY IN WHICH SMALL CLUSTERS OF CHANGES HAVE ADDED UP TO A NEW SEO STANDARD.

This edition of our SEO magazine is a little different to the others you might have read recently. Whereas we normally focus either on content and distribution or on technical developments in search, this time we're pulling all those themes together to provide a holistic look at SEO strategy in 2017.

If you've worked with SEO in any capacity before, you'll probably have heard the term "moving goalposts" mentioned at some point. This is how we tend to think of Google's ranking algorithm, because the factors that web pages are measured against are constantly being tested and tweaked. The variety of moving parts is

extremely broad (we estimate that there are over 200 individual ranking factors) but these can be distilled into smaller groups such as link signals, site speed, content relevancy, accessibility and user signals.

You may have attended one of our events or masterclasses in the past year, in which case you'll have had a close-up look at some of these component parts – perhaps at our mobile¹ or UX and CRO² events, or at our recent creative content marketing clinic³. But as each of these areas evolves separately, the overall SEO landscape eventually starts to shift quite significantly. While a few years ago we might have prioritised optimising content for keywords and outreaching to bloggers, for example, these days you'd be more likely

to hear us talking about structuring site taxonomies and engaging in proactive digital PR. Different algorithmic shifts have affected these transitions, but combined they constitute what the new “best practice” looks like (*best practice* in quotes, by the way, because we never really subscribe to the idea that there’s a one-size-fits-all formula!). That’s why it’s valuable to pan back from time to time and have a look at the way in which small clusters of changes have added up to a new SEO standard.

The structure of this magazine loosely correlates with the chronology of a new, ground-up organic strategy, beginning with keyword analysis, through to site optimisation and onto content creation and distribution. These are the foundations of pretty much all SEO strategies and in that respect things remain largely unchanged. What tends to shift as the industry goalposts move is the way that we approach these fundamental jobs. Keyword analysis, for example, has had to change in recent years in response to a gradual restriction of data available from the most prominent keyword planning tool – Google’s – which is why Senior Consultant, Damian Burke, uses his article to delve into the best ways of making use of the information available now.

Over on the content marketing front, search engines continue to push brands to create content that is relevant and valuable to consumers. As the number of methods for creating and distributing content increases, so marketers must work to ensure that everything they create has a strong purpose and is written to a high standard. The tendency nowadays is to avoid creating content for content’s sake and instead to employ a considered, strategic content marketing plan that is creative and adheres to SEO best practice. Brands that are unable to create high quality content will see themselves losing out on visibility.

We see this trend reflected in the world of digital PR, as Head of Content & Engagement, Andy Way, highlights in his article. He explains that as relevancy becomes a more important ranking factor, digital marketers need to take a step back and formulate digital PR and outreach campaigns that will attract high quality links from sites similar (from a content perspective) to your own. As such, the focus needs to be very much on quality over quantity, since one highly authoritative link will deliver far more value for your business from a search perspective than lots of low authority links.

You’ll also find scattered throughout the magazine little snippets of insights from various other Greenlight SEOs, providing a glimpse into the kind of practices that they’re prioritising nowadays. What I hope will emerge as you read is a clearer picture of what we consider to be the cornerstones of a thoroughly modern SEO strategy – though you’d be forgiven for thinking we’ve veered some way from SEO, given that some of the topics take us into UX, voice search and journalism territory. I’m happy to leave that impression, however, because it’s true that the basics of SEO strategy have broadened laterally in a number of important ways. Beyond this, I hope we’ll also leave you with a lot of tips that you can put into action straight away, whether they resemble familiar SEO tasks or not. Get these right, and you’ll see your organic performance thriving well into 2018.

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1. <http://www.greenlightdigital.com/blog/posts/users-would-rather-give-up-a-kidney-than-lose-their-mobile-but-many-marketers-still-havent-optimised-for-this-channel/>
 2. <http://www.greenlightdigital.com/blog/posts/ux-cro-event-the-round-up/>
 3. <http://www.greenlightdigital.com/blog/posts/creating-content-marketing-marrying-relevance-with-creativity-event-round-up/>


FOOLPROOF KEYWORD ANALYSIS WITHOUT DROWNING IN DATA



DAMIAN BURKE
SENIOR SEO CONSULTANT

“

**KEYWORD RESEARCH
IS ESSENTIALLY
MARKET RESEARCH,
SO IT HELPS TO
LISTEN TO YOUR
AUDIENCE FIRST.**



Keyword research is only a small part of SEO, but it's an important one. No SEO strategy is complete without this vital portion of research, which lends itself to helping structure your site in the most natural and relevant way possible, while also taking into account audience-based analytics. However, the devil is in the detail, and this phase can often result in mammoth amounts of data that can leave SEOs feeling lost – unless, of course, you use my go-to methodology which keeps things simple, logical and, most importantly for your brand, highly relevant to your audience.

So, let's get straight to it; here's my foolproof method to keyword research. The best approach is to build a list from multiple sources, get the monthly search volumes for each term, then pick out what you want to target, being sure to further categorise or prioritise those terms where necessary.

To get search volumes, you'll likely be using the Google AdWords Keyword Planner¹, so you may only get rounded data if you don't have any active PPC campaigns over a certain threshold. There are paid alternatives, but rounded data is often enough to make important decisions.

Keyword lists can get big, but if you've got basic spreadsheet skills and an hour or two spare, then you can cover all bases without drowning in data.

BUILDING YOUR FIRST LIST

Keyword research is essentially market research, so it helps to listen to your audience first. Balance that with further knowledge of your own business and products, and you have a good place to start.

There are also keyword combination tools such as Merge Words² to quickly build out your initial list, and maybe a few variations such as your business name and city or country that can be added too.

Get the basics down into a list then move on to the next step.

COMPETITOR RESEARCH

Browsing the sites of your competitors is a great way to get ideas for synonyms or phrases which you may want to target. The easiest way to do this is to visit your competitors' sites and pay attention to page titles, headlines and sub-headlines, jotting down your findings. Don't forget to take a look at the navigation and footer, and even the sitemap for an overview.

If you're looking to be thorough, crawling tools like Screaming Frog's SEO Spider Tool³ can help you amass them all in one go, as well as meta tags such as titles and descriptions. The keyword meta tag doesn't hold any SEO value (except with some aggregators such as Google News), but if your competitors use it then it's worth researching what terms they're trying to target.

ON-SITE SEARCH

If you don't already track internal search terms on your own site in Google Analytics, make a note to look into it later, as it's a necessary resource to enable you to accurately tell what users are looking for while browsing.

Once you've got tracking sorted, you can find the internal search data in Google Analytics by navigating to 'Behaviour', and then 'Search Terms'. Don't forget to set the time period as wide as possible to add all the terms to your original list.

KEYWORD SUGGESTION TOOLS

Now that you have an idea of the themes you'd like to cover, third-party tools like Ubersuggest⁴ and Keyword Tool⁵ can help generate the bulk of your list. Don't forget to also consider long-tail keywords, which are those that probably have less monthly search volume, but are more specific and therefore less competitive. Select your location and language, run a search for your terms and repeat as necessary.

GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

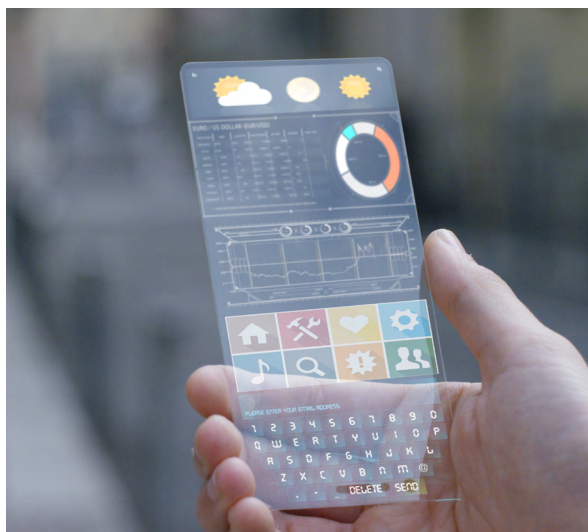
Google Search Console is great for showing which keywords or phrases are already generating traffic for your site. There are also paid tools that provide this with varying success, but go here first for free data from the last 90 days. You can find this data in Google Search Console, and then looking under 'Search Traffic' in the 'Search Analytics' tab.

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

In the salad days before 2011, marketers could see how individual keywords performed via Google Analytics. While we don't see all this traffic data anymore, there's often a residual amount that still gets tracked. Navigate to Google Analytics, go to the 'Acquisition' tab, then click on 'Organic Keywords'. Widen the timeframe, ignore the (not provided) and (not set) entries, and save everything else.

QUERY-BASED KEYWORDS

Voice search is changing the keyword landscape. More search queries are becoming actual questions in the form of complete, interrogative sentences. Search volumes for these can be low and the terms often rely heavily on context, but query-based research can provide some interesting results, and likely more so in the future. A great place to start in order to find content ideas based on keywords is Answer The Public⁶, which is a fantastic resource that no SEO should plan without.



CHECK YOUR VOLUMES AND FEED THE FUNNEL

Now that you have your big list of keywords and phrases, it's time to get the volumes. Log into your Google AdWords account, and then navigate to the 'Keyword Planner' area under the 'Tools' tab in the top navigation.

Select "get search volume data and trends", input your keywords (you may need to do this in batches), select your target country, and click "get search volume" to get your data. To add a second batch, click "modify search" and replace the keywords.

Download your keywords to file or export to Google Docs, and select "segment statistics by month" to see seasonal data. Once saved, sort by search volume and start picking the entries of interest.

Don't let superfluous entries overwhelm you, simply highlight what you need and move on. If this process sparks any new keyword ideas, add them to the list and research those terms.

What you do with your keyword data depends on your requirements, but following this method is effectively the most reliable and logical way to develop sound keyword analysis. What's essential is that you don't forget to keep an eye on your lists, making sure to refresh them and update your keyword volumes every so often so they're as timely and relevant as possible.

1. <https://adwords.google.com/home/tools/keyword-planner/>
2. <http://mergewords.com/>
3. <https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider/>
4. <https://ubersuggest.io/>
5. <http://keywordtool.io/>
6. <http://answerthepublic.com/>

SNIPPET

CONVERGING STRATEGIES



ELODIE MORVAN
SEO CONSULTANT



Even in 2017, we're finding that there's still a disconnect between SEO expertise and conversion rate optimisation (CRO) or user experience (UX) knowledge, as though the disciplines were completely set apart and working towards entirely different goals. While this difference resembles the way SEO and PPC tend to be considered separately, there's an important distinction: SEO and CRO are two points on a single channel, and should

be working hand in hand as their goals are very close; often exactly the same. Both disciplines work towards achieving higher revenue, and one can feed off the other. Search engines now look at user experience and are growing smarter every day – and better rankings mean more traffic to be used to run CRO tests. Going forward, there's absolutely no reason to keep the two strategies separate anymore.

STRUCTURING YOUR WEBSITE: WHY TAXONOMY MATTERS

With the exception of SEO's brief dalliance with single-page web apps a few years ago (just the mention of "escaped fragments" is still enough to send chills down many of our spines within the SEO team), structuring a website's content around a logical information architecture is pretty much how we've always done things. As we often say, it's not always the principles of SEO strategy that change over time but the 'hows' and 'whys' of doing them – and that's very much the case when it comes to taxonomy optimisation.

A correctly structured taxonomy creates a clear conceptual hierarchy and helps users to browse and ultimately convert (fulfilling both SEO and CRO objectives, as alluded to by Elodie in her snippet about the two channels converging). From an SEO perspective, it facilitates easy crawling and indexation, increases your overall keyword reach and indicates a depth and breadth of relevant, rankable content.



JAKE ROMAN-CAPON
SENIOR SEO CONSULTANT



**THERE'S NEVER
BEEN A TIME IN
THE HISTORY OF
SEO WHEN USER
EXPERIENCE
HAS BEEN AS
IMPORTANT AS IT
IS RIGHT NOW.**

However, a taxonomy plan should by no means be driven purely by SEO. When helping a brand to structure – or restructure – its online content, we consult a variety of data sources to come up with the optimal information architecture:

SITE SEARCH

A website's internal search function is one of the most powerful tools for identifying the precise topics, categories or products that its customers are struggling to find. Users tend to turn to the search bar when they can't easily identify what it is they're looking for in the available navigation, so taking the search query data from here and zeroing in on the most commonly searched queries is a great first step towards building a user-oriented taxonomy.

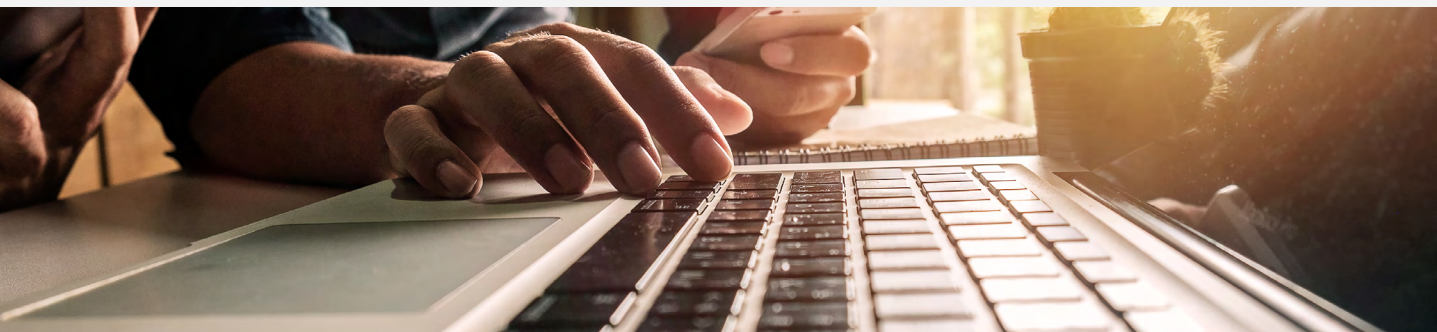
USER PATHS, ENTRY & EXIT PAGES

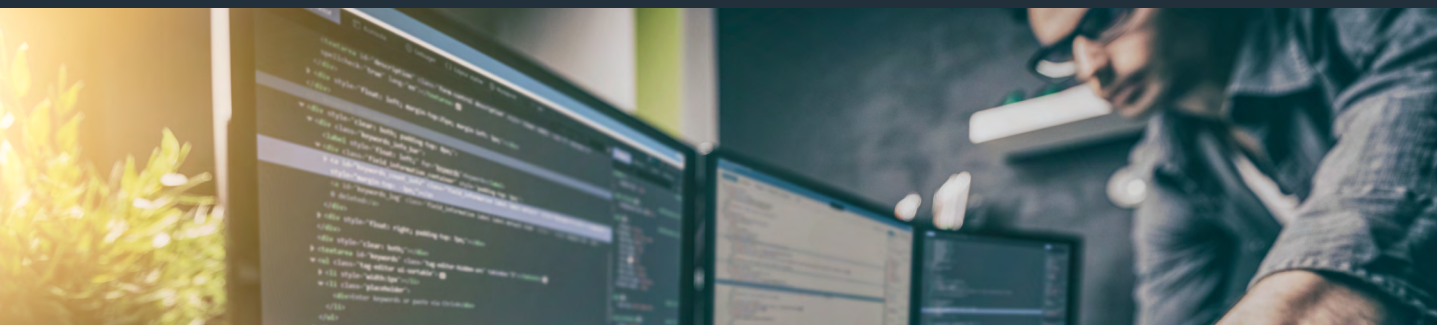
This kind of data is available in all analytics platforms, including the most common: Google Analytics. By understanding how users move from their initial landing page to the rest of your site, and more importantly where you might be losing them, you have a much better chance of building a taxonomy that helps address all of their needs and ultimately leads them towards a conversion.

USER TRACKING

This is another type of analysis that's traditionally considered the preserve of UX and CRO teams, but is now regularly used to inform organic optimisation. There's a variety of programs available to track user activity on your site, some of which offer (anonymised!) live tracking to help you spot informational cul-de-sacs (pages where users are getting stuck for too long, squiggling their cursor around and scrolling up and down in the hunt for further links that aren't there, or perhaps labouring through swathes of content that would be better split across several pages). If you're building the taxonomy for a whole new site or simply don't have access to such tools, you can make use of our previous studies to guide your planning¹.

In essence, our approach is designed primarily to clean up confusing user journeys and promote the most important and popular content. SEO is a happy by-product of those two things.





So why am I talking about this now? Well, it seems like we SEOs might have painted ourselves into a corner in recent years. The PageRank era of SEO, during which we obsessed about the number and weighting of links pointing to a page, instilled a pattern of behaviour that saw webmasters attempting to position content as close to their site's homepage as possible – the logic being that the fewer clicks there were between a homepage and a given sub-page, the better it would perform. What this has created is a web full of sites with flat hierarchies and confusing jumbles of themes.

In an effort to mitigate the problems that these flat information architectures inevitably present to crawlers, we've become heavily dependent on XML sitemaps to ensure that all our pages are crawled and indexed. These remain valuable for indexation, but they only serve bots – what about our human audiences? Google and other search engines are paying increasing levels of attention to the behaviour of site visitors, rewarding sites that engage users with improved rankings, so it's more

important than ever that we consider their journeys as well as those of crawlers.

HTML sitemaps are a quick fix that help to make all pages findable, but they're not much use to a big eCommerce site with SKUs numbering in the thousands. And what about conversion-driving? A lot of users are likely to reach your site without a clear idea of what it is that they actually want. Present them with a list of thousands of topics and you're probably not going to help clarify that for them. But lead them through a logically structured, tightly-themed journey and you're much more likely to see them convert.

So that brings us back to taxonomy optimisation: the key is to gather all the insights you can about your audience's needs and behaviour, pick apart the cramped and jumbled corners of your site, and stretch them out into a concise, intuitive hierarchical structure. There's never been a time in the history of SEO when user experience has been as important as it is right now, and this is by far the most powerful way that you can perfect it.

1. <http://www.greenlightdigital.com/blog/press/what-marketers-need-to-consider-with-their-structural-seo/>
<http://www.greenlightdigital.com/blog/posts/technical-seo-masterclass-the-round-up/>
<http://www.greenlightdigital.com/blog/press/advice-to-website-owners-on-structural-seo-qa-with-adam-bunn/>
<http://www.greenlightdigital.com/blog/magazine/the-seo-brief-2015-review/>

SNIPPET

FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER



CHRIS DUNN
COO, FOUNDIT!



The key advantage within SEO teams is that they have a good understanding of the most likely intent of the customer due to the wealth of keyword and engagement data at their fingertips. However, traditionally, SEOs and search marketers have been confined to operating within the constraints of their site and development cycles. More often than not, this approach results in a landing page experience that produces mixed results, high bounce rates, and leaves plenty of opportunities for improvement left untaken.

The good news is that there are emerging technologies that are enabling SEOs to do more listening to customers and, crucially, to act upon that information without the need for lengthy replatforming projects or fighting for a slot in the

next IT release cycle. By focusing on customer intent at every level of the customer journey and providing relevant, engaging navigation front and centre, customers are less likely to bounce. By reducing bounce rates and improving conversion, the opportunity exists to both improve the site for existing users and develop a larger base of new 'new' customers from better rankings. As a result, search engine algorithms will directly factor in these positive click signals, and ultimately help to grow your business while also annexing a greater portion of the market from competitors.

Foundit! is a big data marketing platform that automatically optimises your landing pages on desktop and mobile devices for the customers intent.

THE CONNECTED

HOME: ALEXA



DAN CODY
SENIOR SEO EXECUTIVE

The internet of things; the connected home; smart homes – these are all ways of describing a new environment in which *things*, devices other than computers, are internet-enabled and interactive. As with many digital concepts, it's something we've talked about for many years now without necessarily seeing much evidence of it entering the reality of day-to-day life.

This has changed in recent years as devices like Nest (a digital, connected thermostat) and, more recently, 'voice assistants' such as Amazon Echo and Google Home have become common household items. The growth of these is changing the shape of search, expanding our focus beyond search engines and into the domain of marketplaces.

“

**THE MOST
IMPORTANT THING
YOU CAN DO TO
ENSURE FUTURE
SUCCESS IS TO TEST
AND LEARN.**

—



Amazon Alexa is the latest big thing – the voice search function that users of Amazon Echo devices can utilise. Among other things, Alexa can facilitate the direct ordering of products, so it's perhaps unsurprising that we're increasingly being asked how brands can optimise for this kind of search. So, how does it work?

From a user's perspective it couldn't be simpler – they simply ask Alexa to order a product, Alexa responds with a product available on Amazon Prime, and then asks them to confirm the order. A user asking their device "order me an electric razor", for example, will be served the top performing product matching this term. In some cases, 'Amazon's Choice' products, which have been given a certification for matching the top-performing criteria, are chosen. These select items can also appear as part of regular Amazon searches too, and so complement the wider Amazon user journey.

But what's happening behind the scenes? How is Amazon choosing which products to display? For a product to be served to users ordering directly from Amazon Echo, it must be available through Amazon Prime and be rated well for price, shipping speed and have decent reviews. However, certain items can't be ordered using voice search, including:

- Clothes
- Shoes
- Jewellery
- Watches
- Amazon Fresh
- Prime Pantry
- Prime Now
- Add-On items

Provided your products don't fall within these categories, it's simply a case of ensuring that you're pricing fairly and competitively, and delivering great customer service.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR A PRODUCT TO BE DEEMED AMAZON'S CHOICE?

To be considered as part of the Amazon's Choice range, there's a broader array of criteria to satisfy in order to influence Amazon's perception.

DESCRIPTION / KEYWORD USAGE

As with traditional SEO, this needs to be richly descriptive and include relevant phrases which are likely to be used by searchers. We recommend ensuring that each product sold through Amazon has a description of at least 100 words.

PRODUCT REVIEWS

Product reviews and seller reputation figures are factors in your product's inclusion as a choice item. Actively encouraging users to leave feedback on purchases not only benefits this, but also adds to the data that you have available to guide you on exactly how influential these factors are to your performance.

TITLE

This should be as specific as possible and relevant to the product category. It must include, where possible:

- Colour
- Brand
- Model
- Size

IMAGES

The more images available, the better! Images positively influence conversions, so choose them wisely and make sure they're accurate to what the product truly looks like. We highly recommend that images be as high resolution as possible to ensure the zoom function can be enabled.

SHIPPING TIME

The speed of shipping is an important consideration, as is ensuring that there's enough stock to match order numbers on Amazon.

Finally, as with any new search environment, the most important thing you can do to ensure future success is to test and learn. Monitor your conversion rate closely every time you make adjustments to your product listings so that you can build up knowledge based on what works best for you (and what doesn't!). Basically, apply this golden rule: take care of your content and your customers, and the rest should follow.

SNIPPET

PAGE SPEED



AGATA BOWDEN
SEO EXECUTIVE

In keeping with the general theme of addressing familiar topics for new reasons, I couldn't let a magazine about SEO strategy pass without mentioning page speed. A longstanding component of Google's ranking algorithm, the time that a page takes to load is being placed under renewed scrutiny now that we know Google is going to shift to a mobile-first index. This transition will see Google using the mobile version of a website (when available) as the bellwether for where it should rank, instead of the desktop site.



Because mobile devices generally have less processing power than their desktop equivalents, the weight and speed of pages has a far bigger impact on how a site performs here. There was a big flurry of attention given to desktop speed a few years ago, when Google confirmed that it was a ranking factor, but since then the focus has died down and many webmasters are treating the job as complete. But for your SEO strategy to be robust enough to withstand the index change, it's crucial that you bring speed back into focus and make sure your mobile experience is as streamlined as possible.

MOBILE-FIRST READINESS



JAMIE FAULKNER
SENIOR SEO CONSULTANT

It's impossible to talk about a bang-up-to-date SEO strategy without giving a nod to Google's upcoming transition to a mobile-first index. Certainly, the renewed importance of page speed is the number one factor for mobile optimisation, but what else can you do to get ready for mobile-first? Here's a quick run-down:

- ▶ If you've been avoiding using content in tabs or accordions because of past advice about it being demoted in the desktop index, you can now reconsider. Non-visible content is not going to be demoted in a mobile-first index



- ▶ If you have separate mobile URLs (e.g. an 'm.' subdomain or a '/mobile/' subfolder) you'll need to be even more vigilant about ensuring that all your reciprocal alternate/canonical links are in place
- ▶ If you have a separate mobile site, Google recommends implementing structured data markup on desktop and mobile
- ▶ Eliminating UX issues on mobile will become even more important. Keep on top of font sizes, tap spacing and fiddly navigation¹!

1. <http://www.greenlightdigital.com/blog/magazine/developing-an-organic-mobile-marketing-strategy/>

CONTENT CONSIDERATIONS IN 2017: HOW CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY INFLUENCE CONTENT



KEVIN O'CONNOR
CONTENT MARKETING MANAGER



**IN 2017, THE STRATEGY
AND THOUGHT BEHIND
A PIECE OF CONTENT IS
FAR MORE IMPORTANT
THAN EVER.**

In a world where technology is getting smarter and the amount of content we create and share is increasing, a return to the basics of content marketing is needed.

In 2017, brands have realised that new trends in tech – and an increasingly content-hungry consumer – has meant that they're better placed to compete for the attention of consumers. They've also realised that cutting out the middle man between themselves and their customers by directly creating and publishing content can reap high rewards at an attractive ROI, while also providing themselves with assets that can be used in multiple channels.

There have been several large technology shifts over the past two years which have affected how we think about content. The rise of mobile-first and social content is nothing new, but what we've seen emerging over the last year is an 'always on' content experience. This phenomenon sees users being constantly active online and seamlessly switching between content formats and channels (streaming music and video services, podcasts, news, social, shopping and work). Whereas previously we had talked about brands trying to own the

user's 'third space' (which is the space that exists while they're either not at work or at home, such as commuting or socialising), now the lines between all three spaces are becoming so blurred as to be non-existent. As such, brands and other publishers have come under increasing pressure to create video and other 'flashy' content to cut through a noisy market for attention.

At the same time, voice search, semantic search and an increasingly richer SERP environment means that it's harder and harder to rank and appear in search landscapes which had previously been quite basic. This has meant that brands are taking part in an arms race for coverage and links from publications and influencers who've also seen their cut-through and influence diminish, meaning that

there are fewer and fewer available high authority sites from which to gain coverage and links.

Updates to the search algorithm have made it harder for bloggers to compete as publishers, as they now need to publish more content of a higher quality in order to affect their authority. Professional content creation tools and mediums such as drones, 360 videos, VR tech and high-end cameras have also become far more mainstream, easy-to-use and affordable, making it simpler for people to create and consume high quality content. These changes have meant that brands are competing to work with the same shrinking pool of influencers, while also competing with them to create outstanding content.



WHO? WHY? WHAT?

Even in this ever-changing landscape, the fundamentals of content remain the same. The key thing brands and agencies should ask themselves before creating content is “who?”, “why?” and “what?”

Who are you trying to reach? Are you trying to gain more customers or connect with current customers to turn them into brand advocates? If brands are able to answer this fundamental question, then the content they create can be more targeted, more effective and more cost efficient.

Why are you creating content? Are you trying to affect a certain call to action such as increasing subscribers to a newsletter, raising awareness of a new product, or growing your existing customer

base? Once brands know who they’re creating content for, they can better understand why they’re creating it and, therefore, how ambitious they need to be. Often brands and publishers will waste a lot of money creating a flashy interactive microsite or polished piece of video content, when that’s not necessarily what their audience wants or what will have the biggest impact on their key metrics.

What type of content should you create? What channels do you need to use? These two questions should inform what format your content should take; whether it’s a well-optimised landing page which can possibly rank in a competitive SERP, or a flashy video piece which can connect to a key audience on Facebook and grow your social audience. In 2017, the strategy and thought behind a piece of content is far more important than ever.

In content terms, form should follow function, but this is often forgotten in the early stages of brainstorming, and brands are quick to either apply overambitious metrics to a dry piece of product copy, or crush a fly with a sledgehammer by creating huge and expensive interactives. In 2017, where there are more possibilities than ever for content to succeed, there are just as many opportunities for it to fail, and so the fundamentals of “who”, “why” and “what” shouldn’t change.



AN SEO FAIRY TALE



ANDY WAY
HEAD OF CONTENT &
ENGAGEMENT



SEARCH ENGINE ALGORITHMS CONTINUALLY SHIFT, LOOKING FOR NEW AND BETTER WAYS OF ASCERTAINING RELEVANCE TO SEARCH TERMS. AND SO, THE NEED FOR BRANDS TO SOURCE HIGH QUALITY, RELEVANT LINKS BECOMES EVER MORE IMPORTANT.

The relationship between traditional PR and outreach for SEO has always been a complex one. Gone are the days of seeking a plethora of links; now, we strive to gain coverage from highly authoritative sites by creating campaigns that are timely and truly valuable to core audiences.

As ever, the ability to create a compelling, creative story is integral to engagement – and so to explain the nuances between PR and outreach in today’s digital landscape, I’m staying true to form and will communicate this through a modern SEO fairy tale.

Once upon a time, there was a princess who enjoyed a pampered and spoiled life. She lived in an opulent palace, was invited to all the best balls, given luxurious gifts, and she knew all the most glamorous people in the realm. Her name was Princess Rosalind; or 'PR' for short.

Now, within the kingdom there was a merchant's daughter. Her family, the Outreach clan, was from the wrong side of the tracks, but her father had become successful and his daughter loved hosting parties for associates amongst the mercantile class in the hope of becoming influential. Admittedly, sometimes she had to encourage people to attend her gatherings with little presents and suchlike, but that was fine because the king's tax collectors didn't pay much attention to her.

But Miss Outreach became more and more successful, until one day, her parties attracted the attention of the aristocracy, the politicians, and the wealthy. And this, in turn, made the Exchequer take an interest in her activities. They objected to what they thought was her buying her way into power. Now, the kingdom was also suffering economic problems and Princess Rosalind's soirees became too expensive to throw and her celebrity chums didn't show up as often as they once had.

It happened that one day Princess Rosalind met Miss Outreach at an event. They took one look at each other and fell madly in love. The Princess found Miss Outreach's hard-nosed approach to business utterly irresistible, while Miss Outreach swooned at the Princess' professionalism and class.

This being a fairy story, they did, of course, get married and live happily ever after. Real life being less romantic, the relationship between PR and outreach is slightly more torrid, but is nonetheless a situation where one can't live without the other. Search engine algorithms continually shift, looking for new and better ways of ascertaining relevance to search terms. And so, the need for brands to source high quality, relevant links becomes ever more important. The days of large volume, low-quality links from bloggers producing measurable effects on rankings are over, and the risks involved in paid or incentivised links have increased considerably. This isn't to say that blogger outreach has no value; many bloggers have excellent relevance and authority in the eyes of the search engines. But it's only the best of the best who offer real worth for SEO purposes. Increasingly, it's digital PR – with an understanding of the importance of followed links – that drives rank increases.

Our approach within the Content & Engagement team has become a much more varied and nuanced one. A single link from a very authoritative website can offer more SEO value than dozens – or even hundreds – of small blogger links. In addition, there's increasing evidence that other factors such as traffic and citation provide a level of worth to an SEO campaign. The secret is in identifying opportunities, convincing publishers to cover your content and weighing up the value of each situation.

If only life were as simple as fairy tales. But that would be boring. Fortunately, it's a gritty, complicated and an endlessly changing world.





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