



SEO TRENDS 2022

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CONTENT

Important SEO Trends To Watch In 2022

By Danny Goodwin, Executive Editor at Search Engine Journal

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Search Data is the New Market Research

By Patty Johnson, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Searchmetrics

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How Google MUM Is Impacting Content, Ranking, And Link Building

By Kaitie Frank, Copywriter and Content Writer at Page One Power

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Ignore Google, Satisfy Users: The Major Shift In The SEO World Is Finally Here

By Vitor Peçanha, Co-Founder and CMO, Rock Content

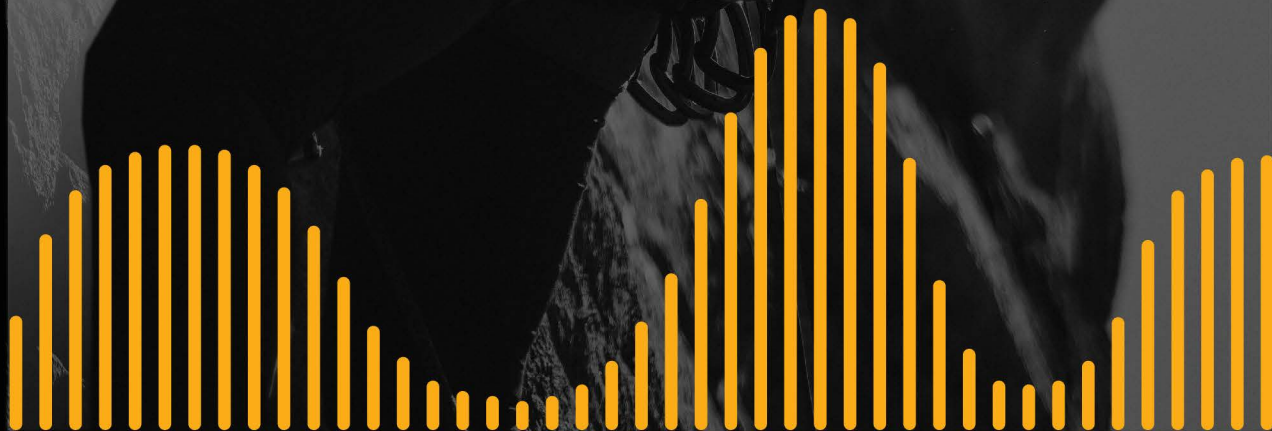


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You'll get uncensored and unfiltered insights and tips straight from these experts on how to succeed at SEO in 2022:



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Dave Davies

CEO, Co-Founder,
Beanstalk Internet
Marketing

Boost your SEO strategy with interactive content experiences

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Users will engage and spend more time on your page, attracting backlinks



Get valuable data from your prospects

Interactive content provides you with valuable data so you can make improvements on your SEO On Page



Improve your mobile experience

Improve your mobile experience and you can get valuable points from the search engines



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Interactive content converts 2x more than static content

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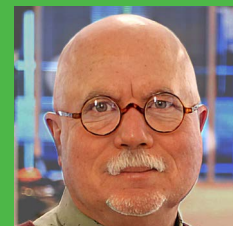
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IMPORTANT SEO TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2022

By Danny Goodwin

“To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.” - Henri Bergson.

If you feel like you’re constantly recreating yourself and the way you do SEO, you definitely aren’t alone.

It felt as though things couldn’t get any more tumultuous after 2020 (you know, with a global pandemic and all).



Then came 2021. And Google said, “Hold my beer.”

Hot on the heels of the [Passage Ranking launch](#) in February came the Product Reviews update to shake up ecommerce marketing, leaving [triumphant winners and unfortunate losers](#) in its wake.

Summer brought a flurry of updates as Google finally rolled out the [Page Experience update](#), [slowly rolled out a core update](#) through June and July, and took [direct aim at link spam](#) in a late July update.

Are you [Core Web Vital](#)-ed out?

It's time to leave 2021 – and its SEO strategy – in the rearview. Let's take our annual look at what's ahead for SEO professionals in 2022.

Read on to learn the top 10 trends you need to know for 2022 planning from our panel of experts in search marketing.

1. User Intent

One of the most talked-about topics for 2022? User intent. It's a trend that's here to stay.

[Kristina Azarenko](#), SEO Consultant & Founder of MarketingSyrup Digital Inc., believes it's time for people to finally “stop thinking in terms of ‘SEO content’ and create content for users with the intent and keywords in mind.”

[Himani Kankaria](#), Founder at Missive Digital, said, “Considering the updates like Google rewriting meta title tags and coming up with indented results on SERPs in 2021, it seems Google is working hard to identify the right intent behind a user's search, irrespective of the type of queries.”

That's where SEO professionals need to focus on bringing a holistic approach to your content strategy in 2022, she said.

“Be it video, blog, or web content, it must be planned for the keywords, users' intent behind searching and consuming them, your intent behind creating them, and the stage at which your consumers are in the buyer's journey,” Kankaria added.

[Suganthan Mohanadasan](#), Co-founder & Technical SEO Lead at Snippet Digital, agrees.

“Search intent will become ever more important in 2022,” he said. “Understanding search intent continues to become more important than ever, particularly with the introduction of Google’s Multitask Unified Model (MUM) update.

“I think we will see more search marketers rethink their approach to content creation by focussing on understanding search intent more intelligently,” Mohanadasan added, noting that keyword research will always remain an important bedrock to organic search strategy.

Even so, we need to be able to look beyond keywords in their raw form and draw meaningful insight from them.

“Understanding the relationship between your keywords and knowing how to target them to meet the search intent is already the key difference between an effective and ineffective search strategy, but in 2022 it will become even more vital,” Mohanadasan said.

[Mordy Oberstein](#), Head of Communications at Semrush, thinks that 2022 will be the year it finally pays off to take user intent seriously.

“In 2022, we’ll take it to a new level. I don’t mean merely breaking things down by informational or transactional intents, etc. I mean,

considering everything intent encapsulates for the multiple user profiles who might find the same piece of content useful,” Oberstein said.

“It’s the ability to adequately empathize with your audience so as to provide a comprehensive experience that addresses their implicit concerns,” he added.

2. Content Quality

[Brodie Clark](#), SEO Consultant at Brodie Clark Consulting, said marketers need to watch for what he calls “The Site-wide Content Quality Effect.”

“One aspect I regularly see for large sites while completing audits is many pages being categorized as ‘Discovered, currently not indexed’ in Google Search Console. Get familiar with this exclusion type within the Coverage report in GSC and pay attention to the patterns Google is trying to highlight,” Clark said.

“Google has said in the past that you should be making sure published pages (that are indexable) should be fantastic,” he said. “Stick to this as your SEO mantra, and you’ll have a future-proof SEO strategy ready for 2022.”

But why is this happening?

“Many are doing short-term SEO efforts mainly to gain links and awareness from digital PR, adding hundreds of content, or only tackling specific technical SEO fixes,” said Motoko Hunt, President of International Search Marketing Consulting | AJPR.

Hunt explains that while these work well for quick wins, they are not long-term solutions.

“This trend also created so much similar content on the web. Considering the MUM update, it is important to publish unique content covering specific topics that are not covered by other websites,” Hunt said.

“Rather than adding hundreds of generic content to the site, research the overall interests of the target audience, organize those entities by the topic, and prioritize them by the relevance to the business goals,” Hunt added. She recommends that marketers focus on the information that is uniquely different from others and highlight your specialty in the topic area.

[Jesse McDonald](#), Global SEO Strategist at IBM, shares a similar outlook.

“With recent enhancements to Google’s algorithm in the way of BERT and MUM, I think more and more SEO professionals are going to focus on the quality of their content and site structure,” McDonald said.

While content has always been a focus of SEO professionals, with these updates, it’s going to be easier to speak to the quality of content being something that deserves focus, McDonald added.

[Jamie Indigo](#), Senior Technical SEO Lead at DeepCrawl, said, “To succeed post-paradigm, you need to focus on creating content that is factual and useful. The big winners will be those sites known for their contributions to their targeted subject matter.”

And [Kelsey Jones](#), Senior Director of Content for Awesome Motive, suggests that marketers quit siloing content and SEO.

“I thought this wasn’t an issue in today’s workforce, but I’ve found that it’s rare to find a writer with SEO expertise and vice versa. This signals a big knowledge gap between content and SEO that goes both ways,” Jones said.

“Of course, it’s great to specialize, but being a writer without SEO experience or being an SEO pro who doesn’t understand the nuances of content writing can be really detrimental to your content’s performance,” she added.

Jones advises that if you can't better integrate the roles (e.g., pay more for a writer with SEO experience), it's important to work hard on better integrating the teams, so they are both more involved in the creation process and cross-trained in all steps.

"It's also always worth paying for training, books, or resources for teams who want to learn SEO or how to write better," she said.

3. Localization Of SERPs & SERP Changes

[Dave Davies](#), CEO and Co-founder of Beanstalk Internet Marketing suspects that we'll see a continued focus on adding new SERP features and layouts in 2022.

Indigo, meanwhile, reminds us that "Misinformation is pushing Google to create a fact-oriented SERP. Search results are powerful. Simply seeing an idea repeated across page titles in a SERP can reinforce a belief."

"Google is often experimenting with changes to the mobile layout for local intent specifically," said [Amanda Jordan](#), Director of Local Search at LOCOMOTIVE Agency, adding that she foresees continued testing and changes in this area, especially for growth in online shopping, reviews, trust signals, and brand awareness.

“My recommendation is to focus on reputation on third-party and industry sites as well as wikis, GMB completion, site markup, and knowledge panels,” Jordan said.

[Helen Pollitt](#), SEO Manager at iTech Media, also discusses the localization of SERPs and how it relates to content.

“Google will be focusing a lot more on the localization of content over the next year. In 2021 we already saw more websites with country-specific content outranking those that used to be top of the SERPs but are more globally focused,” Pollitt said. “This will only get more obvious in 2022 even for purely online businesses with no brick and mortar offering.”

For sites that are not just targeting one country, it will be increasingly necessary to create local-focused content, she said.

“Look at your key search terms that show some local intent. For instance, ‘[x online service] Canada’ – if you are seeing search results being served that have obvious keyword targeting for ‘Canada,’ you may be in an industry where Google is showing more localized SERPs,” Pollitt said.

“In that case, you will need to look at creating Canada-specific pages where you perhaps had globally-focused ones previously. You will need to show local relevance in your content, as well,” she added.

4. Images & Visual Content

According to [Loren Baker](#), Founder of Search Engine Journal, dependence on stock imagery is set to decline.

“Sites with unique images will see a large boost in Image, Product, and normal search,” Baker said. “This is also a user behavior/intent reaction as younger users identify or resonate with unique lifestyle images and can instantly tell if something is real or staged.”

“By rewarding sites that use original imagery, more will be created. Google Lens then learns more,” he added, noting that this incentivizes the growth of original content from creators while learning more about areas, people, products, etc.

Indigo reminds us that at Search On 2021, Google announced a push to make SERPs more visually browsable and intuitive.

“This means bigger image blocks are displayed in the results for some queries. The boon of good image assets isn’t limited to SERP,” she said. “Google Lens will enable shoppers to look for a product using a photo on their device or found on a website – essentially a reverse image search with a solid use case for image optimization.”

Google Discover is also leveraging images, Indigo noted. She added that a recently Google-published case study showed that sites using the max-image-preview:large meta tag could see an increase in click-thru rate by 79% and an increase in total clicks by up to 333%.

“While Discover has been largely overlooked as an SEO opportunity, the inclusion of Discover data into the Search API shows that unified data sources and best practices are going to continue,” Indigo said.

She adds that we can reasonably hypothesize that with the new 4-page scroll of the SERPs on mobile and the increase of images, normal search will start looking a lot more like Discover.

[Eli Schwartz](#), Growth Advisor at Eli Schwartz, believes AI is set to make search much richer.

“Google Images are not going to just be a secondary search engine,” Schwartz said. “AI is going to allow Google to recognize when an image or video might be the best result for a user.”

Google has already revealed some of the capabilities they have in this area.

“And with Google Lens now a primary search action on Android devices, expect direct image search to grow even more,” Schwartz advises.

He also believes there’s going to be another search option by the end of the year.

“It could be growing market penetration from DuckDuckGo or Bing or something totally new, but all SEO pros should be wise to the potential of the growth of another search engine and not just focus on Google,” Schwartz said.

5. Automation

[Andreas Voniatis](#), the Founder of Artios, observes that automation of SEO practices – whether technical audits, competitor analysis, or search intent analysis – has already started this year and in 2022 will become even more widespread.

“As more SEO professionals worldwide become increasingly Python-savvy, we’ll see more automation, especially in agencies where more will automate as much of the technical audits, tools for analysis, and other areas of research, as much as possible,” Voniatis said.

He added for those who started this year or earlier: “We’ll see the automation of technical audits to make use of machine learning to segment technical issues by content type making the automation of technical audits more ‘intelligent.’”

[Aleyda Solis](#), International SEO Consultant & the Founder of Oraiinti, believes that marketers should leverage SEO automation for quality assurance.

“The implementation of real-time SEO validation and alerts systems within our platforms, to avoid the generation of issues in the first place or monitor them in real-time to be warned as soon as they happen will become more important to avoid very common SEO horror stories” Solis said.

[Mark Traphagen](#), VP of Product Marketing and Training at seoClarity, agrees we’ll see automation.

“The pace of change in SEO has continued to increase exponentially, while at the same time enterprise SEO professionals are dealing with ever larger and more complex sites,” he said. “The need for better automation to overcome gaps in technology, skills, and resources to be able to scale execution is rapidly passing from a ‘nice to have’ to a necessity.

Traphagen added that data is abundantly available now and has become a commodity.

“The challenge is reducing the time from data acquisition to insights to action. SEO pros (and the tools they use) will need to invest significantly more in developing automation in the year to come,” he said.

Traphagen advises that particular areas to investigate include the use of Edge technology to implement changes faster, AI-driven analysis to cull signals from the noise of data, and highly-customizable intelligent alerts.

And [Miranda Miller](#), Managing Editor at Search Engine Journal, believes SEO pros and content creators should be investigating their options for automating content creation.

“We can get an assist in competitive research, analyzing existing SERPs, and understanding related entities and concepts from technology,” Miller said. “But I don’t foresee any point in the next decade where automated content creation will satisfy user and search engine requirements without the assistance of editorial process and human creativity.”

“The possibility that I might one day soon be able to train my own language model(s) and scale my efforts in that way is exciting. For SEO pros who focus on content and on-page, this will be a growing area of opportunity in 2022 and beyond,” she added.

6. Natural Language Processing & Machine Learning

[Michael King](#), Founder & Managing Director at iPullRank, doesn't believe there will be major changes in 2022. But he said, "...there are a lot of more subtle shifts that we're seeing that point to the same two things: natural language generation and data pipelining."

"Google's evolution of multi-modal search suggests that there's a bigger focus on search journeys rather than individual queries," he said.

"This has interesting implications with respect to how we need to judge things such as co-occurrence and named entity recognition when we're doing our own optimization," King said.

"Google's shift towards being able to tease out subtopics from broader pages is an indication that more robust content has a better chance to perform in the long tail than it has previously," he added, noting that Apple and Google will continue to march us towards their data monopolies with the eventual death of cookies.

According to King, this further indicates a need for the collection of first-party data and pushing that data into a data store like BigQuery so you can capitalize on it for a variety of optimizations.

“People who capitalize on this data collection and find ways to combine it with advancements in [Natural Language Generation](#) and the understanding of the entity and keyword relationships will be able to scale the creation of robust content that’s positioned to rank,” King said.

[Alexis Sanders](#), Director at Merkle, reminds us that iterations on machine learning natural language models have continually improved multiple times every year.

“Best-in-class models used on the SQuAD dataset exceeded human performance in terms of precision in early 2020. The commoditization of machine learning solutions for generating content (as a means of supporting writers) and categorization is something that inspires our team,” Sanders said.

[Bill Slawski](#), Director of Search Marketing for Go Fish Digital and the Editor of SEO by the Sea, expects to see federated machine learning, “...where information from your mobile device is uploaded to the cloud once a day, and then data is returned to your device after it has been processed along with search selection and browsing information from many other mobile device users to power a machine-learned model,” he said.

“Google has blogged about this and has released a patent on it, and Apple Search has also patented federated learning, and how local and network computer information can be combined under that approach,” Slawski noted.

7. Mobile & User Experience

[Jori Ford](#), Chief Marketing Officer at FoodBoss, expects changes related to mobile page experience. “Last year, Google introduced new tools to support the optimization of mobile as well as page experience,” she noted.

Ford added, “With those pieces maturing, I think mobile page experience as it relates to core web vitals as content will lead the charge.”

As SEO pros, we tend to look at pieces, she said, adding, “But based on recent tooling, resources, and updates to analytics it’s clear that the entirety of the mobile experience from the discovery aspect all the way through to how easily users can interact, engage, and utilize will come together just as content experience has over the past few years.”

“This will impact not only mobile UX but Core Web Vitals on mobile, mobile usability, mobile-first indexing, and mobile security, as well,” she said.

8. Sustainability

[Jackie Chu](#), Global SEO Lead & Intelligence at Uber, said that “in 2022 SEO professionals should stop trying to chase algorithms and instead lean into long-term, sustainable SEO strategies.”

“The noise is so endless that to focus on the work, you’ll have no choice but to only think of the merits of your site and brand – not the latest industry news or Google update,” Chu said. “And that’s probably a good thing.”

“Enterprise ecommerce brands should increase focus for sustainability SEO targeting (as approved by their legal team) to support corporate social responsibility,” said [Renee Girard](#), Associate Director for SEO at Crate & Barrel.

“Google has already added result enhancements to incentivize sustainable choices in Shopping, Maps, and Nest. Although search demand has not yet peaked, consumer appetite should continue to build throughout 2022 and beyond,” Girard said.

[Isobel Smith](#), Technical SEO Team Lead at Ryte, offers another perspective on sustainability and search.

“Reducing the carbon footprint of our websites and digital infrastructures is not only a right step forward towards achieving net-zero, but it could even become a defining factor in search user’s behaviors,” she said.

Smith added that as Google is starting to display carbon emissions of flights and labeling eco-friendly hotels, “It’s not absurd to believe that Google could even begin showing the eco-impact of webpages.”

This could encourage greener attitudes online, especially considering the fact websites and their supporting systems have a similar carbon footprint to the airline industry, she said.

“Although creating more sustainable websites involves similar tactics to improving performance (e.g., improving availability, optimizing performance), carbon emission reductions could soon become an important metric worth reporting on,” Smith advises.

9. IndexNow

According to Jenn Mathews, SEO Manager at GitHub, Microsoft, and Yandex are leading the way with IndexNow.

“This allows websites to easily notify search engines whenever their website content is created, updated, or deleted. With this API, search engines are notified of updates so they can quickly crawl and reflect website changes in their index and search results,” she explains.

“IndexNow is changing the relationship between SEO professionals and search engines forever,” Mathews said.

“It’s eliminating the frustration from IT teams at how search bots hit websites. No longer will their crawlers put a heavy load on systems,” she noted, adding that “this is especially impactful to startups that grow quickly – not to mention the many times companies have launched new pages and had to wait for search bots to find them, crawl them and rank them.”

“This is particularly useful when changes are made to a database that updates millions (sometimes hundreds of millions) of URLs, and we’re having to explain to colleagues that we need to wait for the search engine to crawl the URLs and figure out that there is an update, and where there are changes,” Mathews said.

“With IndexNow, SEO pros can submit a list of only URLs with changes and/or updates through the API. Bing and Yandex immediately know about these updates and changes instantly,” Mathews noted.

On the other side of this relationship, the search engines themselves can greatly benefit from IndexNow.

“Microsoft’s Fabrice Canal, Principal Program Manager at BING, is leading the IndexNow charge, and I have been fortunate to work with him when I was at Groupon and now with GitHub as one of the early adopters of the Bing API tool (the precursor to IndexNow),” she said.

10. E-A-T

[Kevin Rowe](#), Founder & VP of Strategy at PureLinq, believes that the growing importance of E-A-T will be a trend to consider in 2022.

“No matter your approach to SEO, understand how to demonstrate an appropriate level of E-A-T in your on-site content, link building, online PR, and even technical SEO,” he advises.

“This doesn’t mean you need a doctorate to be the expert on shoe repair blogs,” he added. “But being or hiring a subject matter expert that produces, edits, or consults on content is no longer optional.”

Rowe recommends that, at the very least, marketers hire writers with a passion for the subject matter.

[Andrew Shotland](#), the Founder and CEO of Local SEO Guide, refers to E-A-T as “Content Usefulness.”

“The challenge we have always had with E-A-T is that it’s not really measurable. So we came up with our own metric, Content Usefulness (a.k.a., “CUssing”), which we can measure,” he said.

Shotland explains, “For example, once we see the types of pages/content ranking for a large set of related queries, we can analyze those pages at scale and compare them to our site’s pages.”

The difference between the ranking pages and those that don’t rank – often a specific type of content (e.g., reviews, phone numbers, videos, topics, etc.) – can illustrate what content searchers, and therefore Google, deem useful, he said.

“Figuring this kind of stuff out and how to apply it to your site will likely not only be an SEO trend for 2022, but for the foreseeable future,” Shotland noted.



Danny Goodwin is Executive Editor of Search Engine Journal. In addition to overseeing SEJ’s editorial strategy and managing contributions from a team of 60+ industry experts, he also writes news and articles about SEO, PPC, social media marketing, content marketing. Danny has been a professional editor, writer, and ghostwriter in the marketing industry for 10 years, creating content for SMBs to global brands, spanning all things search and digital. He formerly was managing editor of Momentology and editor of Search Engine Watch.



KRISTINA AZARENKO

**SEO Consultant & Founder,
MarketingSyrup Digital Inc.**

The SEO industry is moving toward an improved user experience, not just keywords included here and there. It has been happening for a while already and this trend will become even stronger in the coming years.

Today's SEO is an integral part of the user experience. We've seen it through the introduction of Core Web Vitals.

A strong influence of user experience on SEO means that content should:

- Be useful.
- Answer the user's questions
(i.e.: match user intent and be semantically correct).
- Load fast and be secure
(pass or be close to passing Core Web Vitals).
- Be accessible and indexable
(meaning technical SEO is still important).

People should finally stop thinking in terms of "SEO content" and create content for users with the intent and keywords in mind.



LOREN BAKER

Founder of Search Engine Journal

The following are trends I expect to see continuing or emerging in search in 2022.

We should see more direct feeds to the engines & browsers.

Will Safari launch a similar partnership or offering like Signed HTTP Exchanges?

Following Bing and Yandex, Google will adopt IndexNow.

Google is going to default intent as informational in multiple channels while increasing usage of the Shop's inserts (suggesting eCom sites) and Google Shopping.

I also feel that with continuous scroll, we'll now see more informational results on the first thumb scroll of results and more transactional second thumb scroll. I'm already seeing this over the past month, and users will get used to thumbing up and down the results on mobile devices on Google like they are used to for most sites on the web.

Sites with unique images will see a large boost in Image, Product, and normal search. Stock imagery dependence will decline. This is also a user behavior/intent reaction as younger users identify or resonate with unique lifestyle images and can instantly tell if something is real or staged.

By rewarding sites that use original imagery, more will be created. Google Lens then learns more. This incentivizes the growth of original content from creators while learning more about areas, people, products, etc.

Google will stop serving publisher sites with lists of affiliate links for health and similar queries.

Google will finally filter out publishers renting their subdomains to Coupon and Shopping companies as CNN and BusinessInsider do now. (Who wants to get Kohl's coupons from Business Insider or CNN?)



JASON BARNARD

The Brand SERP Guy, Kalicube

The more I study and work on Brand SERPs, the more I am convinced that this is an aspect of SEO that is vastly underappreciated. Analyzing a Brand SERP gives:

1. Incredible insights into Google's understanding of you.
2. An honest critique of your content strategy.
3. An accurate at-a-glance overview of your digital ecosystem.

Optimizing that Brand SERP brings many direct and indirect benefits, including but not limited to:

- A great Google Business Card that impresses bottom-of-funnel prospects and clients.
- A more effective content strategy.
- A better user and Google-facing reputation (think improved E-A-T).

So, if you haven't got onboard the "Brand SERP train" in 2021, I suggest you get on it in 2022, or you might miss the boat!

Knowledge panels are the visible representation of Google's Knowledge Graph, which is the store of Google's understanding of the world.

Knowledge panels have attracted a great deal of attention in 2021, and that is set to explode in 2022. And rightly so – not only are they something your audience expects to see when they search Google for your brand name (or you risk looking amateur and small-time) but having a knowledge panel for your brand that contains extended, accurate and positive information clearly indicates that Google has understood who you are, what you do and who your audience is.

That understanding is the single most important foundational building block for all of your SEO efforts today, tomorrow, and way into the future. If you don't have a knowledge panel, start working to trigger one.

And if you have one, start working to take control so you can actively manage the information it contains.



REBECCA BERBEL

**Product Marketing
Manager, Oncrawl**

In 2022, we will all be looking at a new normal. After having to discard much of our SEO data for 2020 because of lockdowns, supply chain issues, and changes in how we use the internet, we'll finally have a year's worth of data that reveals new behavioral trends in SEO.

Looking at how things have changed and how we need to adapt our strategies to align with those changes will be the pillars of 2022.

In other words, a “data” focus isn’t new. Yet, it will likely be more important than ever to understand how SEO data is collected, sampled, blended, and analyzed to produce better dashboards and a clearer understanding of how websites “work” in the professional world.

I expect to see this reflected in SEO solutions: more AI-based on analysis, more exports and connectors, and more automation included in the platforms, software, and plugins that we use every day. These might still be beta options or additional paid options, but 2022 without the use of the data we already have available, won’t be 2022.

From my point of view, I believe – at least, I hope – that this will make us more demanding when it comes to data access, data security, and data analysis in SEO.

I’m looking forward to seeing cleaner data, more direct access to data produced by the different solutions we use every day. And more solid data science and statistical analysis applied to everything from user experience, to A/B testing, to traffic analytics, to rank tracking, to keyword research, and beyond, too.



MANICK BHAN

CTO/Founder, LinkGraph

Next year, we'll see PPC costs rise globally, especially in fast-growing markets like the United States. This will make paid search more challenging, but organic search will become more democratic.

The best search marketers will continue to build or utilize new AI-driven software products to quantitatively evaluate the strength of your site for each of the four core SEO factors: authority, content, technical, and UX.



CHRISTINA LEVASSEUR

**Founder & SEO Consultant,
MediaSesh**

I predict that conversations around accessibility within the SEO community will continue to increase in 2022.

This means not only being accessible for just search bots but for all people, including those with differing abilities.

SEO pros are in a great position to be part of these efforts, including:

- Adding high-quality alt text that describes what's in the image versus using AI or copying/pasting the H1 tag.
- Having anchor text that makes it abundantly obvious what the next page is about.
- Writing descriptive page titles that are relevant to what the pages are about.
- Utilizing header tags that are meaningful and outline a hierarchy of content.

Even though Google may not currently penalize you for the lack of ADA compliance, your users might, which could result in lost sales. You also run the risk of getting hit with a lawsuit.

What works for accessibility in many cases works for SEO efforts – it's not always the case when reversed. It's like the saying: "If we're not intentionally inclusive, we are unintentionally exclusive."



JACKIE CHU

Global SEO Lead & Intelligence, Uber

Despite the pandemic, Google has been hard at work. Changes in the Google algorithm did not lighten up; they seemingly increased in velocity instead.

I feel 2022 will be the year SEO professionals stop chasing algorithms and instead lean into long-term, sustainable SEO strategies.

The noise is so endless that to focus on the work, you'll have no choice but to think only of the merits of your site and brand – not the latest industry news or Google update.

And that's probably a good thing.

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SEARCH DATA IS THE NEW MARKET RESEARCH

**Patty Johnson, Senior Content Marketing
Manager at Searchmetrics**

“You’re probably sitting on one of the most valuable sources of data that you’re not currently using to make strategic business decisions,” says Matt Colebourne, CEO of Searchmetrics.

This bold statement refers to a source of data that marketers have had for decades but haven’t used to position their businesses strategically: SEO research data.



searchmetrics



Until now, organizations have used search engines solely as a mechanism for website optimization.

This has begun to change.

Billions of search queries are performed each day – just on Google alone. When you consider the alternative search engines, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Amazon, that number increases exponentially.

These billions of searches hold the key to untapped growth potential for you, your team, and your business.

The SEO Paradigm Shift

As the internet has matured, previously popular search engines, such as WebCrawler, Ask Jeeves, and Yahoo, have all but disappeared.

However, interest in search engines has not waned. In fact, it's growing every day.

According to Google, 15% of monthly searches are completely new.

More consumers are typing their wants and needs into search engines. They are effectively telling SEO professionals who they are and where they hope to go.

We are sitting on a gold mine of marketable information. Prior to this shift, businesses relied on costly market research surveys and focus groups that tended to be less reliable.

SEO's brand of marketable information is the new building block of what makes marketing, and thus businesses, more successful.

As Colebourne said, search data is one of the most valuable sources of data that you're likely not using to make strategic business decisions.

SEO is no longer just a means to an end. SEO is the foundation of successful marketing.

This shift will increase the worth of your skillset as an SEO professional.

You now may be one of your company's most important assets.

The SEO Glass Ceiling Will Fade

Search data, as its own entity, is beginning to increase in popularity. You may know the power of a good keyword set and its search volume – do your business leaders know?

The ability for an SEO professional to contribute to a business's goals at a high level has never been more achievable.

It's time to pitch the true worth of your skillset and how it can impact initiatives across all marketing departments — and possibly companywide.

So, as you dig into your trusty toolkit of metrics and analyze keyword volume, search intent, and more, begin constructing the next level of your SEO career.

Position your hard-researched data as a first-party market research tool.

Open your organization up to a wealth of insights. Trust me. You're well poised to spearhead the next generation of SEO.

How To Position SEO Data As A Market Research Tool

You may have felt that business leadership doesn't understand the purpose of SEO. Perhaps they don't put enough stock into the value it brings to your organization.

Enter the SEO Paradigm Shift.

By shifting how you and your leaders view SEO and its valuable information, you can provide definitive proof of concept with information you already have on file.

SEO Data Can Inform & Validate Multiple Business Strategies

When we're down in the weeds, working with content-specific keywords, rankings, and search volume, it's easy to check off a task and move on to the next brief.

However, when you zoom out with a macro lens, opportunities for full marketing campaigns and large business growth are clear.

Search data, as a whole, is an unbiased indicator of what is happening in the market.

An understanding of this fact allows marketers, and entire businesses, to grasp what their total addressable market seeks and curate their offerings accordingly.

- **In what months are consumers seeking snow boots?**

With search volume metrics for snow-boot related keywords, you can track its trends. The months the traffic peaks will answer your question.

- **Are high school students searching for state schools or private universities?**

Traffic index and search volume metrics are your friends, here. You'll discover how much those keywords are searched for and if people are following through with clicks.

- **What's the market for baseball equipment in Norfolk, Virginia?**

When you're entering a new market, all you need to do is conduct search data research. Use suggested long tail keywords to discover cultural variations on baseball equipment terms. Again, view their search volume to gauge consumer interest and how it's grown over time.

SEO Data Can Drive Digital Demand

As marketers, we're all tasked with the same goal: drive revenue for the business.

When it comes to SEO, many of us focus on the output of search data. Now, it's time to look to the beginning of the search lifecycle.

Take a quick moment, zoom out, and ask yourself:

- What is the intent behind these searches?
- Where are these searches coming from?
- Is there seasonality to this product search or topic?
- Could we save money by not running ads during low-search time periods?
- How are users most likely to convert? In-person? Online?

Search data can help answer these questions and inform your merchandising strategy and product mix. In turn, you're more aligned with your consumer base and poised to maximize revenue.

Structure your search insights into a solid, data-driven presentation to help inform your business's overall strategy.

SEO Data Can Provide Unbiased Insights

Traditional market research has limitations within its ability to deliver true, honest, unbiased insights. Emotional response to interviewers or focus groups, lack of accurate answers on surveys, and feelings of social influence tend to cause skewed consumer response.

Market researchers' own bias may alter the information as they struggle to interpret exactly what "more interested" or "less interested" truly means.

This is where search data begins to beat traditional market research.

While searching online, the audience isn't subjected to reactions from interviewers, ads, or media input. They must enter an honest search query for it to return the desired result.

This data is one of the purest sources of information.

Search volume is a more reliable barometer for demand because of the reduced margin of error.

Search intent is more direct than "more interested" or "less interested" in a survey response.

I encourage you to start seeing how your search data can help influence your company's success and propel your own upward mobility.

Not sure where to start? Connect with organizations and SEO consultants that are using search data to unlock business potential in innovative ways.

About Searchmetrics

Searchmetrics is a global provider of search data, software, and consulting solutions. Over 1,000 customers rely on Searchmetrics to thrive in the hyper-competitive search landscape. Its international team of data scientists, engineers, SEO consultants, and content marketers unlocks unique business insights that fuel clients' continued growth. Worldwide, thousands of businesses grow their revenue with Searchmetrics and its comprehensive portfolio of solutions. For more information, contact **hello@searchmetrics.com**.



Patty Johnson has 10 years of experience managing content marketing programs for agencies and corporate brands. As Searchmetrics' senior content marketing manager for the U.S. region, she oversees an expansive content program geared at educating digital marketers on the importance of search, ensuring long-time SEOs have access to the latest resources and elevating the value of data from search to solve unique business needs.



BRODIE CLARK

**SEO Consultant, Brodie
Clark Consulting**

Google's SearchOn Event in September of 2021 featured several hints for what SEO professionals can expect in the near future.

Two standouts in particular from this event that I believe businesses should pay attention to for SEO success in 2022 are:

- Focusing on the intersection of local SEO and commerce.
- And focusing on the visuals that go along with your content.

Another factor that wasn't covered explicitly during the event but is of high importance is the concept of site-wide "content quality" and how that can impact sites.

The Local + Commerce Intersect

A trend I've been noticing more of in recent years is the integration of Google My Business listings and features related to product feed data. This applies in instances where a physical store has an ecommerce component, creating a crossover between the two.

A new feature was announced at Google's SearchOn Event to make it easier to discover products that a business sells with an "in stock" filter. SEO pros and businesses need to keep their product feeds in check to make the most of the new functionality.

Investing In The Featured Image

I've been a big fan of using the featured image for a piece of written content as an investment in recent years. Carefully planning out the approach with the assistance of a designer can go a long way for your content.

This is particularly true for placement in Google's 'Interesting Finds' module on mobile, within the Discover feed, and showing as the thumbnail in web search.

Google's SearchOn event gave reference to the web search component in the discussion around the prominence of 'visual inspiration.' This is where imagery is seen taking up considerable space, resembling that of Google's Discover feed. Invest in your imagery wisely to enable your content to thrive.

The Site-wide "Content Quality" Effect

I regularly see many pages being categorized as "Discovered, currently not indexed" in Google Search Console when doing audits on large sites. If you're not aware of this exclusion type within the Coverage report in GSC, I would highly recommend paying attention to the patterns Google is trying to highlight.

Google has said in the past that you should be making sure published pages (that are indexable) are fantastic. Stick to this as your SEO mantra, and you'll have a future-proof SEO strategy ready for 2022.



DAVE DAVIES

**CEO, Co-Founder
Beanstalk Internet
Marketing**

I'm going to sound a lot like a Google rep here, but I have to say focusing on intent.

If my guess is right as to why we saw so many significant updates in 2021 as well as back-to-back core updates, it's due to Google building the infrastructure to manage the increasing complexity of machine learning systems.

You can't just add the algorithms and features based on MUM without building in dependencies and interconnectedness with other systems, and that takes infrastructure. That's what they've been building, in my opinion.

With that, we'll see an increased focus on using those algorithms and models, and they'll lean heavily on user intent and experience.

I also suspect that with it, we'll see a continued focus on adding new SERP features and layouts.



JORI FORD

**Chief Marketing Officer
At FoodBoss**

Last year, Google introduced new tools to support the optimization of mobile and page experience. With those pieces maturing, I think mobile page experience as it relates to core web vitals and content will lead the charge.

In SEO, we tend to look at pieces. But based on recent tooling, resources, and updates to analytics, it's clear that the entirety of the mobile experience from the discovery aspect all the way through to how easily users can interact, engage, and utilize will come together just as content experience has over the past few years.

This will impact not only mobile UX but Core Web Vitals on mobile, mobile usability, mobile-first indexing, and mobile security, as well.

I like to keep it simple:

- Is it easily crawlable via mobile URLs?
- Does it load in under 2.5s? (This seems to be the mobile threshold, as opposed to desktop, which is 4s.)
- Can users easily click & navigate on a small viewport?
- Is it served on a secure protocol?

We've seen each of these components introduced over time. However, the trend is showing that they are all coming together to ultimately serve as a true "mobile-immersed" view versus just a mobile-first perspective.

Areas SEO pros should address include:

- Understanding the difference in the measurement thresholds for Core Web Vitals for mobile devices vs. desktop.
- When designing a mobile-first or responsive site, making sure that significant white space and vertical scrolling are taken into consideration.
- Keeping it secure.
- Maximizing your UX by minimizing clutter in both the visual and code sense.



RENEE GIRARD

**Associate Director For
SEO, Crate & Barrel**

Enterprise ecommerce brands should increase focus for sustainability SEO targeting (as approved by their legal team) to support corporate social responsibility.

Google has already added result enhancements to incentivize sustainable choices in Shopping, Maps, and Nest. Although search demand has not yet peaked, consumer appetite should continue to build throughout 2022 and beyond.



CLAUDIA HIGGINS

**SEO Insights Strategist,
Conductor**

The most significant trend in SEO in 2022 should be the continued integration of SEO into all areas of organizations.

We've known for a long time that it's incredibly difficult to have an impactful SEO strategy if we only operate in a silo. Everyone who touches a website has the potential to impact its search performance for better or worse.

If we're going to make the most of opportunities and minimize risks, we need to be developing education, processes, and governance across whole departments.

We also know that data on how people interact with search engines is an incredibly powerful insight into what they want when they want it, how they're looking for it, and what kind of content answers their searches.

We have that data, and everyone whose job involves catering to an organization's users (i.e., everyone) could benefit from it.

We've seen that the most effective SEO professionals are creating in-roads and alliances with content teams, developers, etc., by aligning shared KPIs, supporting measurement, and reporting. They're centering users by sharing search data and making it accessible to non-specialists.



MOTOKO HUNT

**President, International Search
Marketing Consulting | AJPR**

Many are doing short-term SEO efforts mainly to gain links and awareness from digital PR, adding hundreds of pieces of content, or only tackling specific technical SEO fixes. While these work well for quick wins, they are not long-term solutions.

This trend also created so much similar content on the web. Considering the MUM update, it is important to publish unique content covering specific topics that are not covered by other websites.

Rather than adding hundreds of generic content to the site, research the overall interests of the target audience, organize those entities by the topic and prioritize them by the relevance to the business goals. Focus on the information that is uniquely different from others and highlight your specialty in the topic area.



KEVIN INDIG

**Director Of SEO,
Shopify**

In 2022, telemetry will allow big companies to gain a competitive advantage. I see this trend for two reasons.

One, the search results have become incredibly rich in SERP features that significantly impact click-through rates. You need

to be able to measure that to spot opportunities and predict success.

Second, Google doesn't give us enough data to understand with 100% certainty what is happening. Search Console does not accurately reflect what is happening in most SERPs, leaving many SEO pros with question marks above their heads.

As a result, the best companies build their own tools or substantially leverage third-party solutions to gain an accurate picture of the SERPs and build out their strategies accordingly.



JAMIE INDIGO

**Senior Technical SEO Lead,
DeepCrawl**

1. Misinformation Will Push Google Toward More Fact-Oriented SERPs Created By Training Language Models On WikiData.

Misinformation is pushing Google to create a fact-oriented SERP. Search results are powerful. Simply seeing an idea repeated across page titles in a SERP can reinforce a belief.

As humans, if we see something frequently, we tend to believe it. To call this problematic is to apply horse-salve to a societal epidemic of misinformation.

To quote Google's Fighting Misinformation Online summit, the fight against misinformation "starts with raising up authoritative sources across our products."

Wikidata, a collaboratively edited multilingual knowledge graph, currently serves as the source of truth for these fact-oriented SERPs. It serves as their Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, documenting all known objects, people, places, concepts-- even colors!

We can see movement toward this in the [KELM](#), [MUM](#), and [LaMDA](#). KELM research cites WikiData explicitly. Within 10 months of being announced, MUM rolled out as part of the [COVID-19 vaccine information initiative](#). At Search On, Google announced MUM will be powering "Things to Know" and search refinement tools based on MUM.

An [academic paper](#) by Google Researchers in June 2021 proposes replacing the current index-retrieve-then-rank SERPs that we all know (and fight for) with results based on Pre-Trained Language models.

This shift would foundationally shift the field of SEO. To succeed post-paradigm, you need to focus on creating content that is factual and useful. The big winners will be those sites known for their contributions to their targeted subject matter.

If it sounds too far-fetched, remember that MUM and LaMDA were merely academic papers before being announced at Google i/o one year later. MUM is already being used in SERPs.

2. As SERPs Become More Visually Browsable And Intuitive, Image SEO Will Become More Important.

At [Search On](#) 2021, Google announced a push to make SERPs more visually browsable and intuitive. This means bigger image blocks are displayed in the results for some queries. The boon of good image assets isn't limited to SERP.

[Google Lens](#) will enable shoppers to look for a product using a photo on their device or found on a website-- essentially a reverse image search with a solid use case for image optimization.

Google Discover is also leveraging images. A recently Google-published case study showed that sites using the max-image-preview:large meta tag could see an increase in click-thru rate by 79% and an increase in total clicks by up to 333%.

While Discover has been largely overlooked as an SEO opportunity, the inclusion of Discover data into the Search API shows that unified data sources and best practices are going to continue.

With the introduction of infinite scroll on mobile SERPs, we can reasonably hypothesize that with the new 4-page scroll of the SERPs on mobile and the increase of images – normal search will start looking a lot more like Discover.

3. SERP Layouts Will Evolve To More Interactive Models.

Google announced at Search On that several new MUM-based features would be rolling out to SERPs. These new features are just the beginning of a SERP remodel designed to make browsing results more intuitive.

Google is aware of the challenges most users face in finding adequate and accurate information. The changes to the design will likely have dynamic layouts which place enhanced results and features on the page in a way most relevant to the unique query and user intent behind it.



KELSEY JONES

Senior Director of Content, Awesome Motive

Focus on your failures. So many marketing and SEO professionals are so quick to find their wins so they can share them with their team, leadership, or client. But failures are really opportunities to gain more traction.

I'm talking about the keywords you rank for on page 2 and beyond that have you had a good chance to move up in the SERPs, or longtail keywords you rank for that have low search volume. These are both good content opportunities to not only find pages that should be improved but also nuggets of inspiration for new content ideas.

Quit siloing content and SEO. I thought this wasn't an issue in today's workforce, but I've found that it's rare to find a writer with SEO expertise and vice versa. This signals a big knowledge gap between content and SEO that goes both ways.

Of course, it's great to specialize. But being a writer without SEO experience or being an SEO who doesn't understand the nuances of content writing can be really detrimental to your content's performance.

If you can't better integrate the roles (e.g., pay more for a writer with SEO experience), then work hard on better integrating the teams, so they are both more involved in the creation process and are cross-trained in all steps, so everyone knows what is involved.

It's also always worth paying for training, books, or resources for teams who want to learn SEO or write better.



AMANDA JORDAN

**Director Of Local Search,
LOCOMOTIVE Agency**

Google often experiments with changes to the mobile layout for local intent specifically. I foresee continued testing and changes in this, especially for growth in online shopping, reviews, trust signals, brand awareness, etc.

My recommendation would be to focus on your reputation as per third-party and industry sites as well as wikis, GMB completion, site markup, and knowledge panels.



HIMANI KANKARIA

Founder At Missive Digital

Considering recent updates such as Google rewriting meta title tags and coming up with indented results on SERPs in 2021, it seems Google is working hard to identify the right intent behind a user's search, irrespective of the type of queries.

One of the top SEO trends in 2022 to focus on is bringing a holistic approach to your content strategy.

Be it video, blog, or web content. It must be planned for the keywords, users' intent behind searching and consuming them, your intent behind creating them, and the stage at which your consumers are in the buyer's journey.

The holistic content strategy makes it mandatory for SEO pros to think of Ideal Customer Profiles (ICPs), their journeys towards becoming customers, and how keywords can be a part of it.

So now the tables have turned. You cannot only rely on all the keywords and content that competitors have targeted. But use all of the data in your ICPs, define how customers can reach you (using SERP features like [featured snippets](#), knowledge panels, etc.), and what messaging can take them to the next stage of their buying journey.



MICHAEL KING

**Founder & Managing
Director, iPullRank**

I'm a firm believer that SEO hasn't seen any big-picture changes that should be sending shockwaves in several years. To be clear, I mean, nothing has recently shaken up how people are doing things as much as Panda or Penguin did. Those updates changed business models entirely.

So, regardless of anything that is said in this article, most people will continue to do what they've been doing.

With that said, there are a lot of more subtle shifts that we're seeing that point to the same two things: natural language generation and data pipelining.

Google's evolution of multi-modal search suggests that there's a bigger focus on search journeys rather than individual queries. This has interesting implications with respect to how we need to judge things such as co-occurrence and named entity recognition when we're doing our own optimization.

Google's shift towards being able to tease out subtopics from broader pages is an indication that more robust content has a better chance to perform in the long tail than it has previously.

Also, Apple and Google will continue to march us towards their data monopolies with the eventual death of cookies. This further indicates a need for the collection of first-party data and pushing that data into a data store like BigQuery so you can capitalize on it for a variety of optimizations.

People who capitalize on this data collection and find ways to combine it with advancements in [Natural Language Generation](#) and the understanding of the entity and keyword relationships will be able to scale the creation of robust content that's positioned to rank.

Everyone else can just remove AMP from their sites.

Oh yeah, and Edge SEO is cool, too.

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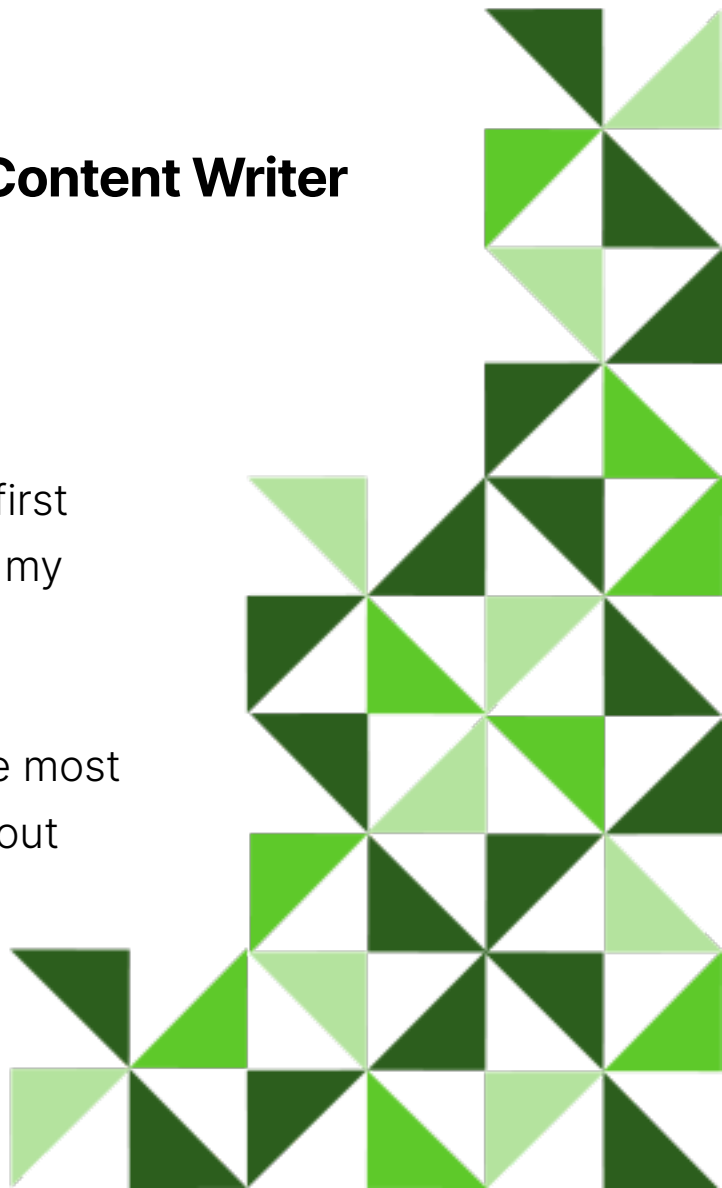
HOW GOOGLE MUM IS IMPACTING CONTENT, RANKING, AND LINK BUILDING

**By Kaitie Frank, Copywriter & Content Writer
at Page One Power**

Google has released a new algorithm.

Naturally, as an SEO professional, my first thought is, “Great. How will this affect my rankings, content, and link building?”

Just when we’re all getting used to the most recent changes, Google seems to roll out another new algorithm update.



What more could Google improve upon, you ask?

After all, it seemed like there was not much more to do after BERT and the arrival of superior context relevancy.

Allow Google to introduce MUM.

What Is MUM?

MUM, or The Multitask Unified Model algorithm, was built by Google to help searchers find content easier, across multiple languages, using AI.

“We’re addressing one [problem] many of us can identify with: having to type out many queries and perform many searches to get the answer you need,” says [Pandu Nayak](#), Google’s Vice President of Search.

MUM seeks to consolidate multiple searches into a single action and turn search into a familiar human experience. Let’s look at an example to get a glimpse into how this algorithm shift will affect the search journey of users.

We’ll call this example “The Marathon Example”, in which it will be easy to see how the past and future of a Google search compares

to a natural, human conversation. “The Marathon Example” will illustrate how MUM will change the landscape of search.

Pretend the user is preparing for a marathon.

The Marathon Example - Google in 2021

Currently, to learn more about a subject, a user may have to type in multiple exact, long-form queries to find a specific answer.

For instance, if a user wants to prepare for a marathon, they might enter **at least four search queries** such as:

1. [Fitness regimen for a marathon]
2. [Best running shoes for marathons]
3. [How to run long distance]
4. [Running training schedule]
5. (and so on)

They would then need to read up on one topic at a time, performing a new search query for each topic. The user leaves the search experience with fragments of information and no clear path forward.

The Marathon Example - Natural Human Conversation

In contrast, if that searcher were to approach a human friend with the same concern around marathon training, they would simply ask their friend a single question: “How do I prepare for a marathon?”

The answer would be a thoughtful response from the human’s experiences. It would naturally cover everything the searcher would want to know – fitness regimens, best running shoes, long-distance training, examples of schedules, etc.

The searcher leaves the conversation feeling as if they have a cohesive understanding of how to train for a marathon.

The Marathon Example - MUM

The idea behind MUM is to bring that same humanistic efficiency to the search process.

For example, a user can ask **a single, broad query such** as:

1. [How do I prepare for a marathon?]

Then, the algorithm will intuitively perform a search and display results that encompass all the subqueries – fitness regimen, best

running shoes, long distance training, examples of schedules, etc – that may exist within that one broad query.

The user leaves the search experience feeling as if they have a cohesive understanding of how to train for a marathon.

In short, Google now wants to understand the nuances behind a searcher's query, allowing it to provide a comprehensive experience that hits on all of the searcher's potential queries.

BERT vs. MUM

In 2019, [Google introduced BERT](#) as a powerful language model that changed how queries work on the [search engine results page \(SERP\)](#).

Because it understood the language better by looking at the full context of a single query and thus [search intent](#), BERT served more relevant results to users with its bi-directional algorithm.

BERT is able to process queries in two directions at a single time, helping the user feel that Google understood their needs.

This was unlike anything we had ever seen before in the world of search.

A machine could now comprehend and predict millions of users' needs at a single time.

Sounds earth-shattering, right?

But get this – MUM is said to be 1,000 times more powerful than BERT.

Yes, 1,000 times.

To make it even more amazing, MUM will be able to display accurately translated information from global websites in 75 different languages. SERPs will no longer be limited to the user's native language.

MUM is built on the same system as BERT, but it can now handle multiple tasks simultaneously. This means it can [answer complex questions](#) more directly than BERT.

Why is this so exciting?

Users gain access to more information at once, including video, podcasts, and graphics, without needing to perform multiple searches.

On the other hand, you, in particular, should be excited because your content has the potential to become visible to a much larger, global audience.

MUM Features

When MUM was announced in May 2021 at the Google I/O event, we were shown three key features destined to change to the landscape of search:

1. “Things To Know”
2. Topic Zooming
3. Visual Search

“Things To Know”

The “Things to Know” feature will display the logical SERP pathways MUM thinks the searcher will use after a specific query.

This feature could provide you with a glimpse into a searcher’s thought process when it comes to a product or service.

By researching keyword phrases and understanding how Google presents information to the searcher, you can gain insight into what type of content to produce.

Based on the advanced AI used in the algorithm and its deep knowledge of the world, Google assumes where a typical searcher wants to go and displays a natural pathway that mimics the average inquiry process.

For example, if you searched [marathon workouts], Google might present pathways including “how to get started,” “best cardio routines for at-home gyms,” and “endurance-building tips.”

Additionally, MUM is fluent across 75 languages, which means it can cross-reference content in other countries and provide accurate translations.

So, if you are searching for a marathon route in another country, MUM could discern which localized content is relevant to your search and translate it for you. After all, locals in another country would know more about their routes than a foreigner.

You would now be able to get higher-quality, more accurate information from locals in your native language.

This technology truly gives searchers access to global content in a way that is relevant to their searches.

Topic Zooming

Topic Zooming's capabilities are exciting, especially for brands that struggle to serve content in a super niche industry.

This flexible feature allows users to narrow or broaden a search topic, enabling searchers to jump in and out of related topics more quickly.

Additionally, brands may have an easier time increasing their discoverability, especially if their content typically covers granular issues.

If your search query is [marathon training schedule], you have the capability of broadening the topic to [marathon basics] or [marathon tips].

You can also make the topic more specific by narrowing in on [marathon running techniques], [best shoes for marathons], [what to eat before a marathon], or [marathon training groups].

Searchers will soon be able to start with a simple search; after a quick visual scan of the results page, they can receive several different answers to their current query and subsequent queries.

Visual Search

MUM's third key feature will help deliver a more visual search to users.

Businesses who rely on pictures to sell their products (ecommerce websites, artists, graphic designers, etc.) can expect their graphics to show up in the regular search results, not just the image search results.

When a user searches for inspiration, MUM will understand that the user ultimately wants [visual results](#).

For example, someone might search for [best scenic marathon training routes] or [best shoes for marathons], and MUM will serve them extensive image results along with the standard ten blue links.

MUM will also help identify related content in videos, even if the video does not explicitly mention the topic.

This gives the searcher a more in-depth SERP, allowing them to dig deeper into a topic without searching multiple queries.

How MUM Changes SEO Strategies

After analyzing the basics of the MUM algorithm, we can understand that search is changing to serve users better. Ultimately, searching for multiple queries will become a thing of the past.

The new AI can anticipate a searcher's needs, allowing users to discover new pages and content.

With the rollout of Topic Zooming and Visual Search, the SERPs will no longer be limited to the 10 blue rankable links.

How can you use this to your advantage?

MUM & Content

Content must align with the searcher's intent – now more than ever.

Historically, [Google's algorithm updates](#) have always been to serve the end user.

Each algorithm change has carved a path that leverages helpful content to answer questions.

MUM is a giant leap forward in regard to giving users what they are asking for.

Since MUM targets users, you must:

- Think creatively about how people search.
- Optimize for the end user and the algorithm.
- Create clear, understandable content.

While [keyword optimization will always be necessary](#), you'll need to switch your thinking to optimize for human understanding instead.

How To Optimize For Human Understanding

Instead of creating [content determined by keyword rankings](#), you must create content from a conceptual query.

Keywords should describe what's on the webpage and what the sections are about instead of simply leveraging high-value keywords in headers and titles.

The new AI technology can filter through content more quickly, making “wrong” content disappear faster.

These deliberate changes aside, your goal should remain the same: to serve the user [high-quality, relevant, and valuable content](#) that answers a query.

MUM & Ranking

Google will begin to prioritize content that matches searcher intent, in addition to traditional [ranking factors](#).

This is not breaking news.

What is breaking news is how rankings may be affected by MUM's ability to translate global content that fits the user's search intent.

MUM, fluent in over 75 languages, provides better answers to queries, meaning that it can pull results from other countries and serve them to the user in their natural language.

Take the Mount Fuji example that Pandu Nayak used in her introduction of MUM:

If American users want to compare two hiking trails on Mount Fuji, MUM understands that some of the most relevant content would likely come from Japan.

So, since Mount Fuji is in Japan, MUM scours Japanese content and serves users articles in their preferred language.

With MUM, your target audience has the potential to expand worldwide instead of under the confines of a nationwide search.

The door is now open for searchers to find global content. Global content now has the potential to outrank your content.

How To Rank When SERPs Around The World Will Be Considered

In alignment with [Google's E-A-T standards](#), you need to keep focusing on building valuable, relevant content, and allow MUM to do the work for them.

To help increase the chances of ranking on the SERPs, you should create multimedia content, because MUM filters through results from podcasts, images, audio, and video.

This could mean adding a short video to a blog post that helps reinforce the topic or using graphics to visually show a point.

Additionally, you should consider switching to a multilingual SEO strategy.

Content in the U.S. will soon compete with content in Asia, Europe, Australia, and other significant resources around the world.

Incorporating localized keywords into translated content could help users find this content in their native language more easily.

MUM & Link Building

No matter how Google serves content to the user, people still want to know they can trust your content and brand.

With that in mind, we can assume that with the door opening wide for global content, backlinks will be as important as they are now, if not more important.

How To Navigate MUM In Regards To Link Building

Google still emphasizes content that follows its E-A-T standards. The best way to improve your E-A-T is by continuing to execute solid, reputable link building strategies.

Key Takeaways

You should keep in mind that MUM looks beyond written content.

While the user looks to find the most relevant answer, MUM looks at the video, graphics, podcasts, and other non-traditional content.

Modify your content creation strategy to include a variety of relevant, high-quality content types.

It won't do much good if you offer just written content when someone else answers the query better in a video or in another language.

Expand your content to make sure you are hitting all areas of the new search.

Whenever Google announces a new algorithm, it's natural to wonder how it will impact the day-to-day search.

After all, that's our job, isn't it?

However, by looking at the basic features of MUM and understanding Google's ever-present standards, we can conclude that the core of Google hasn't changed.

Google wants to serve relevant and valuable content – just like always.

While we focus on providing content readers want to read, MUM will do the rest of the work.



Kaitie Frank is a copywriter and content writer for Page One Power, specializing in SEO-optimized content. She has written for various niches and prides herself in knowing random tidbits of information. In addition to putting words to paper, she indulges in physical fitness and tells her cat why he is, in fact, a good boy.



CINDY KRUM

**CEO & Founder,
MobileMoxie**

I think 2022 could be a really exciting year for SEO, but the news will not all be good.

The potential shift to infinite scroll on mobile search results and potential expansion of this to the desktop will mean the end of an official 'page 1 of search results.' My belief is that Google is doing this to add some plausible deniability in some of the current and imminent antitrust/anti-competitive legal matters.

There are more than a few powerful groups that think Google's obvious preference for ranking Google-owned properties on the first page is problematic, so they have to muddy the waters about what is and is not considered 'the first page.'

I do think that this will push the industry more towards measuring what we call 'Traditional SERP Rankings' and 'Actual SERP Rankings,' which includes ranking positions for the things that Google generally ignores, like ads, Knowledge Graph, and People Also Ask.

Measurement will also shift to focus more on the pixel height of a search result and the comparative space or real estate that a brand takes up in a search result. These are things we've been focusing on for a long time in our tools but that most SEO pros have not really focused on or leveraged in their analysis yet.



KAYLE LARKIN

**SEM Consultant,
Larkin SEO**

Greater SEO success comes by aligning strategies with the way people currently use the web.

When a potential customer Googles a query, they don't see the organic channel. They see Ads, Videos, enhanced search features, and traditional organic listings now with an endless scroll on mobile devices. Success comes when looking at the search engine result page as one playing field to optimize for, not separate marketing channels.

Secondly, we know that the organic channel has one of the lowest CPAs, but it is not usually the first and last click to conversion. By ensuring that your data is accurate – that Google Analytics is implemented properly and event tags are in line with business objectives – marketers can get a multi-touch view along users' paths to conversion.

Lastly, traditional content marketing strategies are circular in logic. When everyone is starting with a competitor gap analysis to define keywords, you get this comical spiderman-meme happening.

When everyone is analyzing the SERP to define users' intent, you have to ask yourself: Is Google showing us which results match users' intent or are marketers regurgitating the same content, and that is all that's on the menu?

So, what should we be doing instead?

Smart brands will stop thinking about how to be #1 in the SERP and start thinking about how to be #1 in the mind of their consumer.

When you say what your audience needs to hear from the channels they need to hear it, you become the authority. That is what drives better qualified leads for a lot less money than competing with competitors' basic campaigns.



LUDWIG MAKHYAN

Co-Founder, Mazeless Enterprise SEO

SEO is as much engineering as it is marketing. New technology and platforms are introduced almost every other week.

Businesses shouldn't be limited or afraid with their migration efforts, and SEO pros have to be ready for it.

Everything should be focused on the business and customer needs, not robots. With this in mind, businesses must focus on having the best platforms for their niche, whether that is Shopify for ecommerce, Cloudflare for DNS management, or accessibility tools for compliance.

SEO professionals should take control and work in coherence with another team to ensure proper architecture, coding, security, accessibility, UX/UI, and compliance. SEO is no longer just about driving traffic.



JENN MATHEWS

SEO Manager, GitHub

The relationship between publishers and search engines is changing forever as SEO professionals realize that E.A.T. is not a ranking factor, Domain Authority doesn't mean anything, and [Google ranks web pages, not websites.](#)

With this realization, there is greater complexity in how search engines identify URLs and page content for enterprise sites.

Microsoft and Yandex are leading the way with IndexNow.

This allows websites to easily notify search engines whenever their website content is created, updated, or deleted. With this API, search engines are notified of updates, so they can quickly crawl and reflect website changes in their index and search results.

IndexNow is changing the relationship between SEO professionals and search engines forever. It's eliminating the frustration from IT teams at how search bots hit websites. No longer will their crawlers put a heavy load on systems. This is especially impactful to startups that grow quickly – not to mention the many times companies have launched new pages and had to wait for search bots to find them, crawl them and rank them.

This is particularly useful when changes are made to a database that updates millions (sometimes hundreds of millions) of URLs, and we're having to explain to colleagues that we need to wait for the search engine to crawl the URLs and figure out that there is an update, and where there are changes.

With IndexNow, SEO pros can submit a list of only URLs with changes and/or updates through the API. Bing and Yandex immediately know about these updates and changes instantly. On the other side of this relationship, the search engines themselves can greatly benefit from IndexNow.

Microsoft's Fabrice Canal, Principal Program Manager at BING, is leading the IndexNow charge and I have been fortunate to work with him when I was at Groupon and now with GitHub as one of the early adopters of the Bing API tool (the precursor to IndexNow).

As Fabrice said:

"Discovering when the latest content is posted online is difficult. Search engines don't really know when a website makes a change or when someone posts something on their blog. In order to see updates and changes, search engines must keep crawling to find these changes (sometimes wasting time crawling countless URLs that haven't changed in years). With IndexNow, websites can quickly notify search engines of any modification. The search engines can then quickly update the search results, providing a better experience for the user. In the end, helping websites display their latest content in the search results while search bots spend less effort in crawling is a win/win situation for everyone."

Search engines are finding that the future of IndexNow is just as important to them as it is for SEO pros. Most importantly, it's about the relationship between SEO pros and search engines.

As mentioned by [Roger Montti](#):

“Adoption by major search engines will be an evolution in the relationship between publishers and search engines that benefits both.”

Throughout the years, the relationship between search engines and SEO pros continues to evolve. SEO professionals are less viewed as tricksters (or spammers) trying to game the system and are becoming more like partners.

Small to medium businesses are hiring more SEO pros, and large corporations are building out SEO teams while search engines work with them to ensure that content gets indexed and provides the best experience possible.

In 2022, SEO pros will stop talking about E.A.T. as a ranking factor. They'll stop tweeting their domain authority numbers and won't rely on their [XML Sitemap submissions](#) and their Robots.txt for [managing the crawl budget](#).

Instead, they'll focus on the individual page experience and ranking factor. They'll focus on using IndexNow to notify search engines of updates eliminating concerns for crawling efficiencies altogether.



JESSE MCDONALD

Global SEO Strategist, IBM

With recent enhancements to Google's algorithm in the way of BERT and MUM, I think it's time to focus on the quality of your content and site structure. While content has always been a focus of SEO, with these updates, it's going to be easier for an SEO professional to speak to the quality of content being something that needs to be focused on.

This especially applies to sites that tend to have more content that focuses on marketing jargon. As the algorithms grow smarter in how they process content, it will become more and more crucial to cut down on fluff and get straight to the point.

As a secondary implication to this, I also think more people are going to focus even more on creating logical topic silos to address content from all phases of the user/buyer's journey.

Focusing on searcher intent and then matching your content to pages that link together logically will be even more crucial as these algorithm enhancements grow smarter and are further updated.



MIRANDA MILLER

**Managing Editor,
Search Engine Journal**

One area I think SEO pros and marketers of all stripes should begin to investigate in 2022 (if they haven't already) is the automation of content creation.

That may sound strange coming from someone who's made their living on content creation for the better part of two decades. I don't see AI-assisted content generation as a threat to content professionals, though. In fact, solid writers, editors, translators, and content strategists who can leverage this technology to create quality content at scale will only grow in demand.

There are parts of the writing process and writing mechanics that can benefit from intelligent automation – improving sentence and paragraph structure, readability, and grammar among them. Scalability is a massive consideration.

We can get an assist in competitive research, analyzing existing SERPs, and understanding related entities and concepts from technology. But I don't foresee any point in the next decade where automated content creation will satisfy user and search engine requirements without the assistance of the editorial process and human creativity.

The possibility that I might one day soon be able to train my own language model(s) and scale my efforts in that way is exciting. For SEO pros who focus on content and on-page, this will be a growing area of opportunity in 2022 and beyond.



SUGANTHAN MOHANADASAN

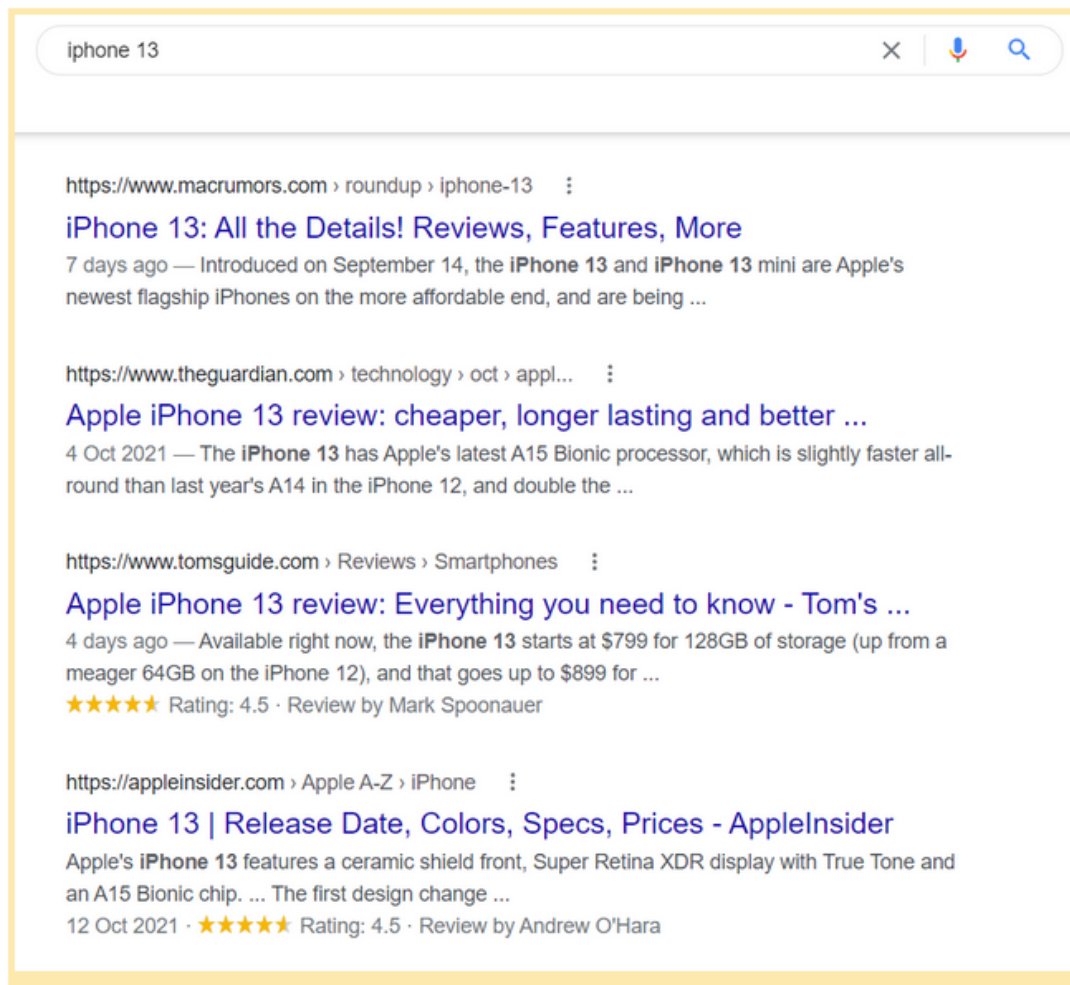
**Co-founder & Technical SEO Lead,
Snippet Digital**

Search intent will become ever more important in 2022.

Understanding search intent continues to become more important than ever, particularly with the introduction of Google's Multitask Unified Model (MUM) update. In 2022, I think we will see more search marketers rethink their approach to content creation by focusing on understanding search intent more intelligently.

Keyword research will always remain an important bedrock to organic search strategy but we need to be able to look beyond keywords in their raw form and draw meaningful insight from them.

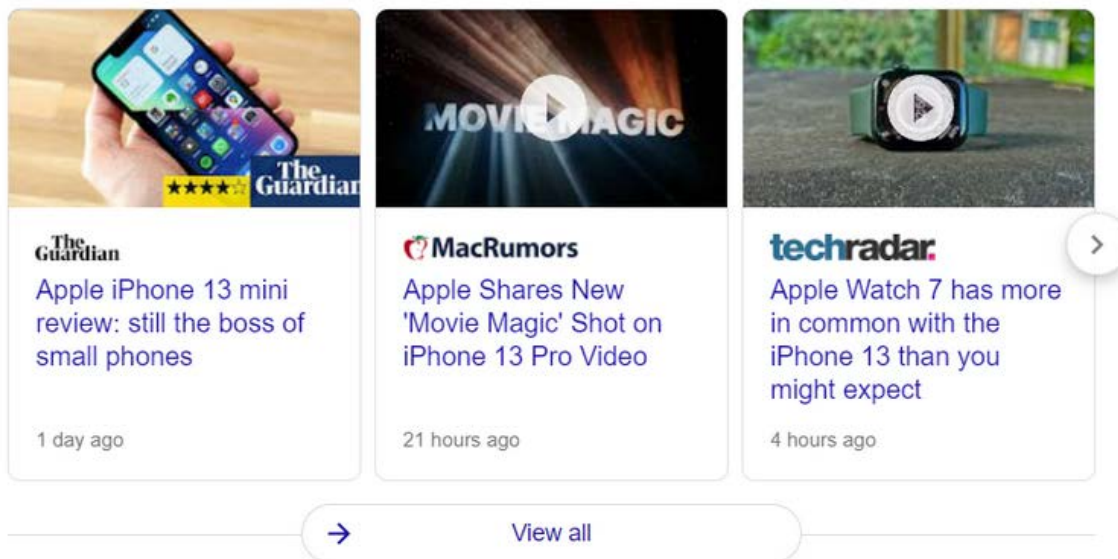
Understanding the relationship between your keywords and knowing how to target them to meet search intent is already the key difference between an effective and ineffective search strategy, but in 2022 it will become even more vital.



For example, you may expect the SERPs for the search query 'iPhone 13' to be dominated by transactional pages to purchase an iPhone. But around 50% of the results are editorial pieces.

Add to that Google's People Also Ask and Top Stories features, and you'll see that there are numerous ways we can gain visibility for this query.

Top stories



Google is testing indented results lately, and if this becomes a permanent feature, we have to think about creating content that will touch every step of the user's buyer journey. Not only that, it might get rid of the keyword cannibalization problem for Google, helping their systems better understand which type of content users prefer for a given set of queries (especially when the query is generic in nature).

As search marketers, we need to adapt our processes to factor this in. Learning how to do this at scale is where it becomes more difficult, but those who are able to do so will reap the benefits.



MORDY OBERSTEIN

Head Of Communications, Semrush

In 2022, we'll take it to a new level. I don't mean merely breaking things down by informational or transactional intents, etc. I mean considering everything intent encapsulates for the multiple user profiles who might find the same piece of content useful.

It's the ability to adequately empathize with your audience so as to provide a comprehensive experience that addresses their implicit concerns.

Even the most straightforward of queries can latently include multiple intents with layers to each! Take a highly transactional keyword like “buy jeans” or “buy Yankees tickets.” When you really get into it and pull it all apart, there are a plethora of angles and perspectives to take from there.

If you really get into the head of your audience (who I am sure is not linear, as there are multiple profiles within your audience), you can break the simplest of queries down into an unending multitude of layers and subtopics.

With “buy Yankees tickets,” for example, there are all sorts of implied subtopics ranging from COVID restrictions to how to get to the game to how to know the ticket is a good price.

Empathizing with your various audiences can help you pick these layers apart, and that is what it means to take user intent seriously. As Google takes a 360° approach with the implementation of MUM to greater extents, genuinely taking user intent seriously and moving beyond the cliches will pay off in 2022.



HELEN POLLITT

SEO Manager At iTech Media

Google will be focusing a lot more on the localization of content over the next year. In 2021 we already saw more websites with country-specific content outranking those that used to be top of the SERPs but are more globally focused. This will only get more obvious in 2022, even for purely online businesses with no brick and mortar offering.

For sites that are not just targeting one country, it will be increasingly necessary to create local-focused content.

Look at your key search terms that show some local intent. For instance, '[x online service] Canada' – if you are seeing search results being served that have obvious keyword targeting for 'Canada,' you may be in an industry where Google is showing more localized SERPs.

In that case, you will need to look at creating Canada-specific pages where you perhaps had globally-focused ones previously. You will need to show local relevance in your content, as well.

Try testing this with one or two pages first and monitor both rankings and click-through rate. If Google is perceiving that searchers want more localized content, that might well be the case! Showing your site to be catering specifically for the user's geography might improve your chances of a click. It might be that adding location keywords to your page title and meta description could increase your click-through rate.



NIK RANGER

Senior Technical Lead SEO Specialist StudioHawk

For the most part, Google has been transparent with us about aggressively pushing for a better search experience. They've been great at giving us a heads up about some of this – Google E-A-T, Core Web Vitals, Mobile-First Indexing, for example – but with others, they've decided they'll make the decisions for us (see taking H1 tags as title tags).

Thinking big picture, I think what's going to dominate the subtext to every major change in 2022 is the rollout of Google MUM (Multitask Unified Model), which utilizes passage indexing and ranking to split, test, solve and bracket a more nuanced understanding of content across the web.

We've evolved and moved on to something that's 1,000x more powerful than BERT, so there's no doubt we'll continue to see updates to tweak SERP results.

Right off the bat, I think well-written longer-form content will perform better simply because there'll be more synapses to find relational vectored entities and make those connections. To that point, I think the content will need and benefit from strong expert authorship.

Schema will continue to play a big role in helping algorithms leap appropriately and understand the context of how content is related to one another—marking up expert authors with the `author.url` property that highlights links to pages that identify and verify the expertise of the author to their written article as important EAT signals will hopefully become standard for SEO practices across YMYL type sites. This will be helped along by incentives like new article carousels in author knowledge panels, of course (we love incentives).

Now, let's consider that Google MUM applies to 75 different languages. YouTube, in turn, will hopefully benefit from the greater volume of content available to users from automatic translations and better search results. This is because it is expanding to more modalities like video and audio contextual understanding, and YouTube results are increasingly appearing in organic results.

Thinking laterally, this will apply to backlinks. There are a number of signals Google uses to consider the value of guest posts besides simply the anchor text. I think more will be done to weed out and detect spam to prevent it from turning up in search engines at scale. As a result, PR will be seen as a much safer, more fruitful route for outreach specialists.

In summary, I really think in 2022 the understanding of content and the placement of new and more SERP features will become more competitive as information retrieval and natural language processing engineers fight for better passage indexing and ranking.



ADAM RIEMER

**President, Adam Riemer
Marketing, LLC**

In 2022, I think that SEO pros are going to be forced into learning more about the lifecycle of customers, touchpoint attribution, and what their impact has on the customer's journey vs. "We had XYZ traffic which converted to AB in sales."

For example, if you have featured snippets that show up but get no traffic so you lose them, you also lose the branding and trust factors. As a result, you may see a decline in new customers.

By showing up, even without a click, in the research step (which became much more important in 2021), you are driving revenue but not getting credit for this revenue.

Another example are those newsletter subscribers who came through organic search but converted via email 2 months later and may not be counted to your channel.

I also find many SEO professionals (and PPC marketers) losing credit for their conversions because the affiliate manager or affiliate agency allows coupon sites and browser extensions to poach the sale at the last second during checkout. The affiliate program is taking credit for everyone else, and you are being damaged (and likely your company's bottom line, as well).

By learning about these channels and touchpoint attribution, SEO professionals will flourish even further.



KEVIN ROWE

**Founder & VP Of
Strategy at PureLinq**

No matter your approach to SEO, understand how to demonstrate an appropriate level of E-A-T in your on-site content, link building, online PR, and even technical SEO.

This doesn't mean you need a doctorate to be the expert on shoe repair blogs. But being or hiring a subject matter expert that produces, edits, or consults on content is no longer optional. At the very least, marketers hire writers with a passion for the subject matter.



ALEXIS SANDERS

Director, Merkle

Customer Experience (CX) And Increasing SEO overlap Within the digital team.

We have always known that Google chases the searcher. Providing best-in-class search results is the core of their entire business.

In the past few years, Google has refined its definitions (within their Quality Rater Guidelines and the prevalence of E-A-T, YMYL, & reputation) while also integrating UX signals into their ranking factors with the Page Experience update, site speed update, etc.

These updates to Google's algorithms have expanded the scope of SEO, meaning SEO's work overlaps with UX, IA, accessibility, content, and development teams.

Programmatic SEO

Content at scale is an exciting prospect. The data, management, and development aspects of content at scale have been proven with ecommerce and real estate leading innovation. Programmatic SEO presents a number of technical SEO challenges (including crawling, indexing, rendering, and signaling).

Machine Learning Generated Content & Categorization

Iterations on machine learning natural language models have continually improved multiple times every year. Best-in-class models used on the SQuAD dataset exceeded human performance in terms of precision in early 2020.

The commoditization of machine learning solutions for generating content (as a means of supporting writers) and categorization is something that inspires our team.

Prevalence Of Testing & Data-driven Decisions

The first part of testing involves forecasting and setting hypotheses. Data is increasingly important for driving decisions, connecting to bottom-line KPIs. The ability to create test plans, execute, evaluate, and refine is absolutely essential and a newer priority within the SEO community.



ELI SCHWARTZ

Growth Advisor, Eli Schwartz

I think 2022 is going to be the year where artificial intelligence takes center stage in search. We have always known that AI underpins the algorithm, but 2021 was the year where Google showed just how much they are willing to rely on it.

Remember when Google used AI to change title tags on search results? While there was much backlash, this was just a taste of what AI is capable of doing.

You can inoculate against these sorts of algorithmic changes by focusing on the users instead of Google. It will only help to build great user experiences with product-led SEO that are relevant to users in any channel.

Additionally, expect AI to make search that much richer. Google images are not going to just be a secondary search engine. AI is going to allow Google to recognize when an image or video might be the best result for a user. Google has already revealed some of the capabilities they have in this area and with Google lens now a primary search action on Android devices expect direct image search to grow even more.

As a final prediction/trend, I think there's going to be another search option by the end of the year. It could be growing market penetration from DuckDuckGo or Bing or something totally new, but all SEO's should be wise to the potential of the growth of another search engine and not just focus on Google.



JOHN SHEHATA

**Global VP - Audience
Development Strategy
& CRM At Condé Nast**

I believe that in 2022, SEO pros will continue to pay major efforts on enhancing their E-A-T, especially in health and other YMYL content.

Topic-oriented tools helping optimize content will grow in number, and more SEO pros will be focused on topics vs. keywords.

More technical SEO jobs will arise in the market, and many companies will be hiring.

Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, and A/B testing will play a bigger role in the SEO industry.

A considerable amount of sites will disable AMP for revenue, business, and technical reasons.

Google Discover traffic levels will drop as more and more sites compete, but it will remain a major traffic source for many sites.

We'll see more title rewrites, as well – not only on SERPs but also for other search types such as videos and images.



ANDREW SHOTLAND

CEO, Local SEO Guide

The three biggest SEO trends our company is focusing on for 2022 are:

1. Determining SERP intent at scale.
2. Automation.
3. "Content Usefulness."

To craft effective SEO strategies across a large number of search queries, you must be able to see how Google handles those queries on both an individual and topical level.

For example, perhaps Google shows only job search websites 95% of the time for a given query type across millions of queries. You have to be able to compile and analyze all that data to understand whether or not your site has a shot at ranking for a meaningful number of keywords.

You need to be able to do this by topic, by page type, by market (if you target “local”), and by query. This is where automation comes in.

While there are great off-the-shelf tools that can get you part of the way to this kind of analysis, ultimately to get to the “last mile” you’ll probably need to have your own custom systems.

Automated productivity tools can help you do these kinds of analyses (and all sorts of mundane SEO tasks) faster and more efficiently than if you have to work inside someone else’s “big data” SEO tools, export the data to a spreadsheet, and manipulate it.

For example, we have created a very simple ngram tool that allows our team to see the most common phrases across a large keyword

set. It's super basic, but it saves us a ton of time in doing keyword analysis. If you want to be able to scale SEO, you should strive to automate as many SEO tasks as possible.

"Content Usefulness" is perhaps the biggest trend to pay attention to.

Over the years, there has been a lot of discussion in the SEO industry about E-A-T (Expertise, Authority, & Trust). The challenge we have always had with E-A-T is that it's not really measurable.

So we came up with our own metric, Content Usefulness (aka "CUssing"), which we can measure.

For example, in the job search example above, once we see the types of pages/content ranking for a large set of related queries, we can analyze those pages at scale and compare them to our site's pages.

The difference between the ranking pages and those that don't rank, which can often be a specific type of content (e.g. reviews, phone numbers, videos, topics, etc.) can illustrate what content searchers, and therefore Google, deem useful.

Figuring this kind of stuff out and how to apply it to your site will likely not only be an SEO trend for 2022 but for the foreseeable future.

SPONSORED

IGNORE GOOGLE, SATISFY USERS: THE MAJOR SHIFT IN THE SEO WORLD IS FINALLY HERE

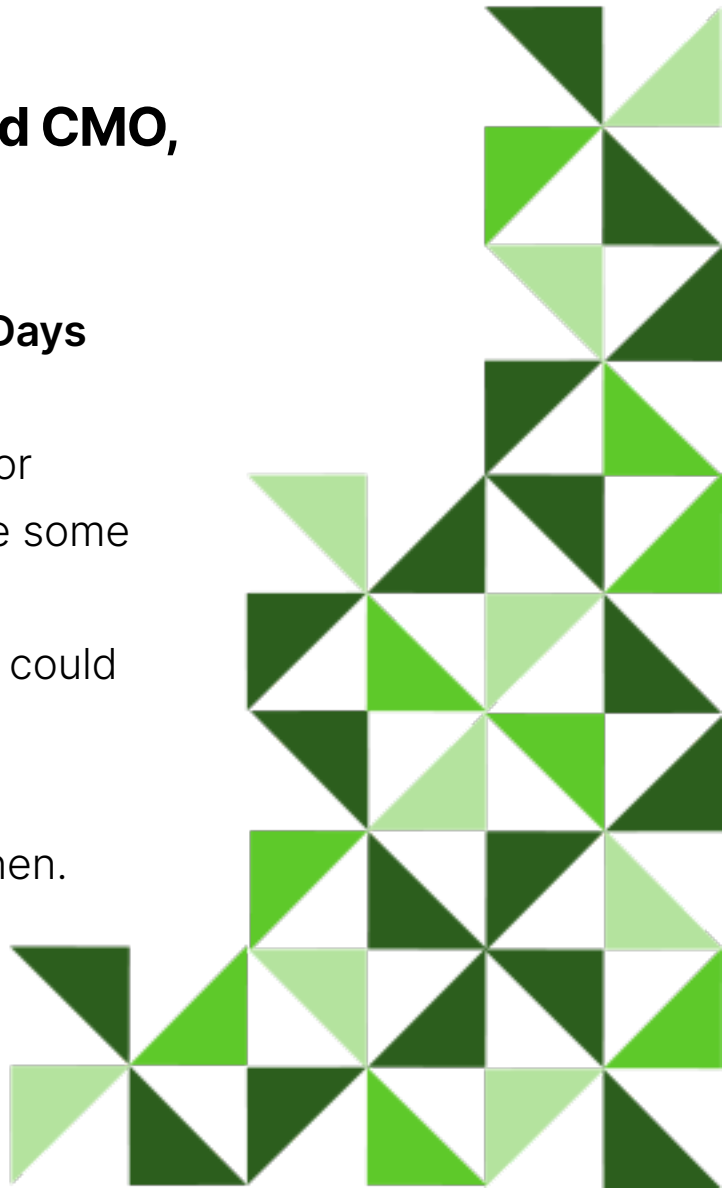
**Vitor Peçanha, Co-Founder and CMO,
Rock Content**

A Formal Goodbye To The Good Ole Days

If you, like me, have been doing SEO for more than 10 years, you probably have some memories of the “good ole days.”

These were the days during which we could outsmart Google in order to rank first.

Google was less sophisticated back then.



Just like the Joker and Batman, we played the seemingly never-ending cat-and-mouse game of looking for creative ways to “hack the system” or bend Google’s rules in our favor.

The result was that we could obtain good rankings, but in reality, the end-user (the actual human who was searching for the content we wanted to rank) was just an afterthought.

Even I’m guilty of that.

In 2012, before forming Rock Content, my blog had over 1.3 million sessions. I was publishing over 1,000 articles per month.

The quality of these articles was questionable. I had multiple variations of a single How To Fry An Egg tutorial; all of them were stuffed with more than 500 words. I’m not proud of that.

Things are very different now.

Let’s look at what has changed since that era.

Google's Not-So-Secret Hidden Agenda: What It's Been Telling Us All Along

For decades, SEO practices were heavily influenced by a strong focus on outsmarting bots, pulling out tricks, and creating complex formulas for success. Before 2011, that was all possible because Google was not “very smart”.

Over time, Google proved us wrong. Google had, in fact, become very smart, and every time it updated its algorithms, there was a not-so-subtle message between the lines:

“Ignore me. Focus on human connection.”

Take a moment to step out of the granular details. Look at the full picture of the most prolific updates to this search engine's core. Let's decode what it was actually telling us.

- 2011: Google told us to **prioritize rich, valuable content** with the launch of Panda.
- 2012: Google told us to **stop keyword stuffing** and halt artificial backlink strategies with the launch of Penguin.

- 2013: Google told us to **consider the user's search intent** with the launch of Hummingbird.
- 2014: Google told us to **think about people** on the local level with the launch of Pigeon.
- 2015: Google told us to go where the users are and **make sites mobile-friendly** with the launch of Mobile.
- 2015: Google told us to **understand our users better and make relevant content** with the launch of RankBrain.
- 2017: Google told us to **stop covering up customer-centric content** with intrusive interstitials.
- 2018: Google told us to **consider users' real needs and questions** with the launch of BERT.

For more than a decade, we've honed in on the small details of tricking the algorithm, but over time, we should have been learning the actual way to be good SEO professionals:

Ignore Google. Satisfy Users.

Looking back, it's neither a secret nor a surprise that Google has been planning this from the beginning.

The search engine has been increasing in human awareness, morphing to become more user-focused and human-centric. It must adapt to survive, otherwise, the search results won't be valuable anymore.

Google is forcing all of us to move away from the technical details of algorithm updates and focus on the detailed needs of real people.

Ignore Google. Satisfy Users.

How Do We Ignore Google And Satisfy Users?

The minds behind Google forced marketers and SEO professionals to change their mindsets and strategies. It became essential to start thinking more as content experts who were capable of building better information for the end-user.

Now, we need to actually become authorities in marketing spaces instead of just thinking like hackers.

The Authority Example

Canceled Practice: Using Hidden Tags To Increase An Authority Number And Other Outdated Practices

Remember the era when we had the “rel author tag”? We would simply insert the tag and be done.

That tag was meant to connect an author to published works on other sites. It helped Google understand the author as an entity and show their faces on the SERP (I miss that).

However, a visitor couldn't see the tag; its only purpose was to be read by machines, not humans. No authority value was added for the end-user.

That seems like a strange technique to use now, in 2021, doesn't it? Isn't Google smart enough to understand who's the author of an article?

The answer is yes, Google is now it is smart enough.

2022 Best Practice: Using E-A-T To Show Actual Authority

Let's compare that canceled “rel author tag” practice to one of today's most important acronyms in the SEO world: E-A-T (Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness).

Google has been giving a lot more attention to E-A-T in its algorithm since 2018. However, contrary to older tactics like “rel author”, there is not a specific tag, technical adjustment, or even specific information on how you can increase E-A-T.

You can’t implement E-A-T by just adding some code.

You should, among other things, identify authors on the page, and link to their published content in a way that helps the reader. Google will figure out the rest.

How To E-A-T

E-A-T essentially determines a website’s value by the quality of content and how reliable the page and author of its content are.

Choosing to follow the current best practices of E-A-T could mean the difference between the best or worst SERP positions.

This is especially important on Your Money, Your Life (YMYL) sites that refer to content from financial, government, legal, shopping, health, safety, and other websites with topics that could have a negative impact on the quality of life.

The only thing Google asks us to do is create good content and make sure that our online presence shows that we are experts on a specific subject.

Google doesn't provide a specific checklist of things to do, but some current best practices are:

- Provide a complete and accurate profile of the author with links to social profiles.
- Understand user intent to create relevant content.
- Earn backlinks and media mentions.
- Correctly implement HTTPS.
- Have easily-accessible, relevant information, such as an address, a privacy policy page, and a terms & conditions page.

These current best practices not only help inform E-A-T but also have a visible impact on the audience's perception of your content and brand.

Old-style hacking techniques that only please only Google are no longer relevant.

The User Experience Shift

As it continues to think about the human experience, Google has begun to expect good websites to be fast and properly rendered on both desktop and mobile.

Just like with E-A-T, there is no hacker's checklist. We must shift our mindset to think like our human visitors.

Luckily, Google does provide some insight to help you understand what to work on.

User Experience Upgrade: How Do I Make Sure I Have A Fast Website?

Right now, user experience is primarily measured by the Core Web Vitals, which can be found under User Experience in Google Search Console.

Here, you can see your site performance, based on how Google perceives it through the human lens. This can serve as a guidepost for what to fix.

At this time, it doesn't matter how you fix these issues, as long as you have high scores in the "Good" category.

User Experience Upgrade: To AMP Or Not To AMP?

Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) are an easy way to optimize your mobile site experience. Enabling AMP on your website can serve as a quick fix to give Google the perception of a fast, properly-rendered website.

Implementing AMP is a matter of choice, even though a few years ago it felt almost mandatory. AMP never was, and still is not, required.

At Rock Content, for example, we've decided to stop using AMP and invest in optimizing our website globally.

We've had zero negative impact on our traffic, nothing changed for our visitors, and our website became much easier to manage without the duplicated pages.

Just like with E-A-T, Google has asked us to change our mindset. The focus is on the final user experience instead of the technology we are using to achieve the best results.

As long as you are getting good scores in your Core Web Vitals, you are fine.

2022 & Beyond

All the changes that we observed over the last two years brought us really close to where we are now – Ignore Google. Satisfy Users.

We saw, first hand, that when you think of the user first, Google will find your value – regardless of the implementation method used.

With extremely advanced AI already being used by Google (oh, hey MUM!), trying to “trick” Google is useless.

The quality of your content’s answers to user intention, plus a great user experience, is what matters.

A Case Study

The proof of this shift in mindset is in the pudding.

Canceled Practice: Content Created Around High-Ranking Keywords Only

We are no longer creating hundreds of the same posts about [frying eggs], each with a different color egg, in an attempt to trick “old Google.”

The “old Google” is gone.

Google now knows that [brown eggs] and [white eggs] are both [eggs]; it will easily mark those pieces of egg content as spam. Keyword density is no longer the primary way to rank.

2022 Best Practice: Using E-A-T And Human-Centric User Experience To Create Meaningful Content

Rock Content set out to rank for a very specific core term when we created our [Business Data](#) post. That single term was [business data].

However, instead of ranking just for our core term, we ended up ranking for intent terms and phrases that were completely different from our original plan.

This post ended up being one of the top three results for keyword phrases that we weren't expecting to rank for, such as [data for business] and [the value of data for companies].

What happened?

Our team had created a strong article that fulfilled a series of interconnected queries around a topic. The content helps answer in-depth questions that readers truly have.

Google, who now understands user intent, user experience, and topic queries, saw multiple markers of high quality on our site. It also recognized answers to a multitude of human-centric topic queries.

Google isn't the only thing that has changed; we've changed our definition of quality content, too.

The Key Takeaway

If you have to choose between all the green lights from your Yoast plugin inside WordPress or more clear and organized information for the user, don't think twice: choose the user.

As marketers, we know much more about our prospects than a plugin with non-humanistic rules.

Google is thinking like a human, and we need to do the same.

I don't mean to imply that we can completely ignore Google to do great SEO. Technical optimizations are key. Yes, we should still utilize these.

However, they are not the primary driving force. We see the technical improvements as a way to deliver what matters the most – the actual content – in the best possible way.

My Prediction

2022 will be the first year in which it will be truly possible to do good SEO by just thinking about the end-user and leaving Google to be an afterthought.

And that, my friend, is what good marketing is all about.



Vitor Peçanha is co-founder and CMO of Rock Content, a global leader in Content Marketing. He's also a best-selling author, international speaker, and has more than 500 thousand students in his online courses.



BILL SLAWSKI

**Director Of Search Marketing
For Go Fish Digital And The
Editor of SEO by the Sea**

I am anticipating that search engines will pay more attention to mobile devices than they already have been, with emphasis on the following:

1. Federated machine learning, where information from your mobile device is uploaded to the cloud once a day, and then data is returned to your device after it has been processed along with search selection and browsing information from many other mobile device users to power a machine-learned model.

Google has blogged about this and has released a patent on it, and Apple Search has also patented federated learning, and how local and network computer information can be combined under that approach.

2. User-Specific Knowledge Graphs may be built on your mobile devices transparently to the users of those devices, which could include email, chat, calendaring, browsing, and searching information. They will leave out personally identifiable information, and that data could potentially be used to help personalize search results and improve the data behind searches. A Google patent that describes how such private knowledge graphs might be used on mobile devices was granted this year.

There may be little that you can do with that knowledge at this point, but the knowledge and awareness that both are possible is good to know.



IZZY SMITH

**Technical SEO Team
Lead, Ryte**

**Skill Versatility/Increasing Knowledge In Web Performance And
UX**

I think 2022 will see a larger, more practical approach to SEO professionals investing time and resources into traditionally “non-SEO” topics.

In 2021, it felt like web performance topics became more accessible than ever, as Google rolled out initiatives like extensive guides and support videos to prepare everyone for the Page Experience update.

This, combined with an ongoing increase in UX and CRO knowledge, paired with post-pandemic travel and education budget increases. I believe we're in for a surge of SEO professionals diversifying their skill sets even more.

A Higher Importance Placed On Accessibility Of Content

I expect there will be a stronger focus on content accessibility topics over the next year. Failing to remove accessibility barriers can often result in pages being difficult or impossible to use by certain visitors, so it's something that deserves to receive more scrutiny from the search engines who rank that content.

Whether that's a ranking boost for more accessible content, SERP features, or "penalties" for those who fail to properly comply, I do believe it's time to be held to a higher standard when making sure information is available for everyone.

Reducing Website Carbon Emissions/Digital Sustainability

Reducing the carbon footprint of our websites and digital infrastructures is not only a right step forward towards achieving net-zero, but it could even become a defining factor in search user's behaviors.

As Google is starting to display carbon emissions of flights and labeling eco-friendly hotels, it's not absurd to believe that Google could even begin showing the eco-impact of web pages.

This could encourage greener attitudes online, especially considering the fact websites and their supporting systems have a similar carbon footprint to the airline industry, she said.

Although creating more sustainable websites involves similar tactics to improving performance (e.g., improving availability, optimizing performance), carbon emission reductions could soon become an important metric worth reporting on.



DANIEL SMULLEN

Head Of SEO, Mediahuis Ireland

This year, we saw the introduction of [Google rewriting titles](#), taking more control away from webmasters on Google's SERPs.

In 2022, we will continue to see Google taking more real estate from organic. It will expand on featured snippets, add more dimensions to what people also ask, and its knowledge graph will get an even deeper understanding.

Google will also continue to prioritize its own products on search as we have seen with Google Flights and Google Jobs. We can expect to see Google branching further into areas of the aggregated space.

In 2022, companies should prioritize audience-first SEO with a strategy focused on the audience you are trying to reach on search for your product or service. Focus less on vanity keyword rankings, organic traffic, and more on business impact.



ALEYDA SOLIS

**International SEO
Consultant & Founder, Orainti**

I see a few emerging SEO trends to have much higher importance and adoption in the following years:

Higher Focus On User Search Experience

Google is putting more focus on the quality of the user search experience at different levels, with our website content and UI. It's fundamental to add an "experience" insurance layer to our content and UI and into our SEO efforts if we haven't yet. If we want to be competitive and rank in the top positions, the quality of the experience given by our site content and UI should be the best.

Growth Of Edge SEO

The popularization of Edge SEO solutions using Cloudflare to facilitate otherwise difficult technical SEO implementation as well as to easily run SEO A/B tests (that can be also run by leveraging JS with GTM) is enabling organizations to adopt an agile approach within the SEO process, fix high impact issues, develop tests and identify opportunities fast.

Leverage SEO Automation For Quality Assurance

We'll see the implementation of real-time SEO validation and alerts systems within our platforms. This will help to avoid the generation of issues in the first place or monitor them in real-time to be warned as soon as they happen will become more important to avoid very common SEO horror stories.



PATRICK STOX

**Product Advisor, Technical SEO,
& Brand Ambassador, Ahrefs**

Here's what I think people need to hear: ignore the trends.

SEO professionals will have more success focusing on the basics, and that mostly involves content and links (internal and external).

Write or record content that matches what people are searching for and covers the topic well, add expert insights, link to and get links from other pages on your site, and promote your content.

The formula for success has been the same for a while now.

This year we saw a large focus on speed and CWV but these aren't really strong ranking signals. It's what was being pushed and caused SEO pros to chase this trend that is more the realm of developers.

MUM, title changes, mobile-first indexing, core updates, etc., are mostly just noise. For some sites that may have specific issues, they're important, but most people will not see much impact from these things, and they can easily become time sinks.

The same story has played out for years with people chasing trends, and that's why I'm telling you not to do it.

I see several trends continuing into next year, but again, I don't know that they're really useful for the majority of SEO professionals.

Automated content isn't really good enough for many practical use cases yet, and you're not seeing it used for writing entire articles.

Automation, in general, is always a popular trend. I won't be surprised if CWVs continue into next year and the focus expands with things like HTTP/3 and Early Hints.

Most of these trends, though, are really the domain of a few people, companies, or tools. For example, for HTTP/3 and Early Hints, you can enable them with a toggle on Cloudflare. More things are being built into CDNs, CMS platforms, SEO tools, and most users don't need to focus on these things. Unless something is a particular issue for your site or a site you work on, then ignore the trends and get back to basics and look for other opportunities to improve your site.



VINCENT TERRASI

Product Director Manager, Oncrawl

Much of what we'll see in 2022 is already available. I've been doing a lot of work recently with different types of NLP models used in SEO contexts, and the progress in that area has been phenomenal. I think we'll continue to see huge improvements in translation, cross-language, and language agnostic processing, which will allow for industrialized solutions for SEO texts like product descriptions, titles, and summaries.

More importantly, the barrier to being able to use these technologies has become much less important. Web app interfaces are easy to create and make NLP models accessible to everyone, even if you don't know how to code.

Even the ability to produce code using only natural language is going to be more and more present in 2022, allowing more SEO pros to develop their own solutions to problems of scale or automation. When you see how easy it is to generate quality product descriptions in 15 languages with just a bit of input, it's hard to look back.

So for me, the big theme of 2022 will be the accessibility of technology that many people have considered to be too advanced or too complicated for use in SEO.



MARK TRAPHAGEN

**VP Product Marketing And Training,
seoClarity**

Here are the three areas we're focusing on for our enterprise SEO clients as we come into 2022:

1. Increased Automation Of SEO Processes

The pace of change in SEO has continued to increase exponentially, while at the same time enterprise SEO professionals are dealing with ever larger and more complex sites.

The need for better automation to overcome gaps in technology, skills, and resources to be able to scale execution is rapidly passing from a “nice to have” to a necessity.

Data is abundantly available now and has become a commodity. The challenge is reducing the time from data acquisition to insights to action.

SEO pros (and the tools they use) will need to invest significantly more in developing automation in the year to come. Particular areas to investigate include the use of Edge technology to implement changes faster, AI-driven analysis to cull signals from the noise of data, and highly-customizable intelligent alerts.

2. Employing Machine Learning And Natural Language Processing For Content Optimization At Scale.

Some might consider this a subset of my first area above, but we consider this pursuit to be a discipline in itself.

The advances in both AI-machine learning and natural language processing have been astounding, and those improvements are now available to anyone.

Because Google is investing heavily in these technologies to do

things like increase the query and intent relevance of its results, it makes sense for us to reverse engineer that to create our content in the first place.

3. Making SEO A Product + Marketing Function.

For too long SEO has been seen as merely a subset of marketing. SEO should be treated as a product, complete with “features” (improvements) that need to be made to attract new customers (searchers), and bugs (issues) that need to be solved to keep existing customers coming back.

Thinking about SEO with a product mindset also opens doors for tried and tested approaches to testing, iterative improvements, validation, etc.



ANDREAS VONIATIS

Founder, Artios

2022 SEO Trends - Intelligent Automation

The automation of SEO practices, whether they are technical audits, competitor analysis, search intent analysis, has already started this year and in 2022, this will become even more widespread.

As more SEO professionals worldwide become increasingly Python-savvy, we'll see more automation, especially in agencies where more will automate as much of the technical audits, tools for analysis, and other areas of research, as much as possible.

For those who started this year or earlier, we'll see the automation of technical audits to make use of machine learning to segment technical issues by content type making the automation of technical audits more 'intelligent.'

SEO reporting for the majority of the industry will also take a step forward too as more start using Google Big Query (or Amazon RedShift) as a data layer to make their Data Studio reports more robust and customizable. SEO software vendors will need to 'up their game' as a result, to stay relevant beyond providing their data via APIs.

What we likely won't see are individual SEO teams (unless they're working on sites with millions of pages) using neural networks to improve internal linking. That's because any decent AI would need at least a million examples to become a reliable model and add value to the SEO process. However, this could be one opportunity for SEO tool vendors to stay relevant.

The stay-ahead answer for SEO professionals everywhere is to keep learning Python, but also learn the data science that goes with it. Python is a language, but to be truly skilled and creative at applying Python to SEO, those ideas will come from data science, or more importantly higher mathematics.



MINDY WEINSTEIN

CEO, Market MindShift

As we head into 2022, we need to focus even more on questions and answers in our SEO strategies. If you pay attention to Google's patents, you know that the search engine is very interested in fine-tuning its question and answering ability.

We have already seen this in search results with direct answers and “People Also Asked,” but I believe it is going to become even bigger as time goes by. The reason? We are now in a day and time where we go to search engines for just about every question and most often we are just grabbing our phones to complete that query.

We have become conditioned that if we want a quick answer, we simply search it online. You see this in just about all age groups of searchers.

From an SEO perspective, if you are still doing traditional keyword research where you only identify a list of 2-4 word phrases, you will miss some great traffic opportunities. As we move into 2022, we need to spend more time identifying questions people are asking and ensuring we have content that answers them. That’s what I will be doing.

An abstract geometric pattern composed of numerous triangles in various shades of green (light, medium, and dark) and white. The triangles are arranged in a complex, non-repeating grid-like structure that fills the upper two-thirds of the image. The pattern is dense and creates a sense of depth and movement.

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