



47 EXPERTS ON THE

2019 SEO TRENDS

THAT REALLY MATTER

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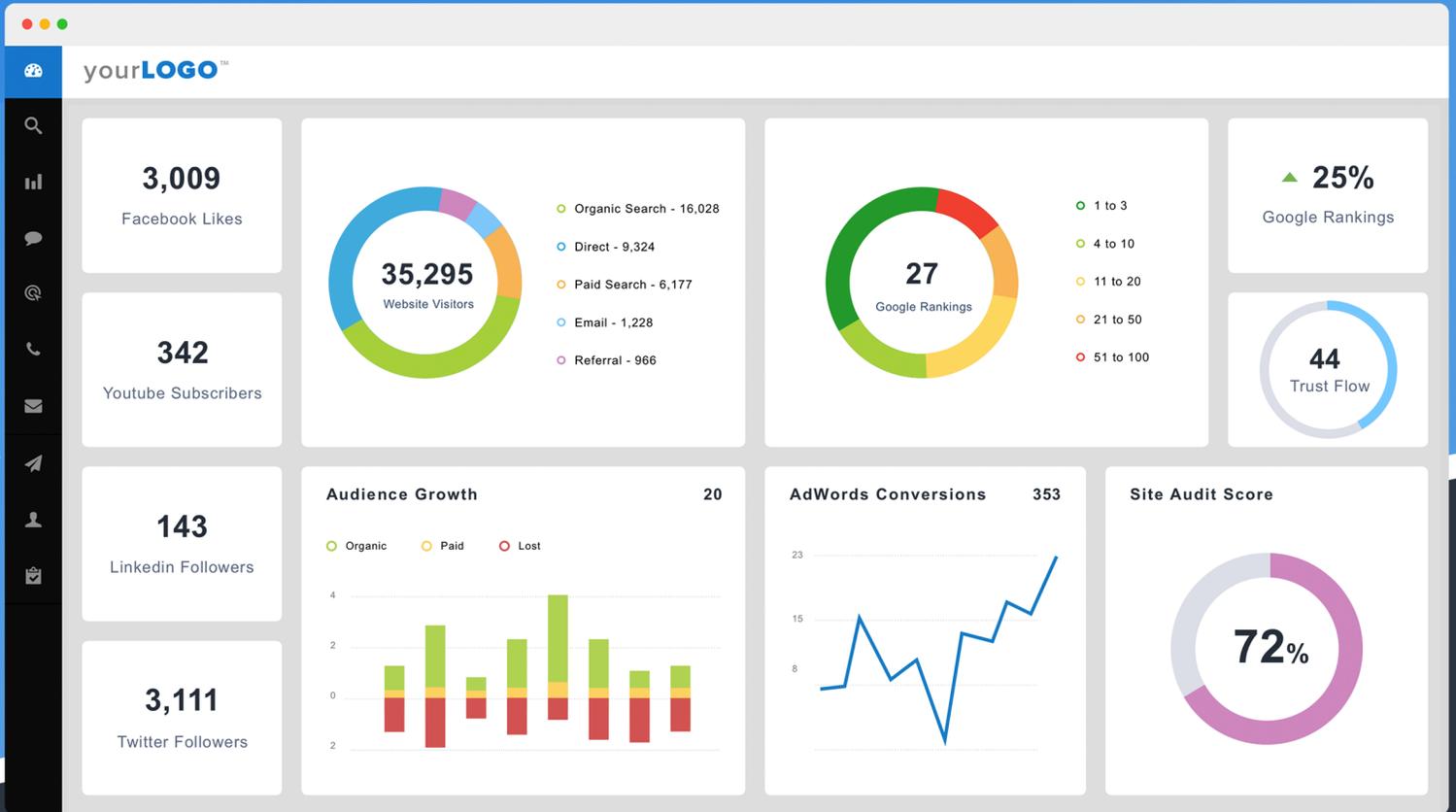
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It's time to take our annual look at what's ahead for SEO professionals in 2019.

What SEO strategies and tactics will work and help you dominate in the SERPs and earn more revenue in 2019?

Here are 10 important trends you need to know in 2019, according to 47 of today's top SEO professionals.

1 UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE & USER INTENT

Does your audience prefer text? Images? Video? Audio.

Knowing this will all be more important than ever in 2019, according to our experts.



“You need to understand what someone is expecting to find when they query a word or phrase and you need to give them the answer in the simplest way possible,” said Mindy Weinstein CEO of Market Mindshift.

Motoko Hunt, president of AJPR, agreed, adding that the interests, tastes, and preferences of your audience can change more quickly than you think.

“Even if your website content is perfectly written and optimized, if it’s done for a wrong audience, it won’t grow the business,” Hunt said.

Tomorrow’s high-ranking website is all about the audience, said Julia McCoy, CEO of Express Writers.

“If your site enhances your audience’s journey, you’ll be rewarded by Google and your visitor will invest in you,” McCoy said.

This is especially important because rankings have been fluctuating over the past year to help fit the semantic intent of a user’s search query, said Jesse McDonald, SEO specialist and director of operations for TopHatRank.com.

“It will be more critical than ever for SEOs and content specialists to focus heavily on the user intent of the keywords they are targeting while creating content,” McDonald said.

Casie Gillette, senior director of digital marketing at KoMarketing, has also noticed Google’s shift in keyword intent.

“We have to think more about the funnel and where we really want to spend our time,” Gillette said. “Do I want to spend time and money trying to rank for a broad term or should I instead shift my focus to terms further down the funnel, where buyers are more knowledgeable and more likely to be interested in what I’m selling?”

To adjust to this shift in 2019, you may have to change the way you’ve been doing your keyword research, said Chuck Price, founder of Measurable SEO.

When doing keyword research in 2019, it's imperative that you check the SERPs to see if websites like yours are ranking for a targeted phrase," Price said. "If the top SERPs are filled with directories or review sites and your site isn't one of those, then move on to another phrase."

The time is now to stop matching keyword phrases and start making sure that your content comprehensively answers questions your audience is asking via search, said Jeremy Knauff, CEO of Spartan Media.

"Ideally, we should take our content a step further by anticipating and answering follow-up questions they may have once they receive the answer to their initial query," Knauff said.

2 GO BEYOND GOOGLE SEARCH

Could Amazon and Apple cut into Google's search dominance? Eli Schwartz, director of SEO and growth for SurveyMonkey, believes so.



“I think that 2019 will be the year that, once again, SEO will not just be about how to optimize for Google, but we will have to take into account these other ‘engines’ as well,” Schwartz said.

As Cindy Krum, CEO of MobileMoxie, pointed out, SEO is about showing up wherever and however people are searching – not just getting the first blue link. So you must learn how to drive traffic and engagement for things other than just websites.

“If potential customers are searching for apps, you need to rank in app stores. If they are searching for podcasts or videos, you need to rank where people search for those things,” Krum said. “Strong brands are becoming multi-faceted, ranking more than just websites. Strong SEOs need to do the same thing.”

Jes Scholz, international digital director for Ringier AG, said she also sees the scope of SEO expanding to cover visibility on other platforms.

“Think beyond driving users to your website by ranking number 1 in the SERPs,” Scholz said. “How can you get visibility for your content in featured snippets and thus conversational interfaces, with hosted articles, with content aggregators and other such opportunities to ensure your brand reaches your target audience?”

In 2019, you also must at least consider optimizing for devices, said Kristine Schachinger, digital strategist and SEO consultant.

“For those with products that can be sold or brands that can benefit from the exposure, being optimized for home assistant or audio-only devices can’t be ignored,” Schachinger said.

Ultimately, this all requires the best content on the fastest platforms geared to meet the users wherever they’re coming from, according to Keith Goode, IBM’s senior SEO strategist, security intelligence.

“The entire search experience is our domain of expertise and control, and our goal isn’t to just drive traffic,” Goode said. “It’s to ensure that we’ve optimized that search experience, whether web-based or app-based or [insert the next big technology]-based, to create the most efficient and engaging intersection of the user’s needs and the site’s offerings possible.”

3 STRUCTURED DATA MARKUP IS KEY

Use structured data whenever possible, said Marcus Tandler, co-founder and managing director of Ryte.



“With AI becoming increasingly important for Google, structured data is becoming more important as well,” Tandler said. “If Google wants to move from a mobile-first to an AI-first world, structured data is key. No matter how good your AI is, if it takes too long to ‘crawl’ the required information, it will never be great. AI requires a fast processing of contents and their relations to each other.”

JP Sherman, enterprise search and findability expert at Red Hat, said you should start looking at and understanding structured data, schema, active and passive search behaviors, and how they can connect to behaviors that signal intent so that the behavior of search becomes a much larger effort of findability.

“Contextual relationships between topics and behaviors, supported by structured markup, is the critical trend we need to start understanding, testing, and implementing for 2019,” Sherman said. “Using information architecture, tags, metadata and more recently, structured markup, we’ve had the ability to give search engines signals to understand this topical and supportive content structure.”

Further, Jamie Alberico, SEO product owner for Arrow Electronics, said you should “leverage your existing content by integrating speakable and fact check structured data markup. These markups are a key link between factual reality and the screenless future.”

And Bill Slawski, director of SEO research at Go Fish Digital added this tip:

“[Understand] and [use] appropriate schema vocabulary on pages for products, offers, events, contact information, sameAs social and entity associations, organizational information, ratings, and speakable content.”

4 CREATE EXCEPTIONAL CONTENT

Google algorithm updates in 2018 revealed that Google is intensifying its focus on evaluating content quality and at the depth and breadth of a website's content, said Eric Enge, general manager of Perficent Digital.



“We tracked the SEO performance of a number of different sites,” Enge said. “The sites that provided exceptional depth in quality content coverage literally soared in rankings throughout the year. Sites that were weaker in their content depth suffered in comparison.”

Enge said he expects to see the trend of Google rewarding sites that provide the best in-depth experiences continuing in 2019.

“Google was continually tuning their algorithms in this area throughout the year, and I believe there is still a lot more tuning for them to do,” Enge added.

That means if you’re still creating content just to keep your blog alive, that won’t be good enough any longer, said Alexandra Tachalova, digital marketing consultant.

“The issue with this content is that it isn’t good enough to acquire links, so there’s a slim chance that it’ll rank on Google,” Tachalova said. “Think twice about publishing such posts, since they won’t pay off. It’s better to do one post that is properly distributed every few months than doing several per month that will only receive a few visits.”

What you need to do is create content that solves a problem – content that moves, motivates, and connects with people, said Matt Siltala, president of Avalaunch Media.

“If you can answer a question, get a lead, make a sale, help with SEO (link building), reputation management, social proof or community building purposes with a piece of content, then you win!” Siltala said. “Do your research, be the solution to the problem that people have, and provide something that is meant for people versus trying to ‘SEO’ the crap out of it and you will always do better in your efforts.”

Shelley Walsh, director of ShellShock, expects to see the level of content quality rise in 2019.

“Content strategy in SEO is not just about answering a query and getting users to the page. It must also use language to engage the user and guide the user to the next action,” Walsh said. “There are still far too few pages doing this well. More use of content maps and experience maps would help this.”

5 INCREASE EXPERTISE, AUTHORITY, TRUSTWORTHINESS

Establishing and growing your expertise, authority, and trustworthiness – better known as E-A-T in Google’s search quality rating guidelines – will be another key trend in 2019.



“Although the E-A-T guidelines are written for Google’s algorithm raters, rather than Google’s algorithm itself, it helps us to understand where Google is heading in the short term,” said Dixon Jones, founder of DHJ Ventures. “I think this will help SEOs start to understand that ‘quality’ comes with context. You cannot rank so easily writing authoritative content unless you are already an authority on a given subject.”

Grant Simmons, VP of search marketing at Homes.com, said you should look at content distribution and promotion from a reputation standpoint.

“Hire experts to author, leverage data from known entities, and ensure credentials and credit is given to both, with appropriate affinity to the promoted brand,” Simmons said. “How can you get more of your employees to blog, write, and speak? How can you (the brand’s people) be the go-to source for journalists around your core topic expertise? Because that level of expertise is what Google is looking for to power their results.”

Like Google, Bing also wants to reward E-A-T.

“A major goal of our ranking team is to build an algorithm that would rank documents in the same order as humans would as they are following the guidelines,” said Frédéric Dubut, Microsoft’s senior program manager, Search & AI. “You can only do so at the scale of the web by generalizing your ranking algorithm as much as possible. It turns out that modern machine learning is very good at generalizing, so you can expect our core ranking algorithm to get closer to that ideal Intelligent Search product view that we hold internally and which we try to capture in our own guidelines.”

6 INVEST IN TECHNICAL SEO

Websites continue to grow in complexity every year, making technical SEO a major area of investment in 2019 and beyond.

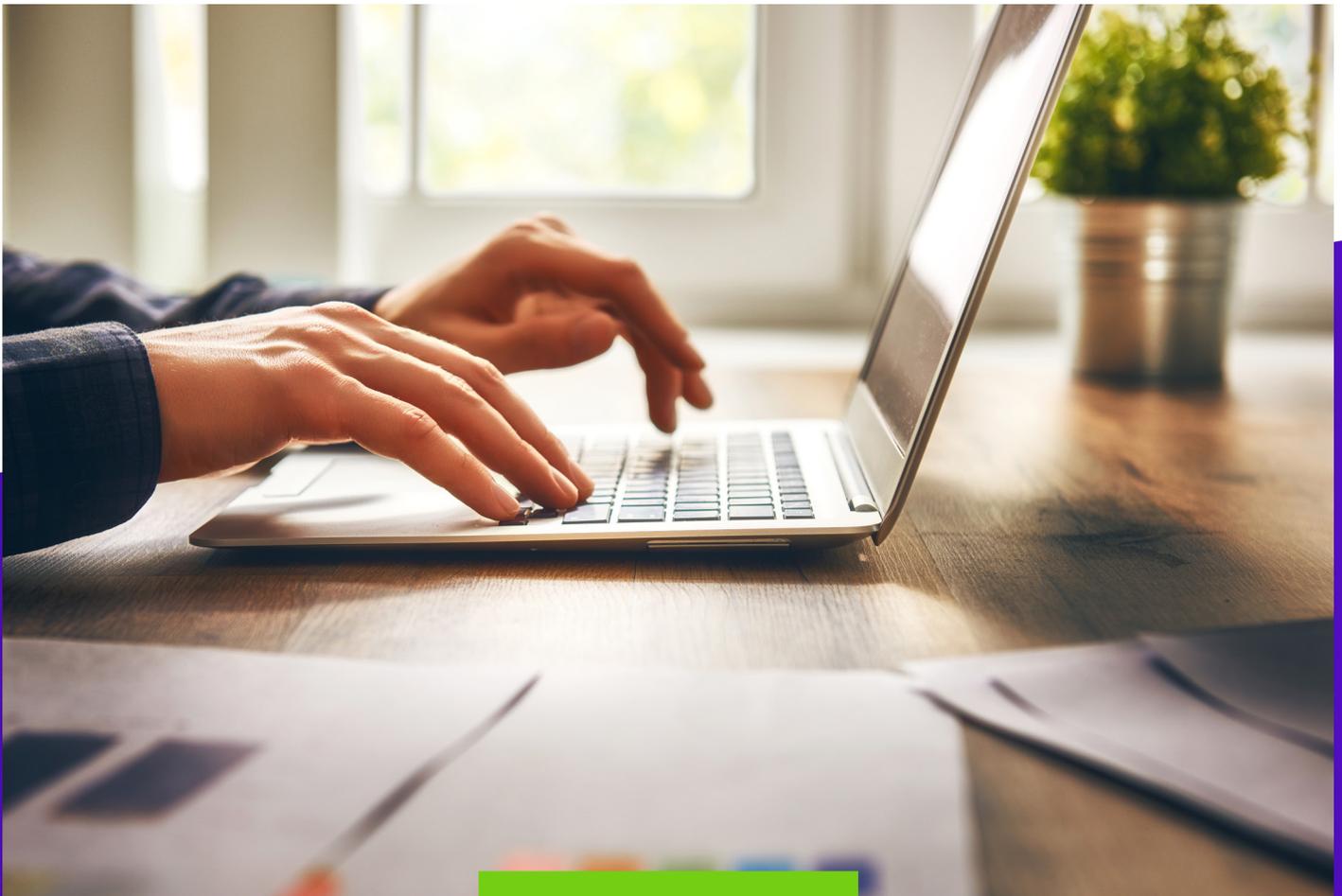


Some key areas of focus on the technical side of SEO will be:

- **Speed:** “Sites will finally start to become simpler and faster as SEOs discover that Google is rewarding sites more than once thought for [first meaningful paint] speed,” according to Jon Henshaw, founder of Coywolf Marketing and senior SEO analyst at CBS Interactive.
- **JavaScript:** “A new year means that even more of the websites you encounter will be heavily JavaScript driven (likely one of the big frameworks, such as React, Vue.js, and Angular). That means it’s time to familiarize yourself with at least a little JavaScript, and how the major search engines play best with JavaScript-driven websites.” said Paul Shapiro, director of strategy and innovation for Catalyst.
- **Progressive Web Apps (PWAs):** “For 2019, you should start thinking about how your website could live on as a PWA in the future. How can your PWA become a keepable experience your users would like to put on their home screen?” Tandler said.

7 WIN WITH ON-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

On-page optimization will continue to be important in 2019, said Tony Wright, CEO and founder of WrightIMC.



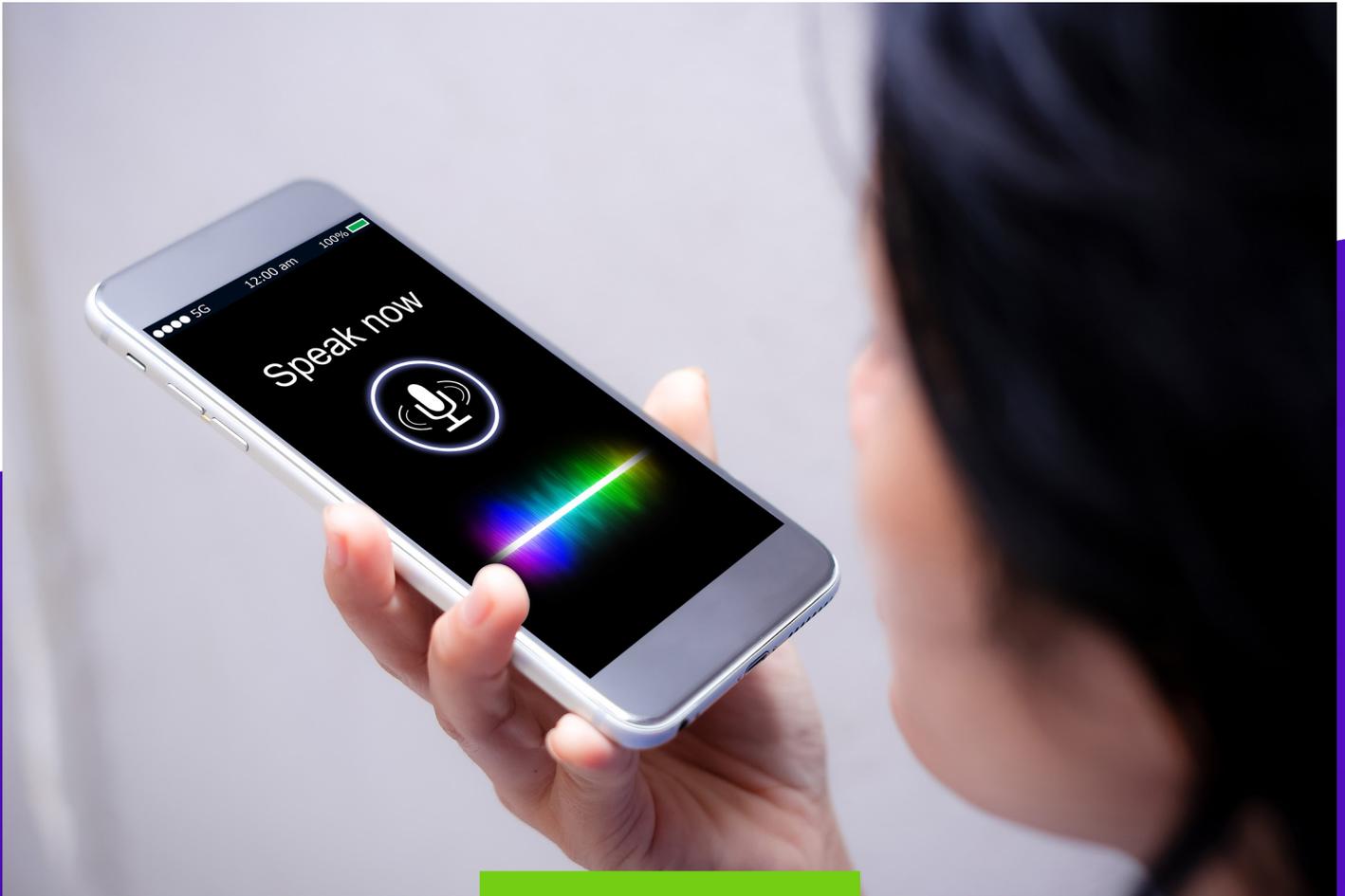
“We are still seeing incredible results from nothing more than on-page SEO tactics for many companies that come in the door,” Wright said. “Links are still very important, but the biggest bang for most companies’ SEO bucks is ongoing on-page optimization. Because on-page SEO isn’t a set-it-and-forget-it tactic.”

Alexis Sanders, technical SEO manager at Merkle, also shared some key website optimizations:

- Content that answers common user questions.
- Ensuring internal site search is providing relevant results.
- Shortening conversion process.
- Ensure that repeat customers can restock commonly purchased items simply.
- Customer support responds to questions related to the business.
- Consider use of chatbots to lighten the load for basic, common questions and procedural tasks.
- Users are easily able to navigate to physical locations.
- Providing users with their stage in fulfillment funnel (think: clear, visual process forms).

8 GET READY FOR VOICE SEARCH

Last decade, “the year of mobile” became a kind of running joke. Every year, the experts predicted that this, finally, would be the year of mobile. Year after year. Until hype finally matched reality around 2015.



Well, is this year the year of voice search? Once again, not quite.

As Wright put it:

“In my opinion, the ‘juice isn’t worth the squeeze’ yet for most companies when it comes to showing up in voice queries,” Wright said. “However, I think more companies will look into a voice optimization strategy next year. As I said last year, voice search is coming, it still just isn’t quite there yet.”

Although voice search got lots of attention in 2018, Aleyda Solis, international SEO consultant and founder of Orainti, said voice search is just a piece of a bigger shift, from specific “results” to “answers” as part of a longer “conversational search journey.”

“This will only gain more prominence and importance in 2019 – and the shift has already started,” Solis said. “While ‘voice’ might be an easier way to request answers in some scenarios, it certainly isn’t the ideal format to fulfill the intent in more complex answers (e.g., when comparing services or products).”

All that said, Michael Bonfils, managing director of SEM International, said voice search is a game changer for multinational and multilingual websites.

“Hopefully, marketers will realize in 2019 that the effective use of voice response can’t be done by translators (machine or human). The use of voice is, and can be, very different from country to country, region to region, dialect to dialect, social class to social class, etc.,” Bonfils said.

9 WATCH MACHINE LEARNING

Dave Davies, CEO of Beanstalk Internet Marketing, said machine learning is about to explode in 2019.



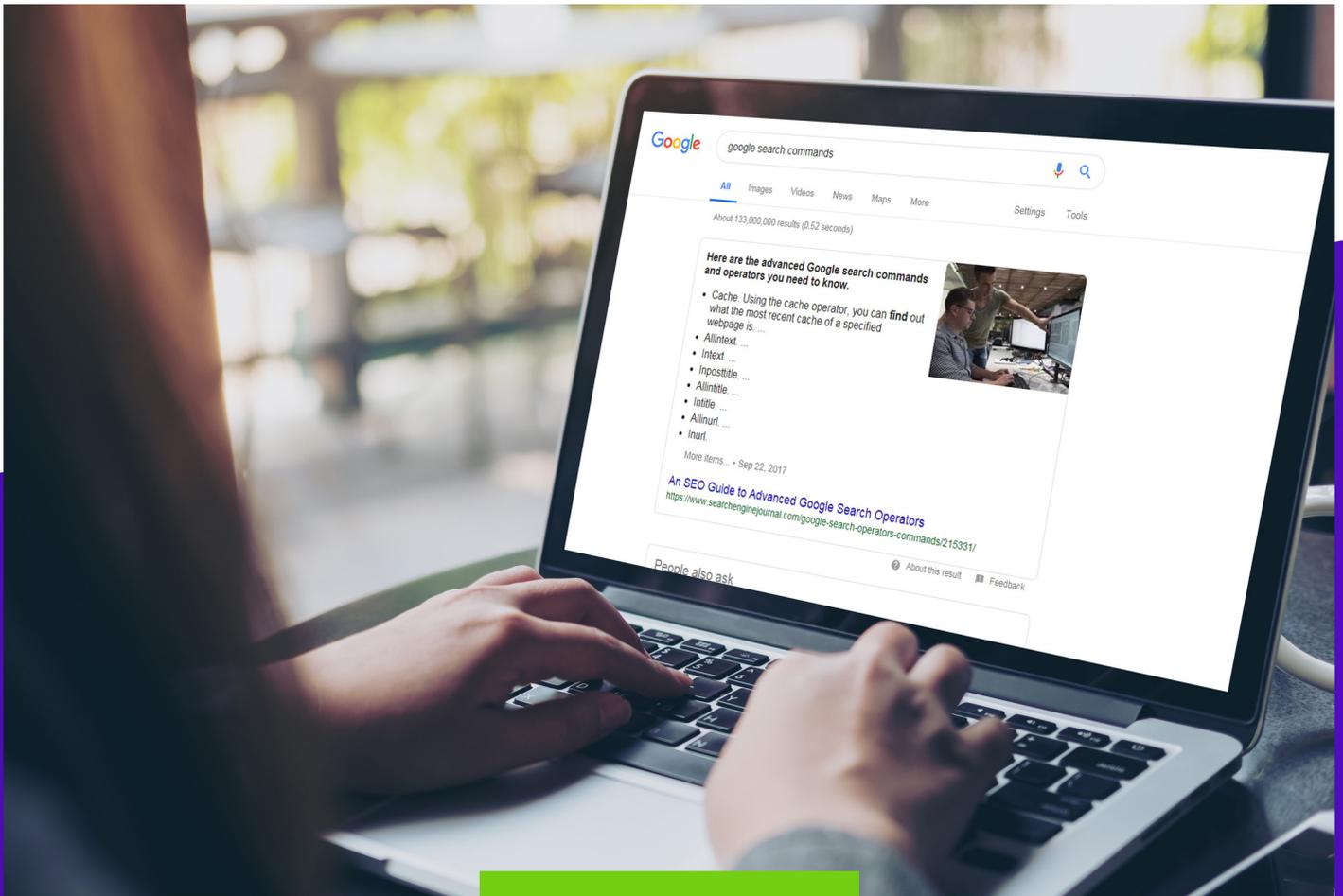
“While we’ve seen machine learning in search with RankBrain, Google News groupings, etc. we haven’t really experienced the true power of what it can be. This is the year that changes,” Davies said. “We can see the prep work coming with some of the layout changes the engines are pushing out and their drive to answer intents rather than questions. This is the root of machine learning’s impact on search.”

But machine learning won’t just be something to watch on Google and the search engines, said Jenn Mathews of Jenn Mathews Consulting.

“Companies need to adopt machine learning to develop unique content for SEO, beginning with a set of data based on specific variables,” Mathews said. “Machine learning, coupled with the need for analysis and reporting, as testing new strategies and implementation is imperative to understanding successes and failures.”

10 OPTIMIZE FOR FEATURED SNIPPETS & OTHER GOOGLE SERP FEATURES

In addition to optimizing for your own website, you must also optimize for the Google search experience in 2019.



“Answer boxes, recipes, the knowledge graph, carousels, and who-knows-what-else will take an even bigger bite out of organic traffic,” said Ian Lurie, CEO and founder of Portent. “That makes SEO even more important, because exposure is as much about visibility in the SERPs as it is about clicks.”

That means optimizing for featured snippets (a.k.a., position zero) and other Google search features will continue to be an important trend – and more important than ever – in 2019.

“We have been able to achieve many answer boxes for our own site and client websites,” said Jim Bader, senior director of SEO at Vertical Measures. “Every time this happens, it results in a significant spike in organic traffic.”

Get More 2019 SEO Trends & Insights

We’ve only scratched the surface so far. Our experts also discuss the importance of links, video, localization, and more.

Read on for more uncensored and unfiltered trends, insights, and tips from 47 top experts on how to dominate SEO in 2019.

The sponsored chapter is written by AgencyAnalytics. The opinions expressed in this article is sponsor's own.

The Top 6 SEO Trends of 2019: How to Implement, Analyze, and Track Results

More factors impact your SEO performance than ever before.

An effective SEO strategy is now much more than just content & backlinks. It should involve staying abreast of cutting edge new trends, and implementing initiatives across multiple marketing channels.

As you optimize for the top trends of 2019, how do you track your progress?

You need a reporting tool that does more than simply tracking keyword rankings. It can take months for your rankings and traffic to reflect your SEO initiatives.

Instead, you should also measure the "micro" KPIs that incrementally lead to better SEO performance.

A dashboard that includes every marketing channel is your solution to better SEO analytics.

In this chapter, we're sharing exactly how to track your efforts to keep up with these top SEO trends in 2019:

1. Optimize for Google's Mobile-First Index
2. Your Brand is More Important than Ever
3. UX Signals & Engagement Matter
4. Social Signals are a Must
5. Video Content Wins in 2019
6. Content and Backlinks are (still) King

Are you keeping up with the latest trends in your SEO strategy? Keep reading to find out.

1. Optimize for Google's Mobile-First Index

Most searches occur on mobile devices. To support their mostly mobile users, Google announced this year that they were broadly rolling out their mobile-first index.

The mobile-first index means that Google will be looking primarily at a site's mobile version to determine rankings globally.

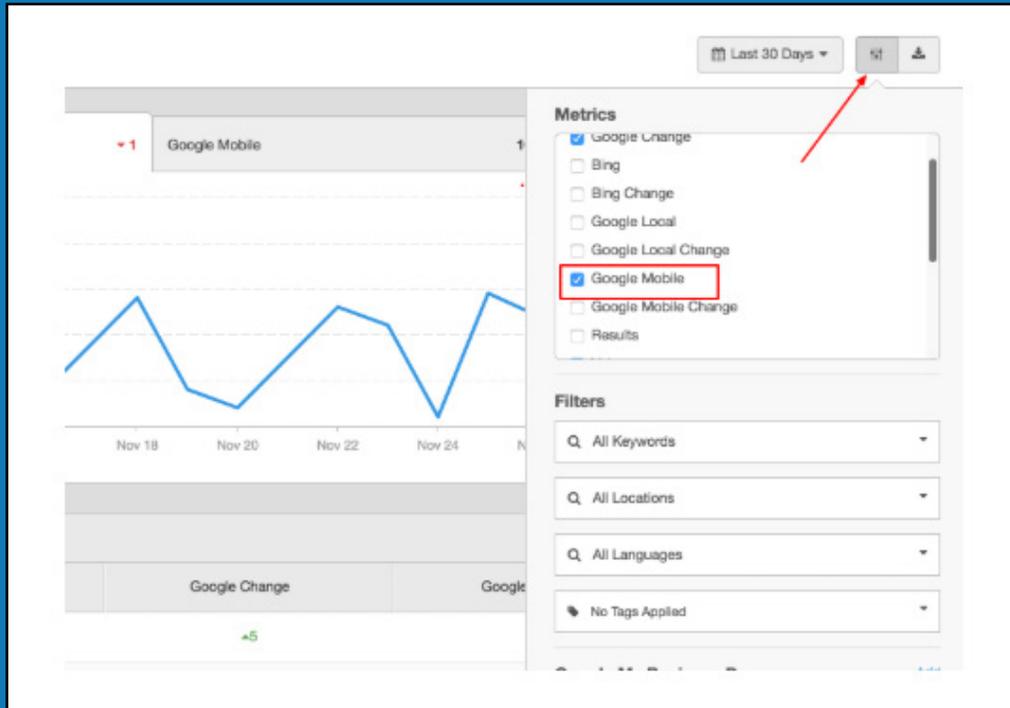
Mobile-friendliness has been a ranking factor for years. But with the mobile-first index, it's more important than ever to make sure that your site is mobile friendly.

How to Track Your Mobile Efforts:

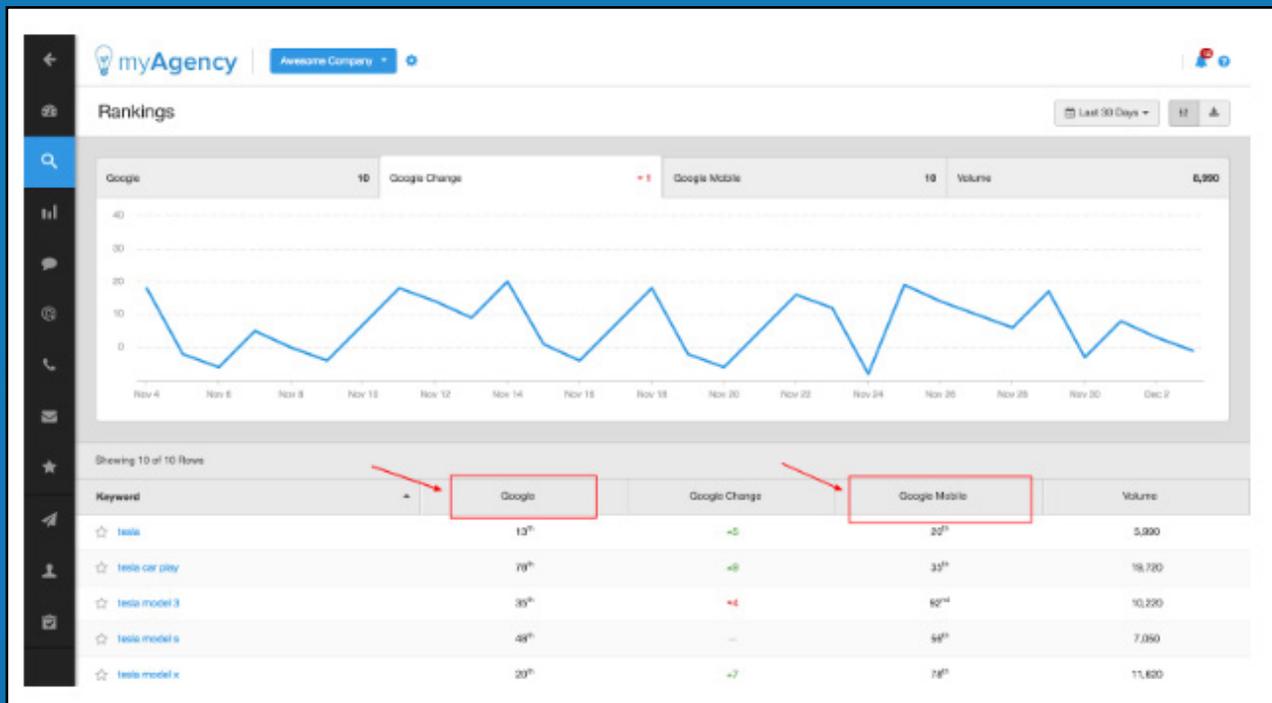
Have you invested countless hours into optimizing your site for mobile? How do you know if it's paying off?

Track your target keywords across both mobile and desktop.

In AgencyAnalytics' rank tracker, you can track both mobile & desktop rankings. Find all of your ranking options in the settings here:



This allows you to compare both desktop and mobile rankings in one table.



Typically a site that's well-optimized for mobile ranks in very similar positions on both desktop and mobile for the same keyword.

However, if you're seeing mobile rankings falling far behind desktop, you'll need to put extra effort into your mobile site.

The rankings in our dashboard refresh every 24 hours, so you can also quickly catch any changes in your mobile rankings.

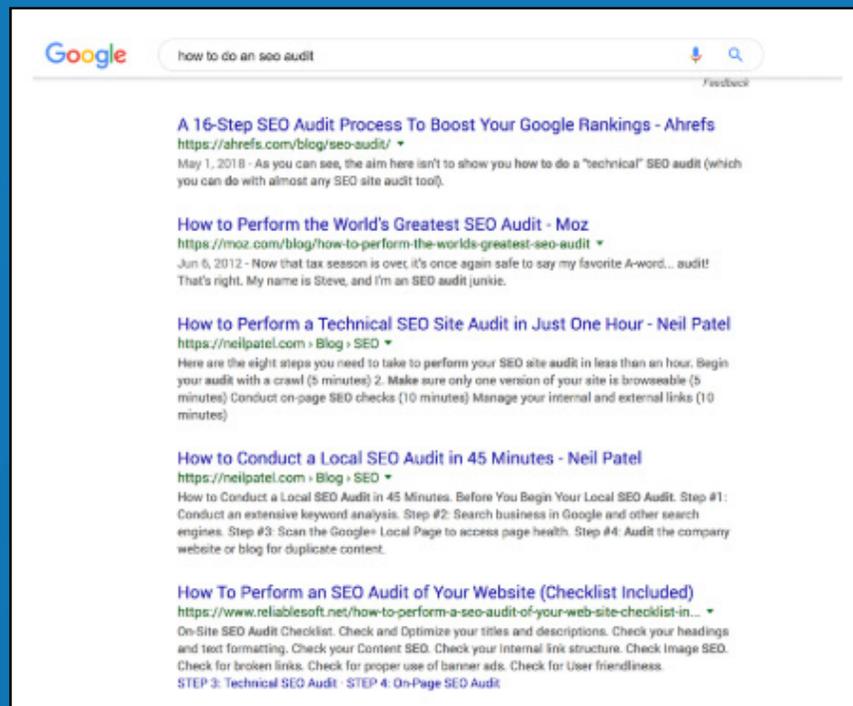
2. Brand is More Important Than Ever

Google has always given preference to bigger brands. Big brands get better rankings with fewer backlinks. However, the divide between small vs. big brands is accelerating.

As Google implements more featured snippets and knowledge panels, clicks on the actual SERPs decline. Only 60% of searches now result in a click!

CTR (click-through rate) is a key ranking factor. Sure, you can use catchy headlines and other tactics to try to increase CTR.

But in today's world, a typical SERP looks like this:



Each article ranking is similar: it's relevant, has a catchy title and fairly similar content. Which link do people click?

People click the brand they **recognize** and **trust**.

You could be ranking number 2 on a target keyword, but that big brand two positions below you will steal your clicks.

The solution: focus on brand-building campaigns. Through Facebook Ads or display campaigns, you need to get your brand in front of your audience's eyes.

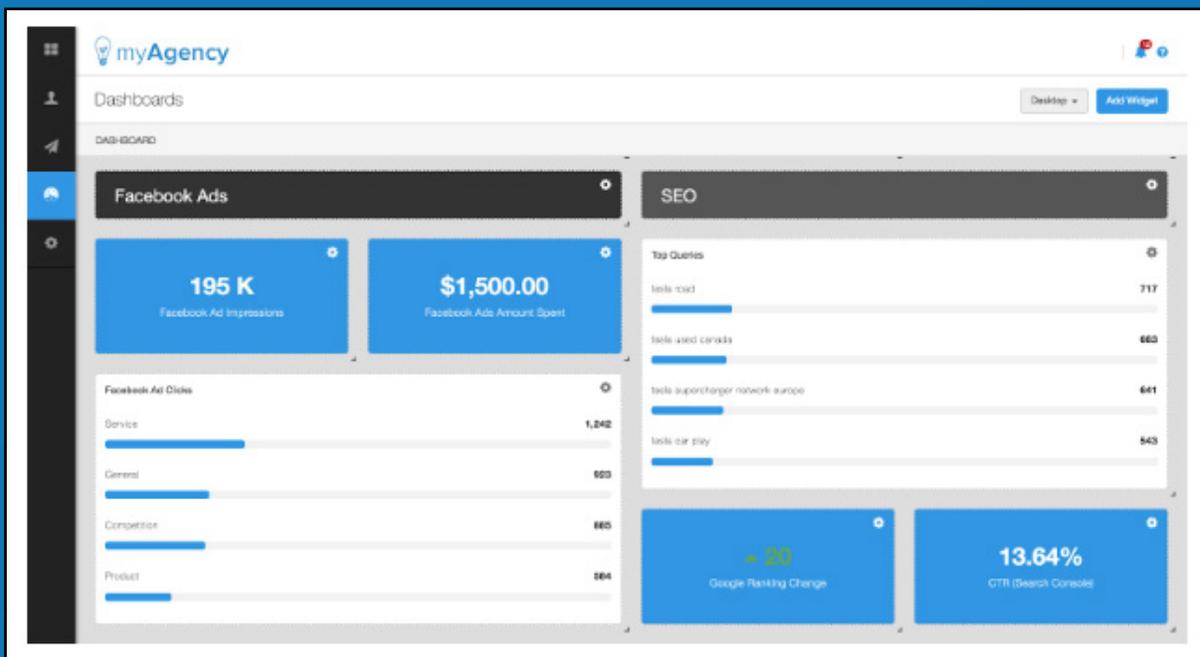
Next time your page appears on the SERP, your brand is the one they recognize.

How to Track Your Brand Building Campaigns:

Brand awareness is always difficult to track. How do you measure whether people are remembering your brand?

There are a few different KPIs to keep an eye on.

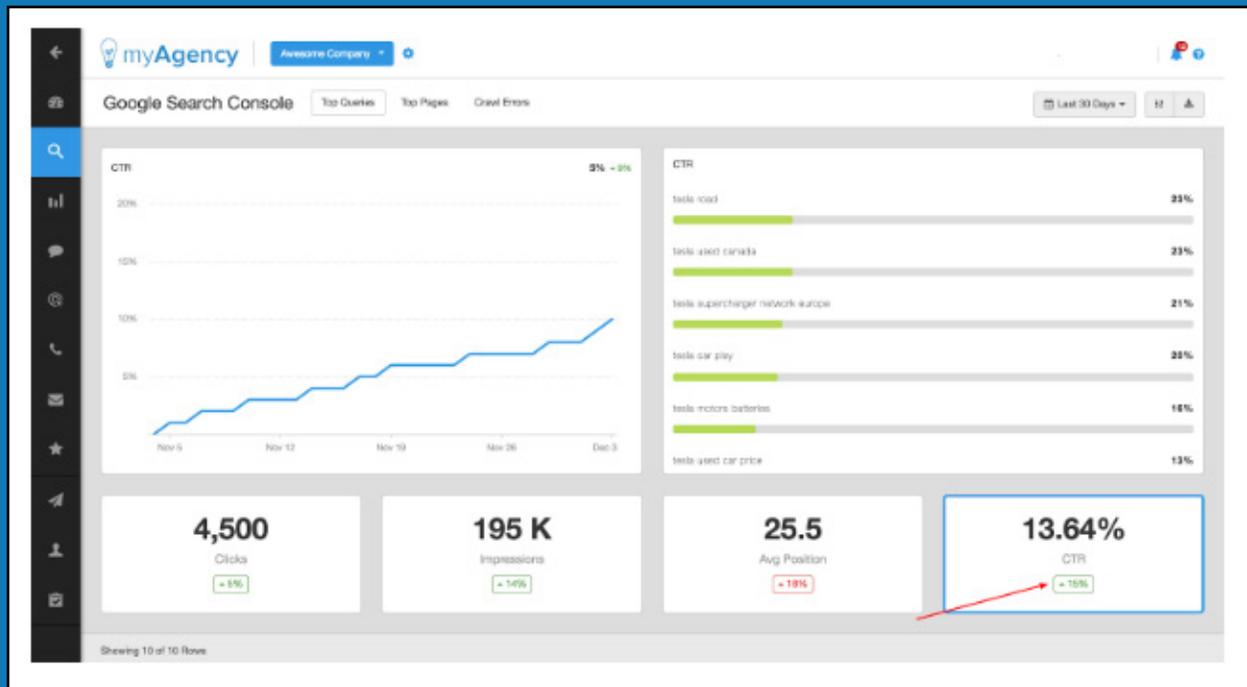
First, add your PPC metrics directly to your dashboard. Here you can measure your total Facebook Ad impressions, reach, and frequency along side your SEO analytics.



Secondly, monitor these two metrics in Google Search Console:

- CTR (Click-through Rate)
- # of branded searches

An increase in branded searches and CTR is a strong indicator that your investment in brand awareness campaigns is paying off.



3. Pay Attention to UX Signals and Engagement

User experience signals are a key ranking factor with the release of RankBrain.

In other words, Google is looking at factors like dwell time and bounce rate to decide if your content is relevant (and worth ranking!)

If users click the #1 result, but then immediately bounce back to the SERP, that means the page didn't answer their query. Why would Google keep it at #1?

On the other hand, if an article ranks #8, has a high CTR and people read the entire article, that page likely offered great content and answered their query. Why keep it buried at the bottom of the SERP?

You need to optimize for low bounce rates and high dwell time. You can accomplish this with a variety of strategies, including:

1. Video: Include video content for increased dwell time.

2. Readability: Break down your content into bite sized, easy-to-read sections. (No one wants to read a wall of text!)

3. Content: Great content is still king. Answer a user's question at the top of the article, so they don't have to hunt for it. Then entice them with an overview of everything else you'll cover to keep them engaged. Great content keeps people engaged - simple as that.

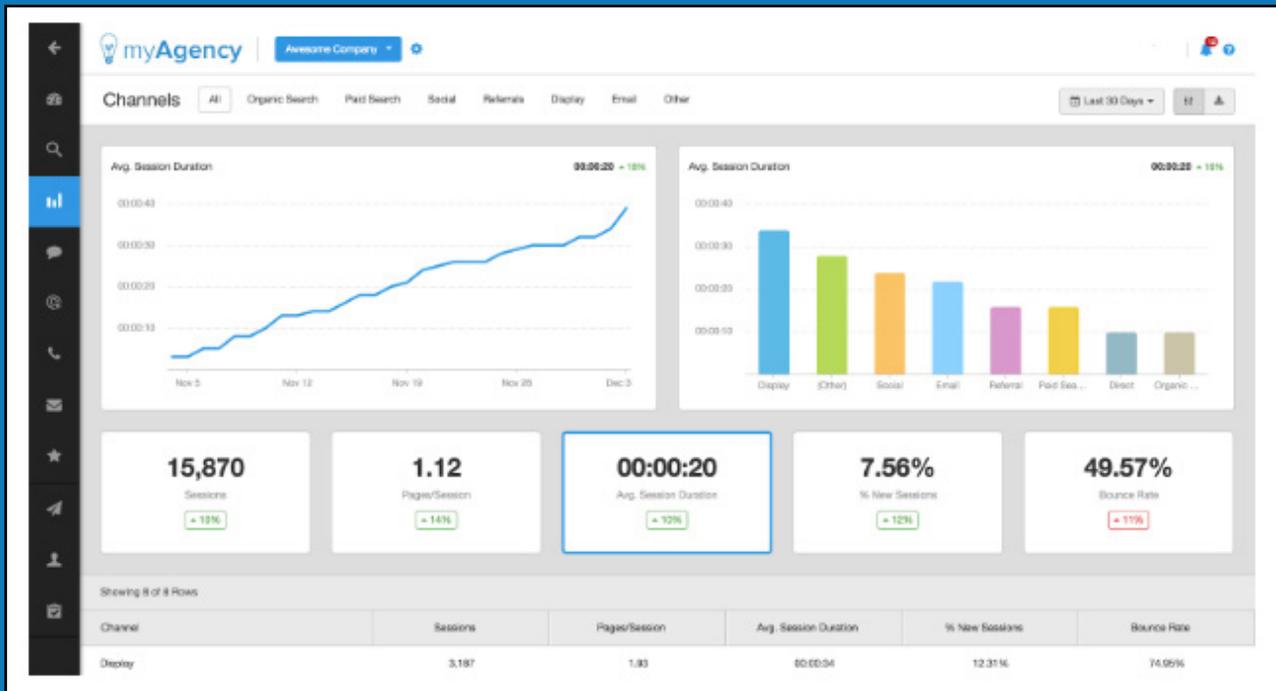
Once you work on your site to increase engagement, how do you track whether it's working?

How to Track UX Signals:

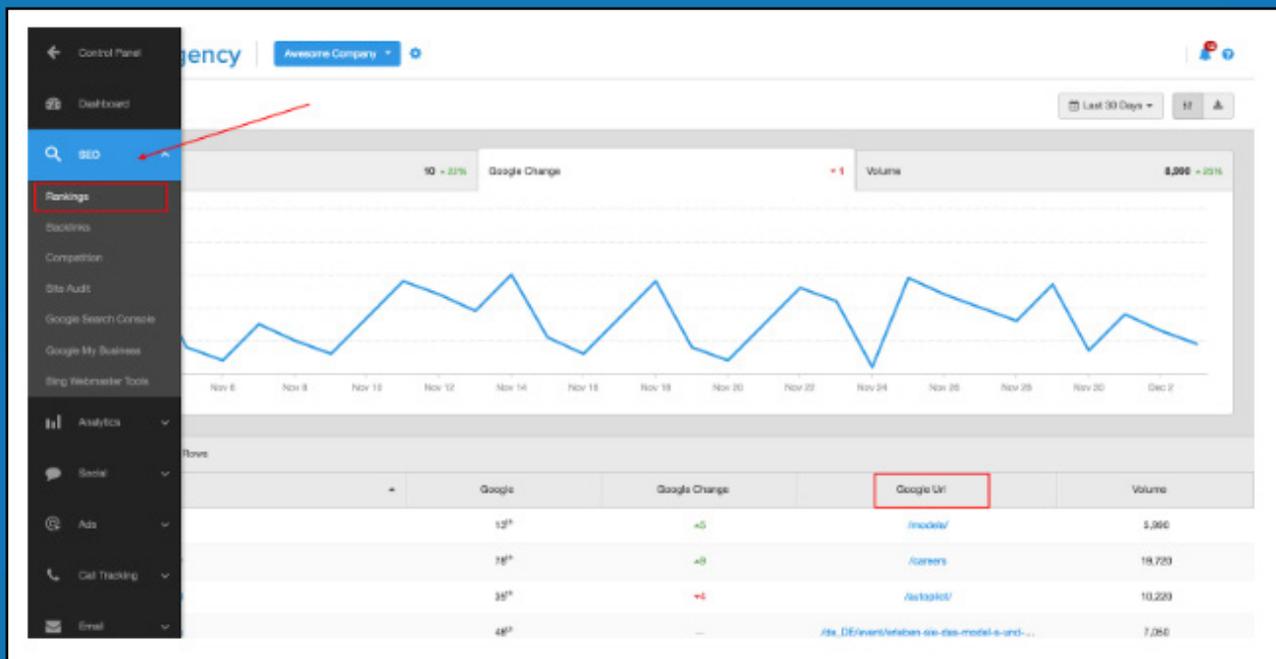
AgencyAnalytics integrates with Google Analytics. Here you can monitor key engagement metrics like:

- Bounce Rate
- Average Session Time
- Pages Per Session

Compare to previous periods, to see if your changes were successful at improving engagement.



Identify the pages with the biggest increases in engagement, then cross check your rankings for that URL directly in the rank tracker to see how its increased as a result of the updates.



4. Social Signals Matter

Hootsuite ran an experiment this year to answer the question: Does social engagement impact your rankings?

The answer: yes.

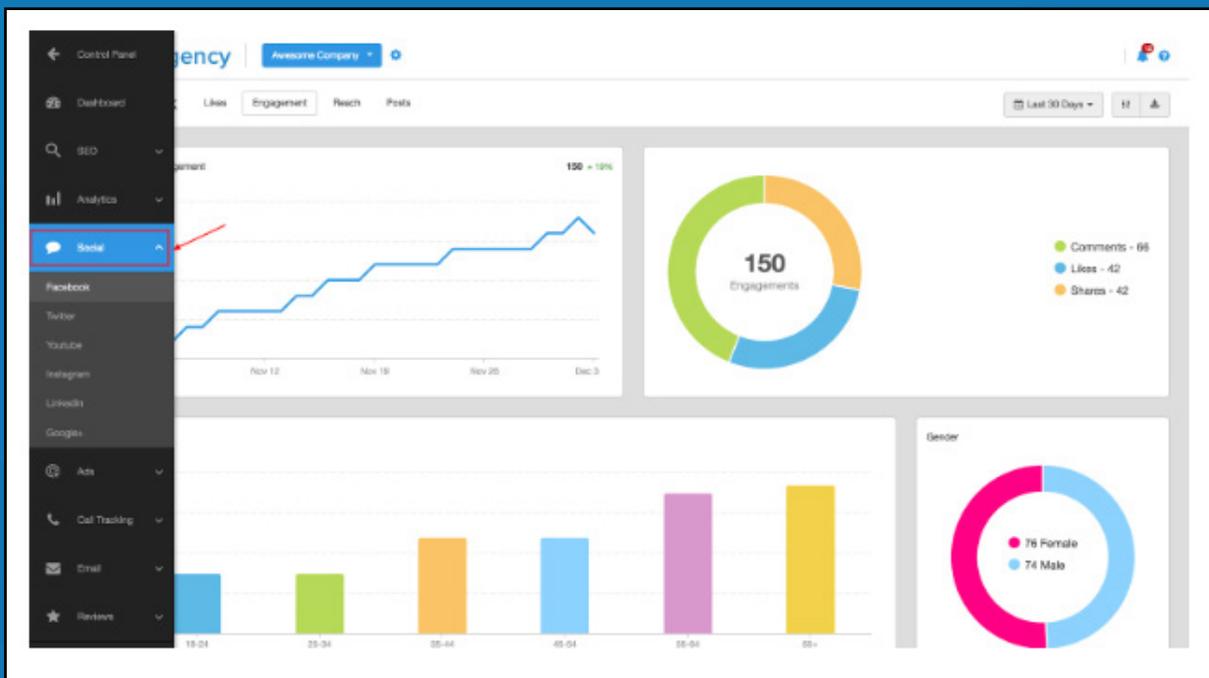
There was a strong correlation between social performance and SEO. Content with more shares was rewarded with higher search visibility.

This trend appeared for both paid social promotion and organic. Content with more social engagement received more backlinks and better rankings.

Now you have yet another marketing channel you need to track and include in your SEO reports!

How to Track Social Signals:

Integrate your social media platforms into our reporting platform. AgencyAnalytics integrates with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.



You want to track both engagement and reach metrics, including:

- Shares
- Reach
- Impressions

Paid social had an even bigger impact on search visibility. So be sure to track your Facebook Ads metrics in this report too.

5. Video Content Wins in 2019

Google isn't the only search engine. More users are going directly to sites like Amazon and YouTube for their searches.

In fact, YouTube is already the second largest search engine, with more queries than Bing.

Cisco estimated that by 2021, **video will be 80% of internet traffic.**

Video content will continue to grow, and you need to be a part of it.

How to Track Your Video Content:

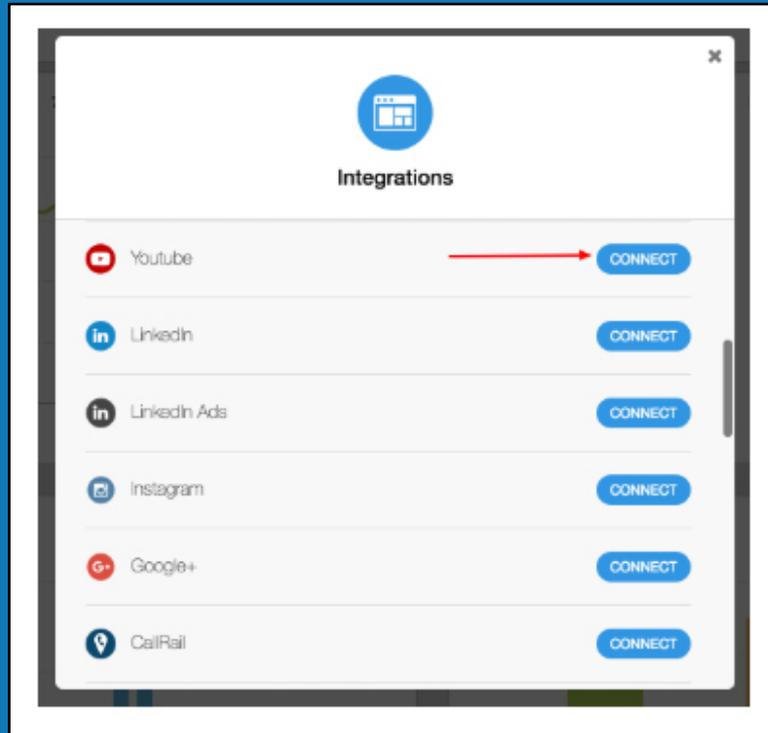
As you expand your content strategy into video, you need to measure a few core metrics to see if your video strategy is paying off.

First we discussed, above, adding your video content directly to blog posts to increase engagement and UX signals.

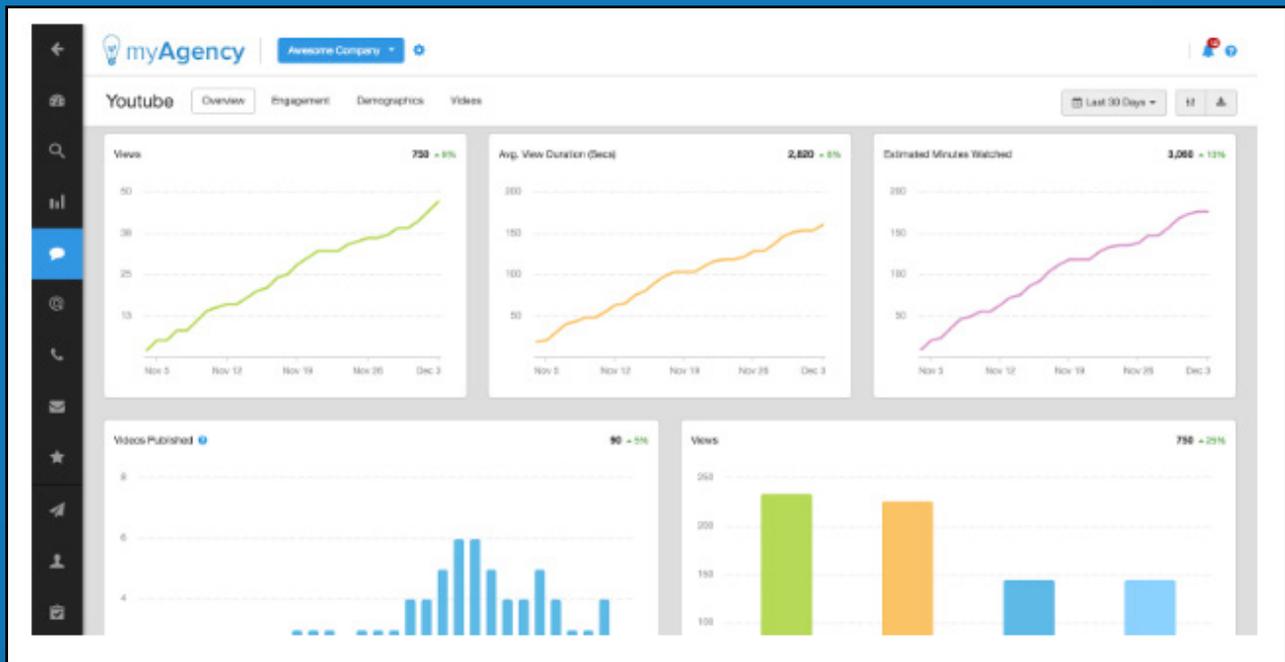
You can measure increased engagement by looking at average session duration in the analytics section of your reports from AgencyAnalytics.

Additionally, you want to look at your individual video metrics by integrating YouTube into your AgencyAnalytics dashboard.

You can find the full list of all 30+ available integrations in your settings.



Once connected, you'll find key video metrics. Measure your engagement metrics, views, and duration inside the dashboard to evaluate your video content strategy.



6. Content & Backlinks are (Still) King

All of the above ranking factors are trends you should look out for in 2019. But you can't ignore the king.

Backlinks and great content continue to be the biggest ranking factors. You need great content that will earn you backlinks if you want to rank in 2019.

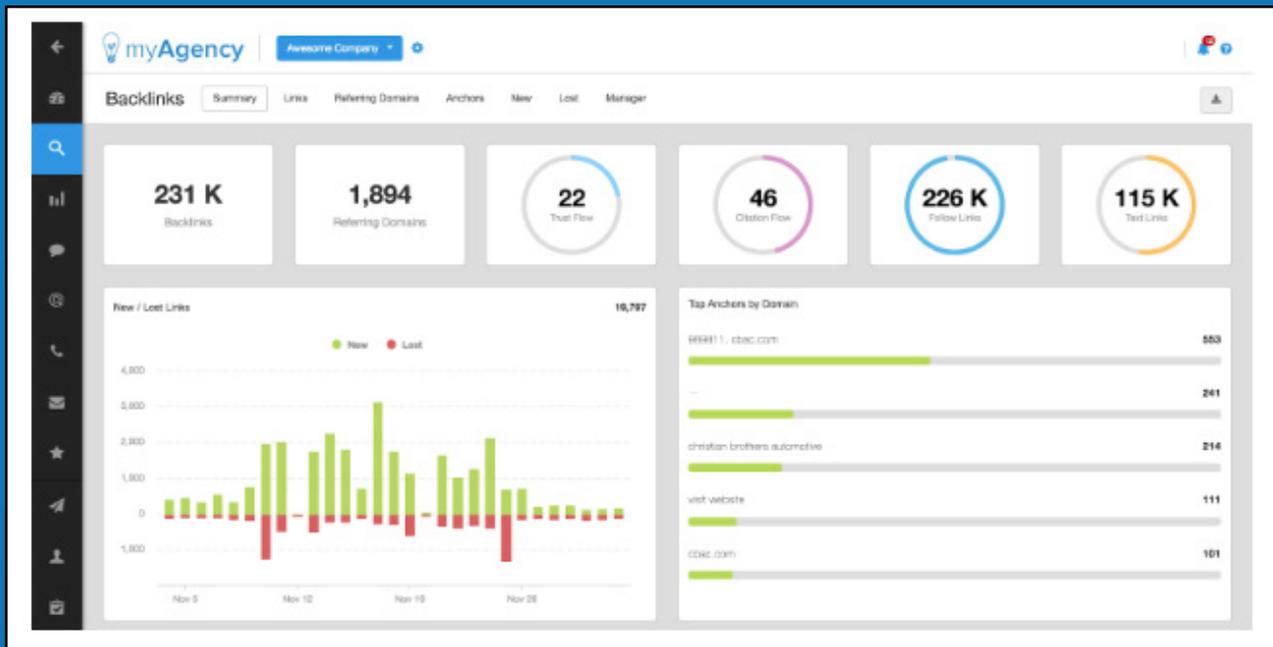
Long-form content continues to outperform in search engines.

Content on the first page of Google's SERPs averages over 2,000 words. You need quality content. And you need a lot of it.

How to Track Content Performance:

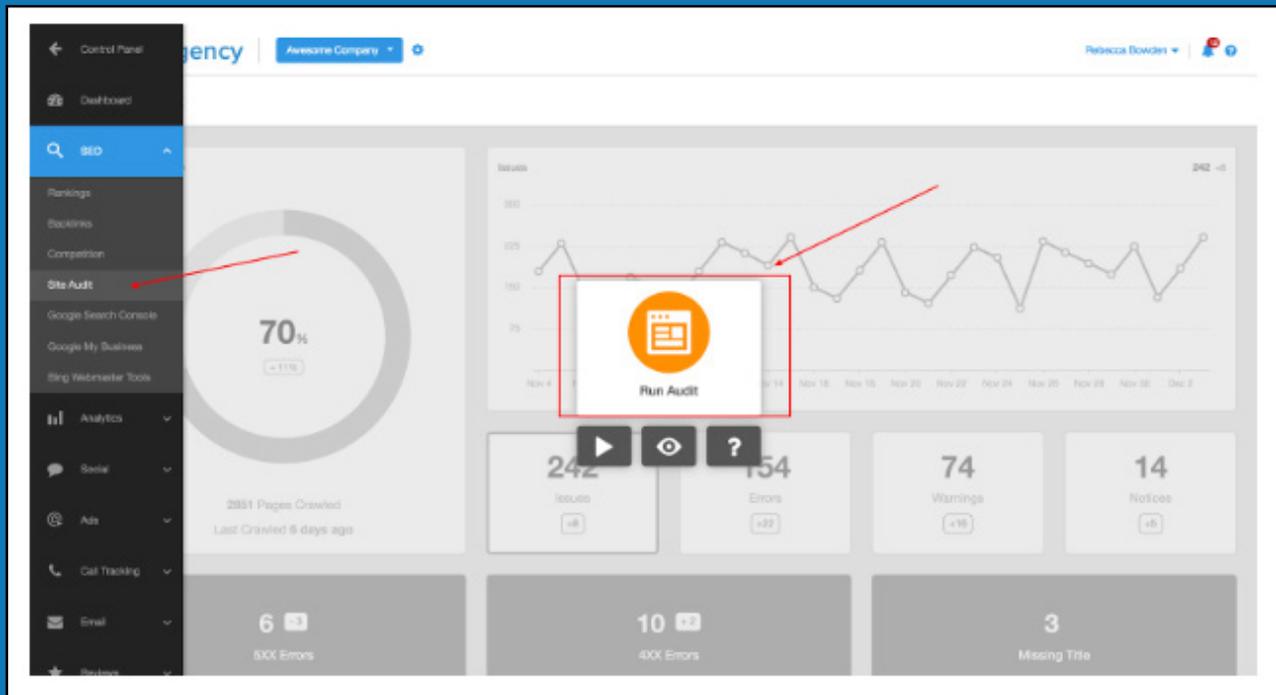
Great content earns backlinks. And backlinks are a ranking factor you can't neglect to track.

Tracking backlinks is straightforward. In the AgencyAnalytics platform, navigate to the backlinks section for a full view of your backlink profile. Narrow down your date range to see new backlinks during a set period of time.



In the dashboard, view the citation flow and trust flow to evaluate the **quality** of your backlinks as well. Hundreds of backlinks aren't enough. You need trusted sites linking to your content.

Next, check that your site's content is up to par from a technical perspective by running a site audit.



The site auditor tool will identify pages with low word count, as well as 40+ other on-page issues, so you can pinpoint which of your pages need the most attention.

Wrapping Up

As Google's ranking algorithm evolves, more factors are taken into consideration than ever before. You can't have a singular SEO strategy to rank on page one.

Which means you also can't have an SEO analytics tool that only focuses on a few core metrics if you want comprehensive reporting.

Sign up for a **free trial** of AgencyAnalytics to track your progress in implementing the latest SEO trends.



JAMIE ALBERICO

SEO Product Owner, Arrow Electronics

 @Jammer_Volts



Zero Click SERPs Will Continue to Rise

To compete with the 160 trillion pages already on the web, creators who want to thrive will need to generate content that brings unique information, perspective, or engagement.

If an answer can be provided simply and succinctly, it will be answered by search.

This isn't Armageddon – probably scary for some publishers who feel like they're being cheated on an unspoken agreement – but it's for the best.

Facts Matter

Trust is a rapidly appreciating currency (Google began quantifiable measurements in 2015).

Leverage your existing content by integrating speakable and fact check structured data markup. These markups are a key link between factual reality and the screenless future.

Predictions for 2019

Google will double down on JavaScript, advocating search to developers and security. This will likely look like expanded documentation and resources for developers and SEOs.

Invest in your team. Let them learn, grow, and fail with fireworks. It will pay off.

Your lucky numbers are 18, 7, and 14. :)



DAWN

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Managing Director, Move It Marketing

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2019 will see a continued move into the era of assistive search whereby search engines are looking to push the right content to meet the informational need rather than waiting for the search engine user to enter their requirements.

Mobile information retrieval will accelerate this dramatically due to its personal nature and greater alignment with contextual search and the notion of time, space speed, and motion detection available via mobile devices.

There have been significant leaps forward in the fields of recommender systems in search and it is clear from the ever-changing search engine user interface (particularly on mobile) that SERPs are being aligned to push through the right information almost intuitively to the mobile search user, even before they need it.

This will include all manner of media to meet differing informational needs, whether this be video, image, text, map pack, or other direct answers.

As knowledge builds around the shifting contexts of mobile and desktop users grows, we will see what are deemed to be more and more “algorithmic shifts” but frequently these may be merely signs of “query intent shift” at scale and will be particularly evident during or just prior to significant dates of note.

While this has been there for quite some time (see: [Mining the web to predict future events](#)), continued data and the ability to predict intent will shake this up further.

We live in the age of the attention economy. These recommender systems will need to cut through the noise to “pre-select” the right answer increasingly accurately.

All the data piping into the knowledge graph and through structured question answering and higher levels of SEO practitioner focus upon semi-structured and structured data will accelerate this faster, and potentially the actions side of conversational search programmed by developers building question-and-answer bots will feed into disambiguating noisy data further.

The web of data is drawing ever closer and while there are still many open issues with natural language processing, word embeddings, and machine learning, to understand meaning will potentially take a hockey stick curve in the next year or so in search.



JIM BADER

Senior Director of SEO, Vertical Measures

 @jambad



There are several topics that are trending to be important in 2019. Here are three:

Grow Your E-A-T

Since the **Google core algorithm update in August**, nothing is more imperative than establishing expertise, authority, and trust for your brand online.

This is especially true if you are in a highly regulated vertical such as legal or financial, or a highly competitive one like higher education or travel.

It is no longer optional to publish thin or self-serving content. It is critical that you are investing in rich, engaging content that helps your brand stand out against your competition or risk losing a foothold on Page 1 rankings.

Ensure Local Signals Are as Strong as Possible

This is an important area of focus for location-driven brands. It includes optimizing your website location pages for the specific city or suburb that each office or branch is physically located in.

It's also important to claim, update, and expand listing data for Google My Business, Bing Places, Apple Maps, and other important local-focused websites.

The citation data (name, address, phone number) for each location must be updated across as much of the web as possible.

Develop Content to Take Advantage of Google SERP Features

Nearly every day Google is testing something new with answer boxes, carousels, knowledge panels, news boxes, and several other features.

We have been able to achieve many answer boxes for our own site and client websites. Every time this happens, it results in a significant spike in organic traffic.



ANDY BETTS

Executive & CMO Advisor

 @andybetts1



Every year SEO becomes more strategic in its importance.

Over the last 3 or 4 years, the shift and focus on content marketing best practices overshadowed technical acumen.

However, new technical trends – AI, machine learning, voice and image recognition, and digital assistants – are now changing the way people look at SEO.

The future of search is becoming voice-driven, visually enabled, and vertically consumed.

Visual and voice search are allowing SEO's to engage more meaningfully with audiences at each stage of their purchase journey – in essence at the same time elevating the importance of SEO in organizations.

As search develops into a multimedia experience, it also starts to open up a number of **new ways to approach technical SEO**.

Opportunities now stem beyond Google and into other vertical search engines, such as Amazon and niche search engines.

This opens up a whole new industry for vertical search optimization focused on numerous sites, categories, and industries.

Marketers should take note and lay the groundwork for the future today, by focusing on balancing content and technical skill sets in the three areas – **voice, visual and vertical** – that are reshaping the search industry right now.



MICHAEL

BONFILS

Managing Director, SEM International

 @michaelbonfils



We hear so much about voice search being the “big thing” these days, even though it still amounts to a relatively small amount of queries.

However, on the multinational and multilingual scene, voice search is a game changer.

Hopefully, marketers will realize in 2019 that the effective use of voice response can't be done by translators (machine or human). The use of voice is, and can be, very different from country to country, region to region, dialect to dialect, social class to social class, etc.

Let's take “raspberries” for example. To someone in Argentina, they may say “por ejemplo, frambuesas maduras” (ripe raspberries). However, a Panamanian verbally may say, “por ejemplo, rasberries maduras.”

Oh wait – don't they both speak Spanish?

Well, yeah, of course, they do. However, the use of language depends on the culture – their use of slang, Spanglish, and the area where they are from can generate requests that might throw voice devices completely off.

Therefore, if people are naturally going to speak to a device, that device should be able to articulate and understand the use of language to the individual.

So now add in voice search. How is that going to happen for a brand trying to optimize words that are spoken differently to voice response devices?

In China, voice search is even more prevalent because it helps standardize the language a bit as it interprets dialects into common characters. The Chinese could finally stop digging through hundreds of links to find what they are looking for.

In Russia, Yandex's Alice isn't just built in understanding the language, it is built to adapt to the culture.

For example, I am telling you this now because it's pure fact: the Yandex Alice doesn't smile. If you were to ask Alice why it doesn't smile, she would respond and tell you that Russians don't smile unless there is actually something to smile about.

To a Russian reading this, that's funny; again, because Alice is adapting to voice and tone beyond a translation. It's understanding that language and culture are key to properly responding to queries in the future.



DOC SHELDON CAMPBELL

Founder, Intrinsic Value SEO

 @DocSheldon



I think we're going to start seeing some dramatic progress by Google in the AI arena.

As they begin letting the machine-learning technology they've been fine-tuning with RankBrain take more of a lead in other areas, I expect to see search undergo some major changes... for the better.

Word2Vec and its offspring will likely be present in all things search-related, both paid and organic.

I also expect to see that same technology, which is undoubtedly already in play in voice search and with Google Assistant, likely to power some entirely new Google services.

Maybe a self-driving car that takes verbal commands? Or an earbud translator that allows unprecedented interpersonal communication and access to foreign language broadcasts? Gene Roddenberry would be proud!

What does that mean for those of us who work in digital marketing?

That remains to be seen.

Opportunities, certainly.

And you can bet it won't be boring!



CATFISH COMSTOCK

Director of SEO, BusinessOnLine

 @SEOCatfish



I think 2019 is the year that people are going to prioritize video as the primary way to communicate with customers if they already haven't.

The optimization and cross integration of video content is going to start becoming even more of a business priority for all organizations.

There are still so many YouTube channels and in-house video platforms that are underutilized given their ability to drive revenue, that the collective opportunity combined with video consumption and mobile trends make it a necessary area of focus for SEO professionals.

And given the tools that YouTube now provides from a data and optimization perspective, there is plenty of work to be done that can be tied directly to incremental revenue when done well.



DAVE DAVIES

CEO, Beanstalk Internet Marketing

 @beanstalkim



Machine learning is the number one trend to watch.

What's interesting about machine learning as a trend, however, is that we won't be watching it specifically.

We'll be watching the impact it has on the search engines' understanding of the world around them and how to use that understanding to provide dramatically better results.

I predict that 2019 (and 2020) will be the years that the world changes, and not just a little bit.

While we've seen machine learning in search with RankBrain, Google News groupings, etc. we haven't really experienced the true power of what it can be. This is the year that changes.

We won't be jumping from our current evolutionary point into "The Matrix" by any means, but I see this as the tipping point where the machine learning infant grows into a toddler.

We can see the prep work coming with some of the layout changes the engines are pushing out and their drive to answer intents rather than questions.

This is the root of machine learning's impact on search.

With the advances in hardware and systems we've seen over the past 365 days, machine learning is about to explode.

Essentially, the engines are about to cross over from understanding the world as syntax to understanding it as a collection of entities and relationships, understanding what those relationships mean, and providing us a solution to the intent we have when we're running a query as opposed to simply trying to match it with an answer.

It will be a brave new world.

Once the user base (that's us) is comfortable with it and we begin interacting with the system as it's intended, which is what I predict we'll see in 2019, that is when the magic will happen and when the rapid evolution can be achieved.

Basically, we will let it start learning from us what our intents are and it will learn to address them – sometimes before we know what they are ourselves.



FRÉDÉRIC DUBUT

Senior Program Manager, Search & AI,
Microsoft

 @CoperniX



I am looking forward to more advances in research areas around how machines understand humans and the world better, whether it is machine reading comprehension, computer vision or speech recognition.

Progress in these areas has already shown a substantial impact on search, making Intelligent Search features like Multi-Perspective Answers or Visual Search possible, while improving search relevance dramatically. And looking at it from the inside, I believe we are only scratching the surface of what's possible.

On the one hand, these advances will increase the complexity of SEO (particularly technical SEO) even further. Understanding the technical details of search algorithms will get more and more difficult, particularly with the increased usage of deep learning models.

On the other hand, I believe that reducing the reliance of the search ecosystem on keywords will help the SEO community focus on what really matters to users – providing high quality and relevant content that they can trust.

As machines get better at understanding intent and general concepts from text, images, and speech, it will become easier for quality content to get matched with the appropriate user queries.

This also ties into recent discussions around “EAT” and the search quality raters guidelines. A major goal of our ranking team is to build an algorithm that would rank documents in the same order as humans would as they are following the guidelines.

You can only do so at the scale of the web by generalizing your ranking algorithm as much as possible.

It turns out that modern machine learning is very good at generalizing, so you can expect our core ranking algorithm to get closer to that ideal Intelligent Search product view that we hold internally and which we try to capture in our own guidelines.



ERIC ENGE

General Manager, Perficient Digital

 @stonetemple



Here are two top trends that I see for 2019:

The New Content Revolution

2018 brought us a little-recognized revolution in content for SEO. Starting with the March and April updates, we started seeing Google intensify its focus on content quality and the depth and breadth of a web site's content. Here is what I believe is at the heart of this:

The web continues to be very long tail. Remember that, 15 percent of all the searches Google sees every day, they're seeing for the first time ever.

More importantly, the long tail is not simply about the words used to construct a query, it's about the actual nature of what users are looking for.

Someone that enters in a query like "couches" has many nuances to their actual need. If you were to profile 100 such users who enter in that query ("couches") and ask them to detail 5 to 10 aspects of more specifics of what they are looking for, you would likely not find a single duplication set of needs among all of their answers. Not one.

So what would be required to implement a main couches page and a set of supporting pages, to address all of the needs of all 100 users? That starts to sound scary complex, doesn't it? Well, it's a question you need to be asking yourself if you want to continue to win and grow in SEO.

Just to back this idea up a bit, during the March/April/August/September/October updates by Google in 2018, we tracked the SEO performance of a number of different sites. The sites that provided exceptional depth in quality content coverage literally soared in rankings throughout the year. Sites that were weaker in their content depth suffered in comparison.

In any event, I see this trend towards rewarding sites that provide the best in-depth experiences continuing in 2019. Google was continually tuning their algorithms in this area throughout the year, and I believe there is still a lot more tuning for them to do.

Voice

To be clear: the voice revolution is not here yet. The percent of queries, or even interactions, that are driven by voice input is still quite small. It is, however, growing rapidly.

That said, this revolution is coming. We can see it.

Already today, 67 percent of the world's Internet-connected devices are something other than a PC, smartphone, or tablet.

These are devices without browsers or search boxes. They're smart speakers, thermostats, cars, refrigerators, watches, as well as a host of industrial devices.

To be fair, the industrial devices are a large part of this, but the rise of new consumer devices which are internet connected is coming on fast.

There are 45 million speakers installed in U.S. homes. Here the primary input paradigm is voice.

Further, proprietary Stone Temple (now a part of Perficient Digital) [research](#) shows that users are fast becoming more comfortable using voice commands with their devices in public places.

Progressive brands are already positioning themselves for success in the new unfolding voice world.

One of the best ways to do that is by building Actions on Google Apps (these are the ones that run within the Google Assistant) and Alexa Skills.

Implementing voice level apps brings some challenges, and frankly, how best to optimize in this world is a journey that's just beginning to unfold in front of us.

Some of the big challenges are learning how to set up your language model to capture the ways that users might ask the question. The other is understanding the persona profiles of your user base and how to model your Actions on Google app or Alexa Skill to present your persona to your target audience. There are many basic technical challenges as well.

Getting this right is going to take time. If you haven't already started to explore the world of Actions on Google apps and Alexa Skills, 2019 is a great time to get started.



SHELLY FAGIN

SEO Consultant & SEMrush
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 @shellyfagin



Here are two big trends to watch in 2019:

Localization

I believe Google's search results will become more localized when the query makes sense. Featured snippets, for example.

For instance, I live in Houston, Texas and if I do a search for [why is my ac not blowing cold?] I see a featured snippet with an article by an HVAC company located in California. For me, it would be more useful to see an article from an HVAC company that is local to me, provided there is one that has the right content to match the query available.

Even with featured snippets not being localized, these queries send a lot of traffic, and they convert.

Local businesses need to start increasing their efforts to build out more “authoritative” content.

Don’t just hire writers to churn out content for the sake of posting frequently. Focusing on quality over quantity is essential.

Before writing anything, there needs to be a proper strategy behind your topics. What queries are people searching for that relate to your business?

Don’t just focus on localized queries. Instead, write to show your authority in your niche. Prove your expertise. Don’t just send your content writers a topic and step away.

Your content writers should be interviewing your experts to provide accurate and unique information about the subject they are writing about, getting it straight from the source.

On-Page SEO

Don’t underestimate the power of on-page optimization.

If you haven’t already, 2019 is the year to learn about how to identify which metrics carry more weight with Google. I believe that good content which is well-optimized can hold their own, if not overcome, websites with more backlinks.

Don't get me wrong, backlinks can still be extremely powerful when they are relevant and come from an authoritative source.

But I believe that the days of using PBNs will soon be over. To build a so-called "safe" PBN that does not put your site at risk of a penalty is an expensive and timely process – and the payoff won't be worth it.

You are much better off spending that budget on building authoritative and well-optimized content which meets the needs of queries in your niche.

If you are a business owner, and your SEO is spending their time building a PBN, I'd be looking for a new SEO.

I suspect that in 2019 we will either see a lot of manual penalties for sites that are using PBN's to improve their rankings or Google might start removing any value these links pass altogether once identified.

Either way, websites which were benefiting from these tactics will take a huge hit.



CASIE GILLETTE

Senior Director, Digital Marketing,
KoMarketing

 @Casieg



There are two big things to be aware of this year, and both really have more to do with content:

Shifting Keyword Intent & Focus

In 2018, we saw a continual move by Google to give users the content they were looking for right within the SERP.

From answer boxes to PAA boxes, to knowledge graph and everything else, it felt like those were more prominent than ever.

However, what also stands out was the shift in keyword intent.

This is something we've seen over the course of the last couple of years, but what I mean by that is many of the broad keywords that used to drive product-related results, shifted to general results.

For example, a term like "marketing automation" used to be specific to marketing automation products. No longer.

For businesses, and SEOs working for those businesses, we have to think more about the funnel and where we really want to spend our time.

If I'm a marketing automation tool, do I want to spend time and money trying to rank for a broad term or should I instead shift my focus to terms further down the funnel, where buyers are more knowledgeable and more likely to be interested in what I'm selling?

For me, we have done a hard shift and it's paying off.

It doesn't mean there's no value in hitting those top of the funnel queries but there is definitely more value in reaching those who are likely to be potential customers.

Take Advantage of Personalization

Several of my clients are using platforms such as Evergage, SnapApp, and Monetate, allowing them to present visitors with specific content relevant to their needs.

This has been really valuable to us as we think more about how we get users down the funnel and how we build content with both SEO and sales in mind.

For example, when crafting a blog post around a specific topic, we are also building out related whitepapers or datasheets. Within the blog post, we can then include banners pointing people to the related asset and even better, we can test and personalize those banners to see what works best.

A good SEO program focuses on driving sales and an emphasis on personalization will certainly help that.



KEITH GOODE

Senior SEO Strategist, Security
Intelligence, IBM

 @keithgoode



I think we're at the end of massive changes coming from Google for a while. They'll just continue to iterate on what they have in place now.

SERPs will continue to shrink as Google reduces the number of superfluous results that aren't fully relevant to searches, so we'll see many searches that result in far fewer than 100 results.

We'll also most likely see more page 1 SERPs with fewer than 10 results. As a result, hopefully, we'll see the end of the era of "meh" content.

Marketers with less than exceptional content will likely see a reduction in impressions reported on Google Search Console. Overall, I think we'll continue to

see a reduction in CTRs for organic results regardless of position.

Where I do see an accelerated change in the SERPs is in the area of machine learning as it relates to creating rich snippets for pages that don't have Schema markup.

Understanding that there is a lot of relevant content on sites that aren't optimized for rich snippets, Google will start parsing this non-optimized content and displaying it with rich snippets.

If we were being charitable in our analysis of this, we would say that Google is doing this to level the playing field for sites that may not be able to afford good technical SEO. But the reality is that they're doing this to get users in the habit of getting their answers directly from Google.

None of this really changes our goals as SEOs.

The entire search experience is our domain of expertise and control, and our goal isn't to just drive traffic. It's to ensure that **we've optimized that search experience**, whether web-based or app-based or [insert the next big technology]-based, to create the most efficient and engaging intersection of the user's needs and the site's offerings possible.

That requires the best content on the fastest platforms geared to meet the users wherever they're coming from.



BRIAN HARNISH

SEO Manager, The Torkzadeh Law Firm

 @BrianHarnish



It will be even more important to focus on content quality than brute-force pounding Google with 30 4,000-word blog posts every month.

Analysis of the particular SERP should be done (if it is not already being done) in order to gauge current competition and what they are writing about, as well as how much they are writing.

Content quality, user intent behind the query, and user intent behind the page itself will all be important factors to implement if you want to be successful.

In 2019, it's time to stop spamming the search engines and focus on E-A-T – Expertise, Authority, and Trust. You'll need to start doing this to stay in the game.

As voice search, video, and other content continues to grow in popularity, it will be even more important to have content that also caters to these needs. Publishing this type of content on a regular basis will also be necessary.

In short – site speed, E-A-T, content quality, user intent, voice search, video, and content needing schema markup should all be a major focus for SEO in 2019.



JIM HEDGER

Creative Partner, Digital Always Media

 @jimhedger



In the not so distant past, our computers spoke to us. A calm but cheerful voice once told AOL users “You’ve got mail” and a soothing voice once asked Microsoft users “Where would you like to go today?”

Many found that these voices were, by nature, tedious or annoying. So an electro-shorthand evolved with beeps, chirps, song-snippets, and other random noises made meaningful in the context of their application.

The same sort of thing will happen in search.

Search is, for the most part, a seamless part of everyone’s life. As it’s now being delivered primarily on personal devices, search is going to be micro-personalized by individuals.

In other words, consumers are going to make our own search experiences unique and personalized as personal technology allows us to.

Home assistant devices, smart-speakers, and the PDAs in our mobile devices are increasingly becoming personal necessities, the stuff you need to deal with a hectic life.

Without going mad, try to think about everything you somehow need to keep track of in any given day. From your children's safety to your financial stability to the route you need to take to get to work each morning, there are never-ending streams of data you need to process all of the time.

As more of our lives are digitalized, those data streams get wider and deeper and flow ever faster. We need our digital devices to help us keep track of all the things we need to keep track of.

From that, personalized shorthand languages will develop and that's how people will start to communicate with their devices.

Understanding and anticipating those shorthands will keep content and social media marketers busy.

Google, Apple, Amazon, and others have been developing devices with the overt goal of facilitating increasingly hectic lives by tracking the enormity of people's information and helping them optimize their lives around it.

Google Home Hub is perhaps the most coherent example. This kind of highly personalized portal environment is likely to be the new home and mobile interface, an “all in one” space where you can talk to your digital facilitator while opening a bag of pre-chopped vegetables for dinner.

That’s why SEOs should [learn about speakable markup](#), the new schema format, which will read content aloud on Google Assistant and Google Home.



JON HENSHAW

Founder, Coywolf Marketing & Senior
SEO Analyst, CBS Interactive

 @henshaw



Here are three trends that will matter in 2019:

Schema & Rich Results

The use of schema.org structured data will continue to grow as more people realize how much Google actually uses it to fully comprehend and rank pages.

Subsequently, its use will also grow because Google will debut new rich results based on the increased usage of certain schema types.

Speed & Less Intrusive Ads

Sites will finally start to become simpler and faster as SEOs discover that Google is rewarding sites more than once thought for FMP speed and having less intrusive ads.

Google Compelling Sites Toward PWAs

We will start to see more PWAs. It won't necessarily be because we need them. It will be because Google wants us to have them.

Similar to their slow but forceful push towards SSL, Google will start to compel sites to add offline and slow network fail-safes through the use of service workers.

This will also align with their goal to make users less dependent on competing app stores.



SAM

HOLLINGSWORTH

Director of Search, Elevation Ten
Thousand

 @SearchMasterGen



Voice search and featured snippets on the SERPs (Position 0 search results) will continue to grow in 2019, as will Google's ability to deliver answers in fewer clicks – one of its main goals all along.

I also expect schema markup to become even more important (and supported) in organic search, although I think I have expected this for the last several years and we've yet to see the "big" year for structured data.

We know site speed is, has been, and will continue to be important, just as mobile-friendly websites have been since the focus on mobile by search engines has shifted there from traditional desktop computers.

Small- to medium-sized-business SEO will continue to evolve toward simplicity. This will allow even the most novice webmasters and/or business owners to get their brands found easily and effectively despite possible low-level technical complications, further living up to Google's belief that if brands offer customers something of true value, they are still easily accessible.

Technical SEO is always going to be important, but low-priority technical hindrances are not going to make or break any brand.

As marketers, the biggest areas to focus on will certainly start with earning more featured snippets for the brand(s) we represent, the best way to improve organic visibility and traffic with shrinking organic real estate on the SERP and increased competition across organic search, as well as connecting our brand(s) and its niche into relevancy with messaging and content that makes sense.

Fast, secure, quality websites are going to continue to be the top-performing ones, but they also have to represent real brands doing real, quality branding, while offering users something they can't find anywhere else (or at least not of the same quality).

Video will continue to thrive, but the growing number of ads within videos will also continue to increase, causing more disruption on that front. This will force both paid and non-paid marketers to use different techniques to get their content seen and digested the way it is intended.

And, yes, Google will continue to get smarter and offer better results and answers for search queries, while also continuing its evolution of the SERPs, ability to successfully serve the right results for the right queries, paid vs. organic search real estate, and much more.

My biggest piece of advice for 2019 from an SEO standpoint really doesn't divert much from 2018 or even 2017: make sure you are thinking about your customer first, your messaging second, and your brand always.

Keep it simple, too — your website, your social media, your content — but make sure you have a goal, a target, and message that will resonate. This can all be achieved through quality content and an easy-to-use website.



MOTOKO HUNT

President, AJPR

 @motokohunt



Now that we have more moving parts for SEO than ever before, I hope SEOs would focus on the following key points in 2019:

Nail Down the Basics

This certainly isn't as "sexy" as talking about AI or even mobile-first indexing, but it still is the most effective part of your SEO work.

Unfortunately, so many companies and website owners seem to pay less attention to the basic SEO work, and just look for a quick fix or chase what is "IT" at the moment.

Go chase that, but you should also work on the basics such as:

- Crawl, index, errors, and broken links.
- Good content writing, and optimizing it (including the title tags and page headers).
- Link building.

Test & Prove the Concept

When you read or hear some SEO tips or the analysis of the search engine algorithm updates, don't go make changes blindly.

Always be confident about what you are changing, and why you are making the changes.

The best way is to test the concept and the tips yourself to see if it's indeed applicable to your website and your audiences.

Have a Deeper Understanding of the Target Audience

We all think we know them, but the fact is that the audience's interests, tastes, and preferences change quicker than you think. Some industries see these changes quicker than the others.

Even if your website content is perfectly written and optimized, if it's done for a wrong audience, it won't grow the business.

Oh, and when you see different results in the data than what you expected to see, double check the data, and accept the changes. Once you accept the changes, implement the changes to the site.



MARK JACKSON

President & CEO, Vizion Interactive

 @MarkJackson



For a few years now, we have known that Google cares a lot about site security, mobile usability, and site speed.

What has often been discussed is the move to https. And, everyone in SEO is running checks to ensure that their mobile presence is (hopefully) “responsive” and to see how they can improve load time.

What has not been talked about has been the levels of security that one might consider when moving to https.

I believe that Google has been more strongly seeking signals for security and that businesses should more strongly consider making an investment in custom SSL certifications.

Very often, without people realizing it, they are sharing SSL certs with others. Those free and/or cheap options for SSL certs are most probably shared. To find out if you may be sharing an SSL cert, run a check: <https://globalsign.ssllabs.com/>.

For a nominal investment, you can upgrade your SSL to a custom SSL and provide an additional signal to Google that you value the security of your website.

You might also want to think about the quality of your hosting and CDN plan. Try to get on a plan level that allows you to limit the number of domains sharing the IP.

For many SEOs, there is a belief that a dedicated IP is – on the whole – a “good thing” for SEO. In today’s CDN world, limiting the number of domains sharing IPs is also a good idea.



DIXON JONES

Founder, DHJ Ventures

 @Dixon_Jones



Although the E-A-T guidelines are written for Google's algorithm raters, rather than Google's algorithm itself, it helps us to understand where Google is heading in the short term.

I think this will help SEOs start to understand that "Quality" comes with context. You cannot rank so easily writing authoritative content unless you are already an authority on a given subject.

This may have a couple of effects:

- It will drive up the value of authoritative content (and really – the spammy stuff won't stop, but nobody sees that anyway... you can't imagine how much bad stuff exists!)

- I think increasing specialization also has the potential to also create more echo chambers, which we know is bad for society – and may ultimately be bad for AI systems, too.

On the other hand, Google is blending these echo chambers by turning unstructured data (like webpages) into structured data, from multiple blended sources. That ultimately means that the company's web content itself no longer resides on the company website and is no longer in the company's control.

So I see much of 2019 being about companies (and with GDPR, also people) putting up walls to protect their data. I see a year ahead dominated by legal battles between the big data providers, governments, and people.

I see a move away from the "open sharing era" that the web has enjoyed for 20 years, toward a much more controlled and controlling force, led by chatbots and AI systems, trying to structure an intentionally chaotic system.

So if SEOs want to focus on value for companies, they need to focus on what information they should NOT create to freely share, rather than creating more content fodder for Google to structure.

Then they need to work out how to monetize that.

So I see a massive increase in gated content... reports that you have to either buy or opt into an ecosystem to understand.



RYAN JONES

SEO Director, SapienRazorfish

 @RyanJones



The biggest trend SEOs should focus on is becoming more well-rounded marketers.

In 2018 we saw the search landscape change rapidly, with the growth of AMP, voice search, instant answers, and various other Google changes.

While the search landscape continues to change (goodbye 10 blue links), what hasn't changed is user intent.

People still have questions that need answers and tasks that they need to perform.

Our goal as marketers is to continue to understand that intent and facilitate helping users accomplish their tasks – whether that be with a website or a voice action or a video or some new thing that hasn't been invented yet.

The way we're going to do that is with solid marketing and data foundations.



JEREMY KNAUFF

CEO, Spartan Media

 @JeremyKnauff



During 2019, you can expect to see personal assistant devices, like Alexa, Google Home, Siri, and others, really start to shake up the search industry.

As more people begin interacting through these devices rather than through traditional browsers, search engines will be forced to deliver more relevant results on the first try instead of delivering a list of choices.

This also has the potential to create a significant change in search engine market share as some proactive companies take the lead in this technology while others procrastinate and fall behind.

Those who have been in the industry for a while may remember that this type of situation is exactly what enabled Google to secure the dominant position they hold today.

Unlike the standard search engine result pages that offer a list of paid, organic, map, image, and featured snippets, these devices must interpret a user's voice query and then deliver the single most likely result.

Fortunately, search engines have advanced far beyond the old school, keyword phrase-based results, and are becoming increasingly better at returning results based on concepts, ideas, or entities.

This will continue to improve as artificial intelligence helps search algorithms learn how to deliver more relevant results to users. And this learning will be expedited as more websites implement structured data, or schema, helping search algorithms to understand how one piece of information may relate to another piece of information.

What this means for marketers is that we need to ensure our content comprehensively answers users' questions, rather than simply matching keyword phrases.

Ideally, we should take our content a step further by anticipating and answering follow-up questions they may have once they receive the answer to their initial query.

We should also help search engines to better understand our content by using structured data because a better understanding may enable them to display it for a potentially greater number of search queries.



CINDY KRUM

CEO, MobileMoxie

 @Suzzicks



With mobile representing more than half of the searches, but more than 61 percent of mobile searches not getting clicks, we need to rethink what we are defining as success, and how we are measuring it.

To be clear: the 61 percent of mobile searches that don't click, also don't get tracked in your analytics; SEO's who are basing big decisions only on what they can see in their analytics are missing the bigger picture.

Ranking in "position one" of organic is nearly meaningless if there are 5 "position zero" elements ranking above that. Position zero requires different strategies to rank, and will have more cross-device, voice-search appeal.

2019 is going to be all about helping brands stay relevant in cross-device search and digital engagement. The 'block and tackle' and indeed, the whole idea of what SEO is, is changing.

SEO is about showing up wherever and however people are searching – not just getting the first blue link.

If potential customers are searching for apps, you need to rank in app stores. If they are searching for podcasts or videos, you need to rank where people search for those things.

Strong brands are becoming multi-faceted, ranking more than just websites. Strong SEOs need to do the same thing.

Learn how to rank and drive traffic and engagement for things other than just websites.



IAN LURIE

CEO & Founder, Portent

 @portentint



We'll hear a lot about voice and mobile. And those are important. But high rankings on voice, desktop and mobile are outcomes, not tactics or strategies.

SEOs can differentiate themselves in 2019, and be more competitive, if they look at a few things. We have to:

Get More Sophisticated About Site Speed

We've learned to compress images and code (finally).

But mobile speed is still a problem. The pipe is thinner than you think, and phones render pages more slowly. So:

- Keep getting better at squeezing every byte out of page payloads.
- Start learning about JavaScript execution and critical rendering path.
- Figure out code coverage and efficiency.

Site speed is a global issue that impacts SEO. Don't get complacent.

Start Adjusting to a World Where SEO Isn't Just About Traffic

Make sure your clients know about search features and their impact on voice, mobile, and overall brand awareness because Google continues to evolve into a publisher.

Answer boxes, recipes, the knowledge graph, carousels, and who-knows-what-else will take an even bigger bite out of organic traffic. That makes SEO even more important, because exposure is as much about visibility in the SERPs as it is about clicks.

We're going to have to change the mindset of our clients as they adapt and diversify across marketing channels.

Understand the True Impact of UX on Organic Search Performance

Please stop saying that content behind tabs is fine. It isn't.

Google won't give priority to content hidden behind tabs and other UI gadgets or buried in endless scrolling.

It's common sense:

Content that's not visible is less important than content that's immediately readable.

You're less competitive if you hide your content.

Is that bad? No. It's just a fact.

Account for that in your UX.



JENN MATHEWS

Jenn Mathews Marketing Consulting



There are many big trends we will see for SEO in 2019, however, the two most important include technical SEO through machine learning and overall structure of teams within organizations that manage SEO.

Throughout the last few years, there has been a paradigm shift in how we approach SEO. Gone are the days of black hat techniques, aggressive link building, and millions of dynamically generated pages with little to no content.

Users are savvier when browsing the internet. They know what to look for when it comes to what they find valuable, and they won't compromise.

While I was managing the SEO Team at Nordstrom, I identified the core values needed to bring SEO to fruition within the organization. The roles fell into what I call the "Four Pillars:"

- **SEO Mitigation:** Error management and/or technical SEO.
- **SEO Analysis/Reporting:** Calculating assumptions and reporting on successes.
- **SEO Project Management:** Determining growth and managing projects for SEO.
- **Relationship Building for SEO:** Championing SEO to stakeholders and other teams.

With the intricacies of massive databases for ecommerce, travel, and related websites, companies are being forced to dig deep, spending the time and effort to find creative solutions that mitigate issues stemmed from these complex systems.

They're focusing more on how users search via categories, subcategories, and descriptive terms (e.g., shoes, blue shoes, blue high heel shoes, blue high heel suede shoes) and implementing machine learning over traditional algorithms to accommodate.

Companies need to adopt machine learning to develop unique content for SEO, beginning with a set of data based on specific variables.

The system understands how to recognize and weigh factors using on past data to produce content based on user behavior on pages that would otherwise have little to no content.

Pages are developed on a massive scale focusing on search queries, user interactivity, business goals, interactivity, and many other factors.

Machine learning, coupled with the need for analysis and reporting, as testing new strategies and implementation is imperative to understanding successes and failures.

This is why a strong SEO team needs someone to report, mitigate, manage projects, and build relationships across the organization.

Provide relevant and valuable content, clean URL structure, browsing hierarchy, and deep level internal linking. Avoid duplicate content while presenting the user with what they see as beneficial.

SEO Mitigation is a role in itself that will allow companies to look at legacy builds and identify what is needed to bring the technology to today's standards with minimal issues; while the SEO Project Manager oversees projects that drive growth, and the Relationship SEO communicates across internal organizations to champion SEO as a top priority.

Complex systems, managed by a cohesive SEO team, is imperative for success in SEO for 2019.



JULIA **MCCOY**

CEO, Express Writers

 @JuliaEMcCoy



Tomorrow's high-ranking website is all about the audience.

That doesn't just mean your blog topics and site copy, although you should definitely be creating and publishing engaging, high-quality, comprehensive SEO content: but this also means:

- Lessening or killing those annoying popups.
- Making your visitor's journey smooth.
- Using SSL security.

- Making sure your website is extremely fast.
- Offering transparent pricing and services pages.
- Giving your visitor easy buttons to contact, chat with, or email you.

If your site enhances your audience's journey, you'll be rewarded by Google and your visitor will invest in you.

Put together, that's a big win for most businesses.

Also, going into 2019 don't forget mobile and voice technology and how both impact your SEO. This is a big, important one.

With voice search and smart devices in our homes and at our fingertips, we "Google differently." It's important to optimize for today's modern-day online searcher.

Remember that those long-tail, niche keywords that reflect a phrase or question your audience member is searching may have very little search data, but might still be your best choice for using in an upcoming article.

Don't let a lack of data on voice-search-friendly keyword strings stop you from using them. I'm going to predict that the missing data in SEO tools on these super long, but popular, keyword strings will catch up soon.



JESSE MCDONALD

SEO Specialist, Director of Operations,
TopHatRank.com

 @jesseseogeek



I believe there are two things SEOs, especially in the local search space, can expect to deal with more come 2019.

Topical Relevance

From what I have observed over the last year with Google's many algorithm updates, rankings seem to be fluctuating more actively to help fit the semantic intent of a user's search query.

Because of this, it will be more critical than ever for SEOs and content specialists to focus heavily on the user intent of the keywords they are targeting while creating content.

For example, someone looking for “pressure washers in [location]” wants to find either a retailer selling machines or someone offering pressure washing services. If Google sees that more people using this query are looking for services as opposed to machines, they will cater the query to this search intent to better serve the user.

Use of Structured Data

With the frequency of Google’s updates over the last year, it is important for local business sites to try to appear in as much SERP real estate as possible.

While this has always been important, I believe it will be an even more crucial element to local search.



COREY MORRIS

VP of Marketing, Voltage

 @coreydmorris



The biggest trend I'm seeing for 2019 is recognition of the need for technical SEO skills and experience and finding ways to acquire it.

With the importance of mobile-friendliness, speed, schema markup and structured data, and other factors, I have found that there's a gap between the content-focused SEO skillset and the technical one.

For many years we have (sometimes painfully so) correctly focused on the growing importance of context, searcher intent, and quality content.

While content, context, and relevancy are absolutely essential to SEO success, so are the technical skills.

There are always surprises and hiccups in site migrations, indexing issues, and a host of other technical aspects to go along with the newer focuses like speed and schema.

I can point to several recent examples of companies recognizing that they have ignored or gotten light in technical areas and have to find outside help to solve issues.

I feel strongly that we'll see the continued push for everyone to produce more high-quality content that resonates with users and draws engagement.

Beyond that, I also think we'll see a resurgence of both traditional and newer technical SEO needs, and brands and agencies recognizing that.

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CHUCK PRICE

Founder, Measurable SEO

 @ChuckPrice518



The influence of machine learning and artificial intelligence will continue to evolve and have a greater influence on Google's search algorithm.

The end goal for Google is to serve up search results that match searcher intent.

Ironically, this makes the most basic of all SEO tasks – keyword research and selection – more important than ever before.

Just writing "great content," applying killer on-page optimization, and getting powerful links is no longer good enough to rank any phrase.

Take the query [albany new york personal injury lawyer] for example. This search will return a list of legal directories. Google has concluded that searcher intent is to find a series of lawyers or firms – not just one.

When doing keyword research in 2019, it's imperative that you check the SERPs to see if websites like yours are ranking for a targeted phrase.

If the top SERPs are filled with directories or review sites and your site isn't one of those, then move on to another phrase.

In addition to less keyword ranking opportunities, there is also less real estate available for organic search results.

On a mobile device, after the shopping feed, sponsored ads, local map pack, more sponsored ads, and top stories, you might find 5-6 organic SERPs.

That means that more time and resources need to be invested in UX/UI to ensure the pages that you do rank for are optimized for maximum conversion.



ARSEN RABINOVICH

Founder, Managing Partner,
TopHatRank.com

 @TopHatArsen



There are lots to be said about entities and how they are impacting search.

Everything from voice search to featured snippets and even local search results, in one way or another, revolve around entities and how Google has organized them in its Knowledge Graph.

What's stopping me from publishing a website that says Arsen Rabinovich is the founder of SpaceX? Nothing, I have all the needed resources to do this.

But my efforts will be fruitless as Google already knows who that is because of entities and how they are mapped (related to each other).

"Optimize things, not strings!" someone said this at one of the dozen or so conferences I attended this year.

It makes perfect sense and must be applied to everything we do as SEOs

The future of SEO, at least in opinion, will revolve around optimizing entities, both explicit and implicit.



ADAM RIEMER

CEO, Adam Riemer Marketing

 @rollerblader



Content formatting is going to change substantially this year for many companies.

It's almost always been about the quality of your content vs. the amount, but rumors flew off the handle about 300, 500 and 1,200-word minimums.

Now that we're in mobile first, voice search and the near me results are here, formatting is vital.

Mobile First

There's a lot less space on mobile sites.

Although accordions may be on in some instances, this is going to force site owners into actually answering questions and providing solid text instead of branded fluff.

The sites that do this should benefit, especially with answer boxes.

Voice Search

This is relying not only on having authority for your site, but by clearly structuring your site so that search assistants know that what they are reading back to the end user is a clear and accurate answer.

By not jumping right in and having a bunch of comments about yourself, your company or why you're the best, you probably won't win at this.

Branding teams will hate it, so will copywriters, but the ones who find the happy medium will benefit.

Near Me

See above.

Now we add in page/site speed and proper markup with location information. Now you have a formula to start gaining some of the near me results.



ALEXIS SANDERS

Technical SEO Manager, Merkle

 @AlexisKSanders



We're entering into a year where consumers have been pampered by large brands to expect radical convenience at every stage of the conversion process.

People can access the internet anywhere, anytime, through multiple devices (using their voice!) and receive answers to almost any question they can imagine.

Consumers have such high expectations, studies have shown that people exhibit **signs of stress** when dealing with mobile delays.

Through 2019, brands should focus on the following to create a virtuous cycle that will enable organic search success in the long term:

Invest in Seamless

There are multiple touchpoints between a website, search, voice search, apps (potentially PWAs), and hardware experiences.

In order to be a convenient, useful option for users, all of these systems should work cohesively to create a short, efficient conversion process that meets their expectations at every twist.

Understanding the current customer behavior/intent, common conversion journeys, where any breakages exist, and overarching experience will enable you to develop tests that are applicable, create the infrastructure needed, and establish the best user experience possible, enabling smaller brands to continue to compete with online giants.

Website optimizations to support may include:

- Content that answers common user questions.
- Ensuring internal site search is providing relevant results.
- Shortening conversion process.
- Ensure that repeat customers can restock commonly purchased items simply.
- Customer support responds to questions related to the business.
- Consider use of chatbots to lighten the load for basic, common questions and procedural tasks.

- Users are easily able to navigate to physical locations.
- Providing users with their stage in fulfillment funnel (think: clear, visual process forms).

Leverage Data to Power Better User Experiences & Empower Users

Test and develop more personalized experiences (make sure to provide search engine bots with a base-case user experience). Be transparent with the user, providing access to where they are at every stage in the funnel (an online snapshot of where they are in the process can go a long way).

Instill credibility within every aspect of the experience.

This includes: presenting relevant information to the user relating to and establishing credibility, as well as a focus on security.

Bonus: Review 2018 Work

Separate out any tasks that might be automated (e.g., consistent tagging) or enabled (e.g., blocking large images from being uploaded, preventing noindex tags from being pushed past production, enforcing accessibility requirements, etc.).

Work with development teams to see which of these common issues can be automated and/or added into the current workstreams.



KRISTINE SCHACHINGER

Digital Strategist & SEO Consultant

 @schachin



Sometimes the trends going into the New Year are cutting edge, but sometimes it's an opportunity to refocus on what has been neglected.

In 2019, you need to not just be aware of what's cutting edge, but what's been forgotten. Focus on doing these things better than your competitor and you'll definitely see the gains you desire:

Focus on Technical SEO

So the biggest recommendation for a business in 2019 isn't really trendy or even new, but given the growing complexities of sites today – and especially with the push for JavaScript-based development – is necessary.

2019 is the year to evaluate your site's technical competence with regards to SEO and fix what's broken.

There have been changes this year in how Google crawls sites, changes which will likely continue into the new year, especially for JavaScript-based sites.

These changes affect how well your site gets crawled and indexed. Companies that haven't kept abreast of these changes could find themselves falling behind.

If you do the technical side well in 2019, it can be the tie-breaker between you and a competitor who isn't.

Understand Conversion Rate Optimization

Tangentially, and filed under what's old is new again, understanding conversion rate optimization and how much of an effect that has on your bottom line will be key.

As sites devolve more and more into design similarity, knowing how users convert becomes even more important. Small, subtle changes can lead to significant KPI improvement.

It's an idea that's not gotten as much attention as of late, but that's why it's even more important going into 2019.

It means if you do better, what others have forgotten to do, you can reap the benefits of their neglect.

Too often site owners mistake pretty design for CRO, they aren't the same. Some of the ugliest sites convert best.

Device Optimization

Finally, in the realm of what's new is site optimization for home assistant or audio-only devices, for some.

Now I say some because right now there isn't a concrete benefit for every site (that's worth the development lift) to be heard on a device that brings your site no visits.

However, for those with products that can be sold or brands that can benefit from the exposure, being optimized for home assistant or audio-only devices can't be ignored.

Google even has [guidelines](#).

▶▶▶▶
JES
SCHOLZ

International Digital Director, Ringier AG

 @jes_scholz



As SEOs, we are witnessing a shift in the definition of the industry.

For a while now, SEO has not been just about search engines. We've had to factor in the impact of other platforms, such as social networks.

We've begun focusing on voice search with digital personal assistants as well as other applications of machine learning, such as chatbots.

And this started raising questions of who delivers the content.

Traditionally, this has always been our websites or our native apps, so this is where we have focused our optimization efforts.

But as we move into 2019 and beyond, this may not be the case.

Facebook has Instant Articles, SnapChat has Discover, Google backs AMP, Medium and LinkedIn are trying to get you to publish your blog with them – and that's just article content.

We are also seeing the rise of Facebook Marketplace, jobs details are aggregated by Google Jobs, Amazon wants you to sell via Shops, as we have in the past on eBay or Etsy.

All of these initiatives by global platforms replace the need for users to come to our websites to consume content.

Don't misunderstand me. Websites will always be an important part of our job as SEOs as they are a critical building block for any brand.

But I see the scope of SEO expanding to cover visibility on other platforms as well.

You're already doing this when you optimize schema to get coverage in voice search or drive subscription conversions directly through Google News. Neither of these directly contribute to organic sessions, but both drive value for the brand.

And that's what matters!

Be at the forefront of this shift. Investigate the distributed content opportunities for your brand.

Think beyond driving users to your website by ranking number 1 in the SERPs.

How can you get visibility for your content in featured snippets and thus conversational interfaces, with hosted articles, with content aggregators and other such opportunities to ensure your brand reaches your target audience?



ELI SCHWARTZ

Director of SEO & Growth,
SurveyMonkey

 @5le



Given a number of big things that happened in 2018, I think that 2019 will be a gamechanger for SEO, and I have some pretty bold predictions.

Get Position Zero Rankings

Google has been rapidly expanding their Google Assistant capabilities, which powers voice search on phones and Google Home.

This past year, Google moved the goalpost once again with the launch of the Google Home Hub, which now adds a visual display to a voice assistant.

I expect to see position zero matter more than ever as an increasing amount of searches are conducted on these assistant devices. A focus on attaining these rankings should matter even more than ever.

Links Will Matter Less

Google AI is good enough that this year Google will commence their autonomously driven taxi service.

A company that produces technology which can make life-and-death decisions millions of times per day should have no problem figuring out which links are unnatural or gamed.

I think that this year, links will start to matter less as Google simply discounts unnatural links, and the minority of SEOs that used these tactics will have to work on generating natural links.

Optimize for More Than Just Google

Google isn't the only company with a smart assistant that allows users to search by voice.

While search isn't their core competency, Amazon and Apple likely will cut into Google's search dominance as an increasing amount of users adopt their devices over Google's.

I think that 2019 will be the year that, once again, SEO will not just be about how to optimize for Google, but we will have to take into account these other "engines" as well.



PAUL **SHAPIRO**

Director of Strategy & Innovation,
Catalyst

 @fighto



If you haven't already incorporated it into your practice, make sure SEO A/B testing is at the forefront. It's not for every website, and best practices still have their place, but it's one of the more surefire ways to ensure the best results.

What else will matter in 2019?

Web Performance Optimization

This is already a hot topic, but guess what? Most of your sites and pages are still slow. Those pages can always be faster, and faster makes for better conversion rates.

Get Familiar with JavaScript

A new year means that even more of the websites you encounter will be heavily JavaScript driven (likely one of the big frameworks, such as React, Vue.js, and Angular).

That means it's time to familiarize yourself with at least a little understanding of JavaScript, and how the major search engines play best with JavaScript-driven websites.

PWAs Are the Future

Progressive Web Apps (PWAs) do a fantastic job of bridging the gap between mobile app and website, and there are web performance implications to boot.

PWAs mark yet another reason to familiarize yourself with modern web technology. It will likely help in the years to come.

The TL;DR that brings this all together?

Invest in technical skills, invest in technical SEOs.



JP SHERMAN

Enterprise Search & Findability Expert,
Red Hat

 @jpsherman



Contextual relationships between topics and behaviors, supported by structured markup, is the critical trend we need to start understanding, testing, and implementing for 2019.

For almost as long as I've been in the search industry, we've been talking about the hub and spoke model of content. We use a bicycle wheel as a visual metaphor to drive home the point.

Time, expertise, and money are spent to create topical and sustainable models of content that follow that hub and spoke model. It organizes content and creates excellent opportunities for internal linking and suggestive content based on a user's interest.

Using information architecture, tags, metadata and more recently, structured markup, we've had the ability to give search engines signals to understand this topical and supportive content structure.

The challenge is that internet traffic is at a tipping point where most traffic to sites are bots.

Barry Adams, in his presentation at Nottingham Digital Summit, made the point that these bots are scraping up as much information as possible to build databases for machine learning.

This means that machines are looking for data to feed their own ability to create better contextual information, to create relationships between topics, and the data associated with them.

For good or evil, they get this information from the pages and data we publish. These smart systems then smash that quantitative information together with the qualitative behaviors we do.

When I leave the house to go to work, I generally stop at my local cafe. Here, I'm in a passive mode, I'm not actively searching or entering data to plan my route, which would be an active behavior, yet my phone, because of my passive behaviors lets me know how long it'll take to get to the cafe, not to my office.

Taking the bike wheel metaphor again, we are now entering a phase of search where there are overlapping bike wheels, topics are no longer simply central hubs, topics relate to other topics.

Machines are understanding the passive behaviors that influence information and can predict what we may be looking for.

I encourage people to start looking at and understanding structured data, schema, active and passive search behaviors, and how they can connect to behaviors that signal intent so that the behavior of search becomes a much larger effort of findability.



MATT **SILTALA**

President, Avalaunch Media

 @Matt_Siltala



The best trend is, and always has been, the hardest trend. Creating the type of content that actually does something.

I have been preaching for years to create something (visually or contextually) that solves a problem.

If you can answer a question, get a lead, make a sale, help with SEO (link building), reputation management, social proof or community building purposes with a piece of content, then you win!

Creating the type of content that moves the needle, or does any of the things I mentioned here is not easy. People who continue to look for (and try to figure out) easy ways will continue to lose by doing so.

Do your research, be the solution to the problem that people have, and provide something that is meant for people versus trying to “SEO” the crap out of it and you will always do better in your efforts.

Moving, motivating, and connecting with people are all things that I have been trying to get my content to do since before any industry acronyms.

This is not something earth-shattering or brand new and trendy. I get that.

But for too long people have not even been able to do the simple things with marketing.

So let's all start here.



GRANT SIMMONS

VP of Search Marketing, Homes.com

 @simmonet



These three trends will dominate 2019:

Reputation

Look at content distribution and promotion from a reputation standpoint.

Hire experts to author, leverage data from known entities, and ensure credentials and credit is given to both, with appropriate affinity to the promoted brand.

It's much more about relationships and association than link building, with a 360-degree eye on mentions across the web, ratings, review and brand metrics at a people level.

How can you get more of your employees to blog, write, and speak? How can you (the brand's people) be the go-to source for journalists around your core topic expertise?

Because that level of expertise is what Google is looking for to power their results.

Focus

Be the recognized expert of something, no matter how small.

With long-tail and voice searches, Google's RankBrain and AI-driven algorithms, the query focus is even more granular and the opportunities even more abundant for the "micro-topic" expert.

It doesn't mean there aren't great opportunities at the top of the query chain, too. It's just crowded and better to approach from the bottom up to dominate multiple query niches that fight the biggest brands for mindshare..

Speed Beyond Fast

Google will power a faster web experience through JavaScript caching as a service.

Google's infrastructure will ensure fast(er) delivery and experiences, plus solve some of the many issues both they and SEO/developers have, making JS adoption quicker, easier, and better for Google crawl (and web users).



BILL **SLAWSKI**

Director of SEO Research, Go Fish Digital

 @bill_slawski



Here are my four biggest SEO trends to focus upon in 2019:

- Understanding and using appropriate schema vocabulary on pages for products, offers, events, contact information, sameAs social and entity associations, organizational information, ratings, and speakable content.
- Using the new features available in Google My Business, such as event, booking and buy buttons, and Google Posts.

- Using context terms in page content to identify words that are polysemous (having than one meaning) or that help to disambiguate people with the same or similar names (e.g., Michael Jackson, singer vs. Michael Jackson, Homeland Security Director).
- Using Semantic Topic Models to help pages rank higher in search results.

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ALEYDA SOLIS

International SEO Consultant
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 @aleyda



Although voice search got lots of attention in 2018, I believe voice search is just a piece of a bigger shift, from specific “results” to “answers” as part of a longer “conversational search journey.”

This will only gain more prominence and importance in 2019 – and the shift has already started.

While “voice” might be an easier way to request answers in some scenarios, it certainly isn’t the ideal format to fulfill the intent in more complex answers (e.g., when comparing services or products).

That will always require visual support (Google also mentioned in their 20th anniversary post how they expect a shift from a text to a more visual way to look for information), which might be the reason why they have also launched smart displays instead of just offering smart speakers now.

I believe this shift will become more obvious in 2019. We will need to start shaping more of our SEO activities around it.

This means more than just optimizing for featured snippets. It means you should start using speakable schema and expanding and complementing your site's presence with Google Actions, for starters.

Two other critically important areas in 2019 will be:

- The need to optimize JavaScript-reliant content (whether we like it or not, due to the usage of JS frameworks).
- The popularization of Progressive Web Apps. This will require you to have a better understanding to assure proper crawlability and indexability.



ALEXANDRA TACHALOVA

Digital Marketing Consultant

 @AlexTachalova



Here are a couple of things that will definitely help your site stand out on Google in 2019:

Work More Closely with Analytics

Understand the quality of traffic that you're acquiring. Many of sites that acquire a solid number of organic visitors rarely track the quality of that traffic.

For instance, with the help of Google Tag Manager, you can identify how exactly your users are interacting with your site and how many clicks, page scrolls, etc., users need before turning into a lead or a client.

So after this, you can always classify the quality of traffic and work on improving not only your page's SEO performance but converting traffic more effectively.

It doesn't matter how many users you're acquiring if your leads/sales numbers aren't growing.

Produce & Promote High-Quality Content

Another common problem that I see on my clients' sites is content that was published purely to keep their blogs alive. The issue with this content is that it isn't good enough to acquire links, so there's a slim chance that it'll rank on Google.

Think twice about publishing such posts, since they won't pay off.

It's better to do one post that is properly distributed every few months than doing several per month that will only receive a few visits from social media channels.

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MARCUS TANDLER

Co-Founder & Managing Director, Ryte

 @mediadonis



There are two major trends I'm seeing for 2019.

Structure All the Things!

Use structured data wherever possible. Unstructured content has no future!

With AI becoming increasingly important for Google, structured data is becoming more important as well.

If Google wants to move from a mobile-first to an AI-first world, as Sundar Pichai proclaimed one year ago, structured data is key.

No matter how good your AI is, if it takes too long to “crawl” the required information, it will never be great.

AI requires a fast processing of contents and their relations to each other.

Google recommends using JSON-LD for structured data whenever possible, but for now, you can also use microdata or RDFa.

The Future Belongs to Progressive Web Apps

Google’s upcoming OS, Fuchsia, is planned to replace Chrome and Android in the future. It is most likely going to be based on an app store framework.

Therefore, it becomes vital to offer your https-mobile-friendly website as a Progressive Web App.

Even Apple now quietly supports a set of basic PWA functionalities, making it possible to install an app without the detour via App-store.

This is huge because a native app and its progressive web app counterpart are not distinguishable on a user’s home screen!

For 2019, you should start thinking about how your website could live on as a PWA in the future.

How can your PWA become a keepable experience your users would like to put on their home screen?



SHELLEY WALSH

Director, ShellShock

 @shelleywalshuk



Fundamentally, pure SEO is still the same as it always has been and that's not going to change.

Retrospectively reviewing the trends for 2018, they're all as relevant for 2019 as they were for this year: mobile-first, voice search, featured snippets, site speed, schema, etc.

What is changing, is how the role of SEO is defined and how it integrates with other departments, and that it can no longer be considered in isolation.

As an external content supplier, internal PR or marketing departments can be defensive against the campaigns that I produce and be obstructive to efforts. I guess it's symptomatic of every industry, that territory-stamping goes on between departments.

Long overdue, I expect to see changes in where SEO is positioned.

Marketing is a holistic view of achieving the end goal of raising revenue and SEO is a significant (if not the most significant) part of that. I now want to see far more cross-channel campaigns and channels working together in harmony.

For that to happen, we would need the rise of strategists who can take a holistic view and direct accordingly. The SEO of the future would be an overarching marketing person, who is both multi-disciplined and has the ability to draw on other channels.

For the past several years, I've talked about the resurgence of print and the use of print in combination with digital and email campaigns. Brands are investing in printed catalogs and niche sites are producing high-end, printed magazines to complement their online newsletters.

This year, Mailchimp has started to offer printed postcards. I think this underlines the move toward online and offline integration.

Specifically looking at the part that content plays in SEO, I want to see more focus on what happens to the user once they get to the page, by SEOs investing in understanding the psychology of the user and then using the content to build a connection with them.

Good content strategists and content producers are in short supply, and well constructed and presented content is still the exception rather than the norm.

I expect to see the rise in quality for how content pages are produced.

Content strategy in SEO is not just about answering a query and getting users to the page. It must also use language to engage the user and guide the user to the next action.

There are still far too few pages doing this well. More use of content maps and experience maps would help this.

Also, there's a move toward integrating AI with SEO. I predict that this will polarize skill sets as there will be more demand for creative strategy thinking, as machines do more heavy lifting of data. This also feeds back into the rise of multi-disciplined strategists.

Over the last few years, SEO as an industry has changed massively. Although the technical aspect of how to rank sites has not changed, what we do with the resulting traffic and with the user has.



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The areas that got the most attention this year will continue to do so into 2019.

- Mobile (the index, the criteria, the increased usage, etc.).
- Schema and the presentation of content in a way that can be incorporated into databases (voice search and featured snippets).
- Other Google-generated content areas in the SERPs (as this changes, we adapt).

The trends you should watch will vary, depending on what work has been done to the site already and what is the most effective ways for their site's niche and content to attract the right traffic.

Become involved with groups that share relevant information for your needs. This will be a smart play moving forward.



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Here are two key SEO trends to watch:

A Website's Technical Foundation Will Be Paramount

When I looked back at my 2018 prediction, I mentioned that technical SEO would become even more important. So much for being original.

However, that is what I also see ahead in 2019.

Over the last several months, I have noticed more and more sites impacted by technical issues. Part of the reason for this involves the mobile-first index. Google has moved many sites to mobile-first indexing (just check Google Search Console).

Websites that have poor coding, slow loading pages, and mobile errors will continue to suffer in 2019 – even more than they have in the past.

Content (Words, Videos, Images, Audio) Must Answer the User's Query FAST

Here's an exercise for you:

Quietly observe 4-5 people in different age groups search for something on Google.

You will notice that the majority will quickly scan the page or play a partial video or audio file to see if it has the information they searched.

This behavior isn't new, but the speed at which users do it is.

From an SEO and content perspective, you have to present your information to the user quickly, efficiently, and effectively.

What does that mean?

You need to understand what someone is expecting to find when they query a word or phrase and you need to give them the answer in the simplest way possible.

Plus, you need to know if your target audience prefers words on a page, images, videos, or audio.



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In 2018, Google's Gary Illyes and John Mueller stepped up their game. We saw a lot of communication from Mountain View – especially around SEO ranking factors (particularly ranking factor myths).

I hope that we continue to see this trend in 2019. I believe we will. Here are five more SEO trends.

Voice Search? Not Quite Yet

I still don't think that voice search will be a mainstream SEO tactic in 2019.

In my opinion, the “juice isn’t worth the squeeze” yet for most companies when it comes to showing up in voice queries.

However, I think more companies will look into a voice optimization strategy next year. As I said last year, voice search is coming, it still just isn’t quite there yet.

On-Page SEO = Big Wins

On-page SEO will continue to be important in 2019. We are still seeing incredible results from nothing more than on-page SEO tactics for many companies that come in the door.

Links are still very important, but the biggest bang for most companies’ SEO bucks is ongoing on-page optimization. Because on-page SEO isn’t a set-it-and-forget-it tactic.

Better Data from SEO Tools

I predict that SEO tools will take some astronomical leaps in their capabilities over the next couple of years.

Tools like SEMrush, Moz, Majestic, Ahrefs, etc. are in an arms race – which is good for us in the SEO world.

Tools won’t ever replace SEOs, but they can make us more effective. Look for better data analysis and more solid recommendations from these tools in 2019.

Amazon Optimization

I think 2019 will be the year that many SEOs start to embrace Amazon as a platform for optimization.

Many agencies already have dedicated Amazon optimization specialists and I see this trend continuing.

For many companies, Amazon has replaced Google as the most important channel. The need for qualified Amazon consultants is out there – and who better to fill that void than SEO professionals?

Google Will Continue Pushing AMP

I thought AMP would be bigger in 2018, but I think there is a delay in adoption for many companies that are not publishers.

I expect that to change early in 2019.