

SEO AND GOOGLE TRENDS TO LOOK OUT FOR THIS YEAR

So the first month of the year is over already and a lot has changed in technology already. If you keep one eye on technology news, you will be aware that Google has many changes planned this year and therefore, SEO will see many changes. But just in case you don't know what we're talking about, we've compiled a list of the major changes by Google that we're expecting to see over the next few months.

Voice search and featured snippets will grow hand-in-hand

One in five mobile search queries currently comes from voice search — a number that is likely to rise as Google Assistant-enabled devices such as Google Home continue to grow in popularity. And as voice search grows, we can expect to see an increase in featured snippets, from which Google often sources its voice search results.

Indeed, there is already evidence that this growth is taking place. A study released by Stone Temple Consulting last year confirmed that featured snippets are on the rise, appearing for roughly 30 percent of the 1.4 million queries they tested.

If this trend continues, featured snippets may even begin to rival the top organic listing as the place to be if you want to get noticed. (For more on featured snippets and how to target them, check out Stephan Spencer's excellent primer on the subject.)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is set to control more aspects of search

It's been over two years since RankBrain, Google's AI system, was first introduced. Since its inception, RankBrain has moved from handling 15% of searches to all of them. That's a lot of faith to put into AI! Google's interest in AI doesn't end there however, the company has developed a machine that can recognize a huge number of objects and in fact, Google now has so much capacity for machine learning that they are actually selling it. If you're impressed by that, then prepare to be mind-blown as Google has now built and AI that builds better AI than humans! As Google continues down the AI route, search results will no doubt change and become far less predictable and we need to prepare for that as how we know SEO will change as well.

Fake news algorithm will update

It has been a number of years since Google had to be held accountable for the amount of spam and low-quality content in their search results. While they would have liked to believe this was a thing of the past, for the past year Google has once again been blasted for the amount of fake news being promoted. In fact, this is being cited as being Google's biggest issue yet. Action has already been taken by the internet giant and more safeguards are set to be put in place this year. Whatever else happens, honesty will be ranked very highly in the months to come.

Guest posting used as a way to manipulate ranking will be reduced

Using guest articles as a way to build links is against Google's rules and from now on, those who are caught using fake articles in this way will be penalized. The only

any digital marketing strategy is going to succeed is to be open, honest and follow the rules. You may wonder what constitutes manipulative guest posting, if you are at all unsure as to whether you are breaking the rules, all you have to ask yourself is whether the articles you are posting are relevant to your visitors. Would you still post these articles if search engines were a thing of the past?

Unlinked mentions to get noticed

There are signs that Google is about to start paying more attention to those brands that are mentioned but without links. This will undoubtedly help the smaller brands that can't advertise in the same way as their larger competitors. What this does is highlight just how important it is to have a digital presence. You need to get involved with conversations to you and about you and put yourself around on social media. This should be a big part of your digital marketing strategy — especially if you are a small business in a big pond!

Mobile-first indexing

Google is responding positively to the change in user behavior and as such, it is advisable that all companies ensure they have mobile-friendly websites as it won't be long before SEO ranking is heavily impacted by mobile sites. If your site does not work on a mobile, you will soon start to be heavily penalized.

While there is a lot of change for SEO and Google itself, one thing that is not changing fast is the use of long-term SEO strategies for digital marketing. This course of action should continue to be the focus of your attention. Google gives nothing to people looking for quick hits.

SAVE YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY WITH CONTENT MARKETING

We begin this article with the assumption that your company already has a marketing plan. If you don't already, it's vital to get one written. It is so important to have a documented, organized and strategic plan so that you can monitor successes/failures/development as well as ensuring that your marketing stays on track.

As the importance of digital marketing continues to grow, it's vital that you include some kind of content marketing in your plan to work alongside your other marketing techniques. Content marketing is the explanation - the catch-up information that will help to make all your other marketing better.



Balance is an important part of a marketing strategy and the importance you place on each part of your marketing campaign will (should) be determined by what works for you. Those who do not include any content marketing are missing out on a key component to success as content is often the foundation by which all other strategies are based on. By looking at content marketing this way, it will be much easier to implement wider integrated marketing solutions. We are moving towards a digital transformation but without the groundwork in place, much of your strategy could unravel before it's had a chance to get going.

Customized content interactions are increasing in popularity with both businesses and consumer's. People want – in fact they expect - information at their fingertips any time of day or night. Digital media is driven by the need to stand out and targeted on specific messages and specific advertising. The only way to reach a specific demographic is through content. You need to be saying what they want to hear.

An integrated marketing strategy is the best way forward and this must always start with a detailed content strategy. You need to lay the foundations before you start on anything else! Look at the possibility of driving clients to a content platform which will then guide them on a journey through your products/services and lead them to the heart of your sales focus.

Marketing campaigns need to have an element of content production to inform and educate people on why they should be choosing you. The days of cheating the system



are over and the only way to survive and thrive is by offering the information people are searching for.

It doesn't matter what the focus of your content marketing is, it's how you use it that's the key. Execution is everything when it comes to content! For example if you have a regular blog, this needs to be proofread with no mistakes and then shared on all of your social media platforms. The popularity of your posts depends on how many people see them and the more you share, the more your online presence will improve and if you are offering interesting content, you will soon find that this is being shared on and before you know it, you are reaching a much wider audience.

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Instagram officially adding GIF support to its Stories

After months of rumors and limited rollouts, Instagram has finally announced that GIFs will, from now on, be supported in stories! The options and fun to be had are endless. How did we ever live without this before now? To access the GIF stickers, tap the add sticker button at the top of Stories as usual. And choose from the newly formatted GIF library before dragging it onto your photo or video.



The photo media giant is also set to announce an upcoming feature to allow users to upload photos and videos of any size to Stories. Once this is live, you'll be able to pinch the uploaded image or video so that no one needs to be cropped anymore! The extra room surrounding the image is said to be filled with a matching custom color.

WHAT IS MOBILE-FIRST INDEXING AND WILL IT IMPACT YOUR SEO?

We've only just arrived into 2018 yet already it's clear that the importance placed on mobile-first indexing is only going to increase. Google continues to try and make the internet more mobile friendly and as a result, the need to ensuring your website passes Google's test is also increasing.

However it's not as easy as people may first think. There is much confusion surrounding what is actually required, what the terms actually mean and whether it will actually affect SEO at all.

Firstly, we need to look at what mobile-first indexing actually is. Basically, it just means that your website's mobile version is the first thing Google will include in its index – it essentially acts as a base for how Google will rank you. This doesn't automatically mean that every website without a mobile-friendly version is about to lose everything as desktop sites are still to be included in the index. However, it could impact (and actually severely impact) your page ranking. Ultimately, a site that has been modified for mobiles will see a boost in their ranking even when people are searching on a desktop.



Mobile-first is a reference to the fact that your mobile version is considered as the primary version. Therefore, you need to make sure that you have optimized content, design, graphics, shopping carts and every other aspect of your website for mobile. The fact that Google is placing so much emphasis and importance on mobile versions signifies the change in browser searching and the way in which people are looking at the internet. No longer are mobile versions alternate. They have overtaken desktop sites and are more important when it comes to SEO. That's why you need to ensure your mobile version works to the best of its ability. With mobile-first indexing, there is only one index but what will change is how content is added to this existing index.

If you don't yet have an optimized mobile site however, don't panic! While it is important that you start to develop one, the change is still in its infancy and therefore until it is ready, Google has stated that it will still have minimal impact. According to some, we could be talking years before the changes are finalized. Also, it's important to note that if your website is responsive and easy to use on both desktop



and mobile, you might not have to change anything at all – providing you're happy with your current ranking.

However, it may not be the wisest decision to sit back and do nothing as it is always beneficial to keep up with the times just in case you miss an important change. It is also advisable to check mobile page speed regularly and also that images are loading efficiently. It is also important to note that hidden content will be treated no differently than visible content so it needs to be optimized in just the same way.

One of the official recommendations is that once the new indexing is finalized, if you're in the process of building your mobile site, it would actually be better to have no mobile site than a broken or incomplete one. You should wait to launch your mobile site until it is ready to go live.

Ultimately, when it comes to SEO, mobile-friendly sites are the way forward. You have sufficient warning and enough time to become mobile ready so use your time wisely and remember that without it, all your SEO up until now will eventually become useless.

Should you need a checklist of what to keep an eye on with regards to your mobile site, look no further. We have the key points listed for you here:

- **Content:** ensure the content is as valuable and high-quality as on your desktop site. This includes text, images and videos. Make sure the format is crawl-able and index-able
- **Structured data:** it's important to include the same data markup on the mobile and desktop versions. However make sure you use the mobile version of the URL.
- **Metadata:** ensure titles and meta-descriptions are the equivalent on both versions of EVERY page. N.B. It's important to be aware that we say 'equivalent' instead of 'identical' because it is wise to optimize mobile titles for shorter character counts, but still include relevant keywords.
- **Responsive:** Make sure your mobile site works efficiently and quickly.
- **SEO, SEO, SEO:** this doesn't come automatically. You need to ensure the correct measures are in place for Google to rate you highly.

REMARKETING... WHAT IS IT? WHY DO YOU NEED TO DO IT?

In simple terms, marketing exists to get more sales. This is its main (well single) purpose. It is a way of getting your brand/products/services out to a wider audience in the hope of finding new clients. Traditionally, placing ads in magazines, newspapers, Trade mags, TV and radio was the best way to achieve this, but much has changed since these days. There is of course still a place for traditional ads, but much less is left to chance these days.

Adverts will literally follow your targeted demographic or interested parties around the internet. You must have noticed how many adverts pop up for products you've only just looked at online. They literally pop up everywhere – regardless of which website you're on. Now imagine that's your advert for your products and services! Think about how much coverage you would get.

While not everyone who comes into contact with your advert will buy your products/services, they should be reminded about what you can offer them time and time again... and this is what's known as remarketing.

Put simply, remarketing is an easy solution to stay in the minds of your potential customers. You can target your ads to the people who visit your website or app and they will see you app across the internet wherever they are browsing. You don't actually pay for anything unless someone clicks on the ad.

It is a strategy enabling you to reconnect with both potential and existing customers while they browse the internet. By seeing your ads in relevant places, there is a much higher chance that they'll revisit your site to make a purchase. Remarketing can lead to higher conversion rates in the long run, however if you're looking for quick fixes (that rarely work out anyway) this may not be quick enough for you. However, if you wait, the results will definitely be worth it.

You don't have to be an expert to set up remarketing on your website. You just need to place (what is known as) a remarketing tag which is focussed on specific products/services/sales. Once someone visits that page, a cookie is left on the user's browser. If they leave your site without purchasing, they will activate your targeted ads through the Google Display Network. You can have complete control over these ads such as who you want to target and how you want to target them. You can even send different ads to people who left their shopping carts full and those who were just browsing. Remarketing works directly with keywords and segmenting your visitors to ensure that they see the most relevant results and information.

It doesn't have to stop there however. Dynamic remarketing takes all of this a step further. It is also possible to show potential customers an ad to highlight a specific product or service that they looked at while visiting your website.

So, you may be wondering what the actual benefits of remarketing are. Well, the most important benefit is the much higher potential of turning a visitor into a customer. It is proven that remarketing consistently raises conversion rates (if it is carried out correctly of course). It is the perfect way to reach potential customers and remind them of what they need right up until the time of purchase. It is also the ideal way to bring customers back to your site who perhaps haven't visited for a while.

As with traditional PPC advertising, it is easy to monitor results and see which works for which group. This makes it much easier to manage your marketing and make changes when they are necessary.

Whatever your target group and whatever your motivation for remarketing, it is a highly effective digital marketing tool and should be incorporated into every digital marketing plan.

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Hawaii governor forgot Twitter password during false missile alert

If you're going to embarrass yourself on a worldwide scale, you may as well go the whole way. That is exactly what happened with Hawaii's governor who has admitted that he took 15 minutes longer to tweet reassurance because he had forgotten his Twitter password.



Governor David Ige (D) was informed of the untrue notification just two minutes after it was sent out but didn't let his followers know it was a false alarm for a further 15 minutes. He stated in an interview: "I have to confess that I don't know my Twitter account log-ons and the passwords, so certainly that's one of the changes that I've made... I've been putting that on my phone so that we can access the social media directly."

It took about 40 minutes for the state to send out a correction to mobile phones. The Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, which is apparently responsible for these notifications, tweeted a whole minute after this.



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