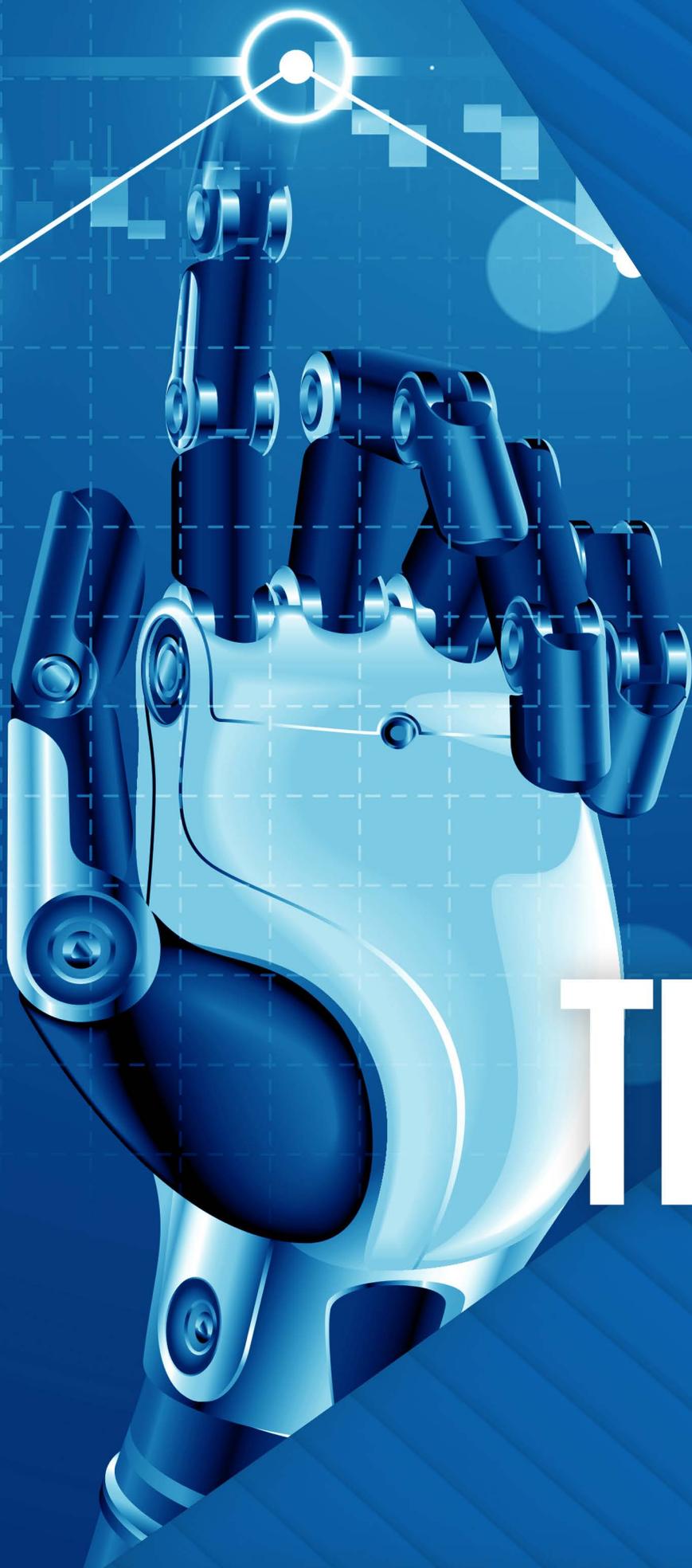


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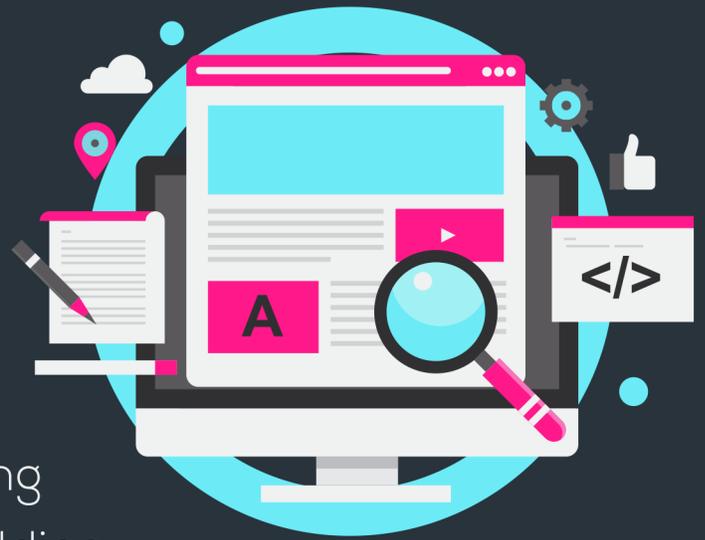


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10 Important 2020 SEO Trends You Need to Know

By Danny Goodwin

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“ In 1999, I started this company with the mission statement, “We will work toward bringing in the greatest amount of relevant traffic to our clients’ websites, using the most ethical methods available.” That mission remains true today.

Jim Boykin, CEO & Founder of Internet Marketing Ninjas

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After 3 Months

↑ **47%**

After 6 Months

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After 12 Months

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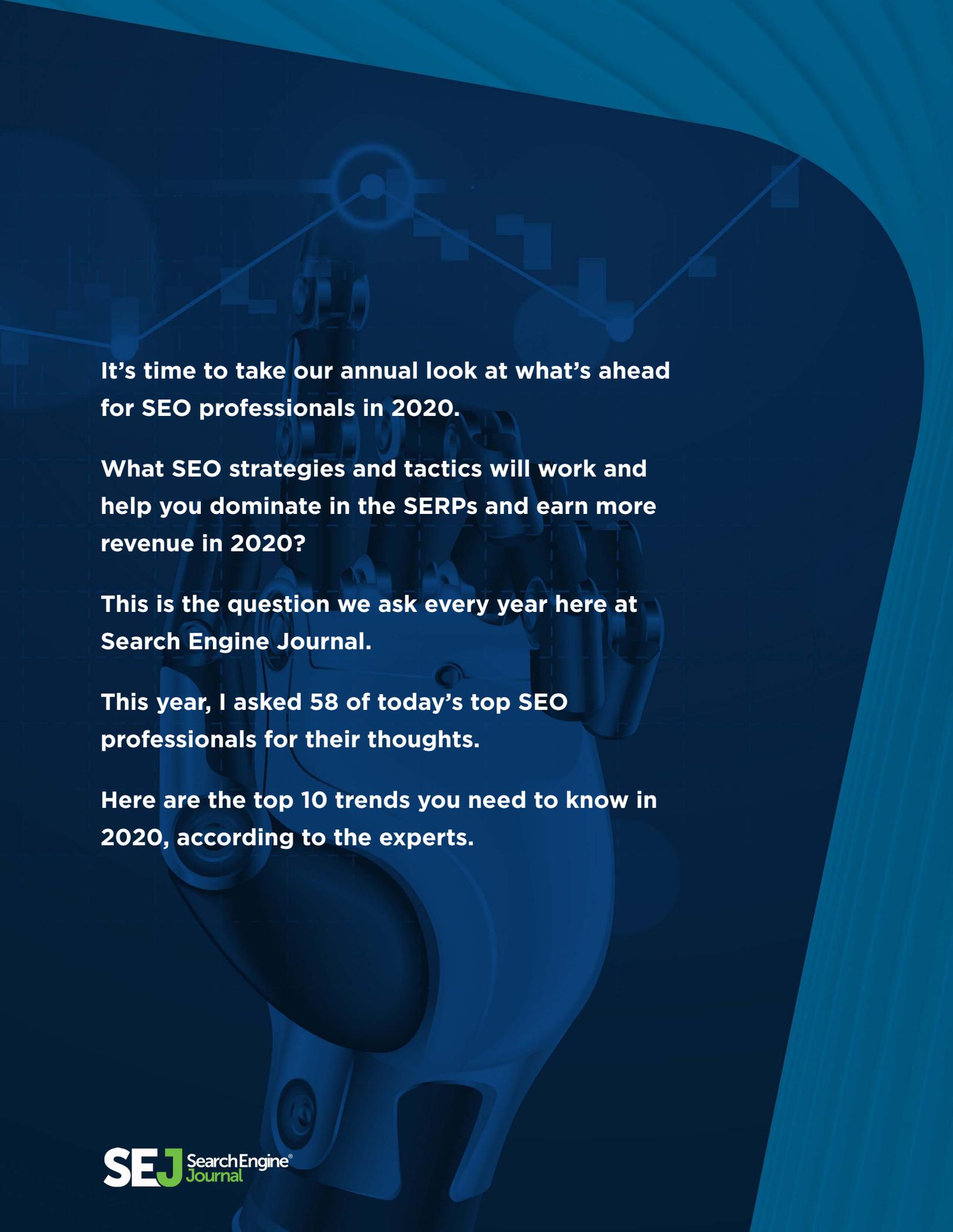
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FULL SERVICE INTERNET MARKETING & TOOLS

INTRODUCTION

10 Important 2020 SEO TRENDS You Need to Know

BY DANNY GOODWIN



It's time to take our annual look at what's ahead for SEO professionals in 2020.

What SEO strategies and tactics will work and help you dominate in the SERPs and earn more revenue in 2020?

This is the question we ask every year here at Search Engine Journal.

This year, I asked 58 of today's top SEO professionals for their thoughts.

Here are the top 10 trends you need to know in 2020, according to the experts.



1

BERT & USER-FOCUSED OPTIMIZATION

In 2019, the launch of Google's new BERT algorithm got a lot of attention. Naturally, every SEO professional wants to learn how to optimize for BERT.

Well, rather than focusing on how to optimize for that specific algorithm, take a page from **Kelly Stanze**, Search Strategist, Hallmark, who will be focusing on user-focused optimization and the technical delivery of content.

In short, that means reassessing user access points to search and aligning content with that.

“Look at the mechanics of how something is crawled, indexed, and served in a variety of different search settings,” Stanze said. “With users having more options than ever in how they search for things, it'll be even more important for SEOs to bear in mind the fundamentals of clean architecture and content delivery.”

With the incorporation of BERT this year into the ranking and featured snippets algorithm, Google has taken a huge leap forward into making search really about intent matching rather pure string matching, according to **Eli Schwartz**, Growth Consultant, and Advisor.

“Content will truly have to be written to user intent rather than just strings that a user might search,” Schwartz said. “Keyword research tools may even become less relevant with the primary dataset for content creation coming from suggested queries. In 2020, the really smart SEOs will get up from their desks to talk to customers so they can find out what their audience really wants from them.”

Frédéric Dubut, Senior Program Manager, Bing, echoed that, noting that keyword research, at least as we know it, is going to become obsolete.

“There’s no sign of [neuro-linguistic programming] NLP and deep learning research slowing down anytime soon, and you can expect search engines to shift even further from keywords to intent in 2020,” Dubut said. “Both practitioners and tooling providers will need to shift their efforts towards ‘intent research’ and fulfilling user needs.”

As **Jenn Mathews**, Senior SEO Manager, Groupon, points out, Google is continually updating to optimize search results based on user intent rather than a focus on content/page to keyword matching.

“SEOs need to understand the nuance of what this means with their content as well as have a firm grasp on Google’s past updates leading to this trend.”

We've all wanted to focus on intent for the last several years, and better understand what the journey of our customers looks like, said **Duane Forrester**, VP, Industry Insights, Yext. Now it's become such an important part of the landscape, it's integral to the survival and growth for most online businesses.

"If you focus on the customer's intent, you'll clearly understand where you fit on that path," Forrester said. "By providing the best answers for questions on that path, you can more reliably capture and convert customers."

What does this mean for you?

Focus on how our users talk about their issues, problems, and needs at each aspect of the buyer's journey much more, according to **Keith Goode**, Sr. SEO Strategist, IBM.

"Additionally, we're going to have to extend our efforts far beyond the purchase in that journey to include content that addresses needs after the sale - support, opportunities to advocate, community-building and staying relevant for future purchases," Goode added.

Always focus on your customers, said **Sam Hollingsworth**, Director of Search, Elevation Ten Thousand



“Too many brands forget or fail to realize what it takes to attract and impress potential customers. They want real value,” Hollingsworth said. “Just like in a brick-and-mortar establishment, customers want to know that you’re on their side, that they can trust you, and that you are a reliable partner in what is going to be a long-term - hopefully lifelong - relationship.”

Carolyn Lyden, Lead SEO/Owner, Search Hermit, hopes 2020 brings a change where we get back to the qualitative, human side of search.

“So many marketers market their products and services having never spoken one-on-one to their target audiences,” Lyden said.

Without talking to our customers and understanding why they are behaving the way they are, we are limiting our ability to create a smart and holistic strategy, according to **Sarah Gurbach**, Senior Account Manager, Search and Audience Insights, Seer Interactive.

“So, in 2020, I recommend you go and sit down with your customers,” Gurbach said. “Talk to them, ask them to tell you about their journey to purchase, how they used search, what they thought of your site. Use that data in every decision you make.”

User-focused optimization can only truly be done by integrating SEO into a holistic marketing strategy. **Ryan Jones**, SEO Group Director, Publicis Sapient, said this will be the biggest trend in 2020.

“Now, more than ever, companies are going to have to stop treating SEO as a condiment that they just add on to their digital strategy, and instead treat it as a key ingredient of their business plan,” Jones said. “SEOs are going to have to grow their skillsets to understand the full marketing and digital stack. It’s going to be less about fixing SEO issues and more about fixing marketing and business issues.”



2 HIGH-QUALITY, OPTIMIZED CONTENT

Anna Crowe, Assistant Editor, Search Engine Journal, said there is one thing that has been and will continue to be the lifeblood of SEO:

Content.

“Content affects everything in SEO,” Crowe said. “From your site structure and internal linking strategy to the types of links you build.”

To succeed in 2020, you will have to write something that is relevant and valuable, said **Tony Wright**, CEO, WrightIMC.

“This means that SEOs need to learn how to write or hire people who know how to write,” Wright said. “Google’s editorial discretion isn’t perfect yet – there will still be content that ranks that shouldn’t. But the day is coming when the best content will win.”

Make it your goal to have the best content on the web for your topic, or at least an important subset of your topic, said **Eric Enge**, General Manager, Perficient Digital. By doing so, you will be future-Google-proofing your business.

“This allows you to compete effectively for long-tail searches (which still remains about 70% of all search queries), will help build your site authority and demand for your content, and can be done in a directly ROI positive way,” Enge said. “In addition, this type of approach to content is exactly what Google is looking for to satisfy user needs and represents the type of market investment that Google will likely never make, because Google is about doing things with massively scalable algorithms.”

Jesse McDonald, Global SEO Strategist, IBM, and **Jessica Levenson**, SEO & Content Strategy Consultant, both said 2020 is the time to move away from the obsession with keywords. Stop targeting individual keywords, chasing pageviews, and “spraying and praying” with content.

McDonald said to focus more on topics.

“The goal of switching the mentality to more of a topic-focus is to create content that addresses an entire conversation holistically as opposed to just worrying about the single keyword a page should be targeting,” McDonald said.

Levenson said to adopt a deliberate and methodically organized cluster of content that delivers comprehensive and intuitive topical experiences while meeting business objectives.



“Know what answers the user needs next,” Levenson said.

“Boiled down:

- Understand who your audience is and how they search.
- Understand the intent behind the questions they are asking or problems they need to solve.
- Give them solutions or answers in the formats they prefer via on-point, quality, and authoritative content.
- Execute in this fashion for every stage of their journey to create a satisfactory topical experience that serves their needs again and again.
- Iterate because just because you do it well once doesn't mean intent won't change or someone else won't do something better.”

Another thing to watch out for, according to **Aja Frost**, Head of Content SEO, HubSpot: content cannibalization.

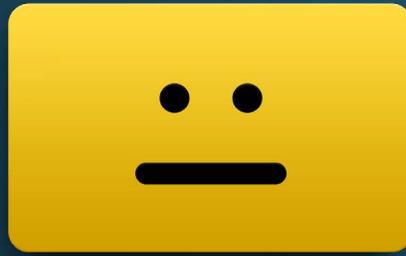
“I'd recommend auditing all of your content for overlapping rankings and merging, redirecting, and archiving as needed so every page ranks for a unique set of keywords,” Frost said. “If your website covers the same topics again and again, even if you're covering these topics from different angles, your pages are going to knock each other out of the results.”

In 2020, it's time to take a hard look at the quality of your content – and optimizing that content for users rather than search engines, said **Michelle Robbins**, VP Product & Innovation, Aimclear.

“In a way, the key to staying successful in search marketing 2020 is the same as it ever was – put out good content, with consistent brand messaging, in all your channels,” Robbins said. “As the search engines become evermore adapted to natural language understanding, the best-written content – in all forms – will win the day.”

And in the world of international SEO, the time is now to invest in good localization of content, said **Motoko Hunt**, President, AJPR.

“Many global websites have poorly translated content that hasn't been edited for the local tongue,” Hunt said. “It's not the placement of the keywords, it's about how well your content is written for the local audience.



3 E-A-T & YOUR UNFAIR ADVANTAGE

In 2020, Google will continue to look at the overall reputation and E-A-T (Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness) of a given company and the individuals who publish content on behalf of that company, said **Lily Ray**, SEO Director, Path Interactive.

“Companies that struggle with a poor reputation, customer service issues or other trust issues will have a harder time competing,” Ray said. “These trust issues not only manifest themselves as reviews and feedback about your brand, but they also, take the form of technical or security issues on your site.”

Ray expects that it will become increasingly difficult to receive organic visibility for YMYL (Your Money, Your Life) queries without the proper expertise and credentials to write on those topics.

Trustworthiness will be super important for publishers in 2020, said **Grace Kindred**, Junior Technical SEO Analyst, News UK.

“There will be a strong focus on quality content and fighting against fake news,” Kindred said. “It will be more important than ever to focus on the trust value of authors (verifying authors and showing their authority for particular subjects) and sites as a whole.”

According to **Loren Baker**, Founder, Search Engine Journal, opening up nofollow as a hint was an attempt by Google to better understand the sources of news stories, the sources, and references in large papers and academic study.

“Match that with the credentials of the author (which can be defined by structured data markup) and any fact-checking oriented schema, and we have an easier way for Google to weigh authority and trustworthiness of a piece of content, whether a news or publishing story,” Baker said.

Put simply: The offline is coming online, said **Jason Barnard**, Owner, Kalicube.pro. Every business needs to find its unfair advantage.

“With entity-based search, the Knowledge Graph and the rise of E-A-T, our capacity to create an accurate and convincing online representation of our offline world will become a major differentiating factor,” Barnard said. “All those offline events, conferences, awards, partnerships, etc. that Google cannot see suddenly take on enormous importance. Pull them online and push them to Google to feed its need for understanding and credibility.”

Alexis Sanders, SEO Senior Manager, Merkle, shared a few ways to have a digitally-based competitive advantage:

- Supply chain excellence (e.g., delivering within 2-days (or less) with relevant status updates).
- Customer service (e.g., ability to answer the user’s question with minimal friction).
- Digital charisma / branding (e.g., Having users seek you out, because they want to do business with you? Do most of your reviews look more like love letters?).
- User experience (e.g., is your experience more convenient / useful / simple?).
- Price.
- Niche products.



4 UX & TECHNICAL SEO

The biggest trend that smart SEO professionals should focus on in 2020 for greater success is UX – user experience, according to **Brock Murray**, Co-founder, seoplus+.

“This includes the overall experience from the initial interaction in the SERPs, to the overall landing page experience, and even the experience after they leave your site (think remarketing, drip campaigns, personalization for returning users),” Murray said. “Think about how you can help your users have the best possible experience while truly pondering what value you can provide to them during their visit. ”

Technical SEO is a key piece of the UX discussion, according to Goode.

“While I believe Google will do a lot to compensate for our site’s own poor technical foundations (e.g., canonical corrections, hreflang corrections, etc.), it’s going to become increasingly more important for SEOs to focus on shoring up their technical foundations,” Goode said. “I don’t think it’s accidental that Martin Splitt spends as much time as he does promoting good technical best practices from Google’s perspective. We should consider that a signal in and of itself.”

When we talk about technical SEO and UX, you have to talk about site speed and page speed.

Dan Taylor, SEO Account Director, SALT.agency, noted that Google has reinvigorated discussions and focus around site speed, with the new Chrome “slow warning badges,” and the speed reports in Google Search Console.

“This for many will reignite conversations with developers and in some cases lead to systems requiring almost complete redesigns of page templates and reengineering of how assets are loaded,” Taylor said.

Going further in the technical realm, **Aleyda Solis**, International SEO Consultant & Founder, Orinti, expects to see a further shift to a more technical SEO ecosystem, fueled by more JavaScript frameworks usage, PWAs, and a need for SEO automation for bigger websites.

“This already started since a few years ago but has become far more obvious this year,” Solis said. “In 2020, it will only get bigger with the popularization of JS frameworks, app first businesses that will also more strongly shift to the web due to the benefits of PWAs, and the need for SEO task automation for bigger sites where machine learning with Python can provide a solution.”



5 MOBILE SEO

Surprised to see mobile SEO as an important 2020 trend? Don't be. As Wright put it:

“Almost every prospect coming into our shop has a mobile site that is a mess,” Wright said. “To survive in 2020, you need to implement 2017 tactics and fix your mobile.”

What's that mean?

“Build sites for mobile-first, then make them compatible for desktop,” Kindred said. “That way those sites don't have to be optimized for speed after launch.

Kris Jones, Founder / CEO, LSEO.com, said if you don't have a mobile-friendly and mobile-optimized website, you need to take action immediately. You can't wait any longer.

“All of your online reporting must reflect insights into your mobile performance as a priority,” Jones said. “Instead of visualizing a person sitting at a desktop computer you have to realize that most of the time people will find your website via a mobile device.”

But mobile SEO doesn't stop there. Study the mobile SERPs.

“SEOs need to be looking at real, mobile search results, to know what they are up against, what kind of traffic they can expect, and what kind of optimization will actually be successful at impacting the bottom line,” said **Cindy Krum**, CEO, MobileMoxie



6 STRUCTURED DATA

We know high-quality content will be important in 2020. However, algorithms still don't fully understand context.

So we need to give search engines "hints" to better understand and deliver results, based on a searcher's intent, said **Jeremy Knauff**, CEO, Spartan Media.

"This means [structuring the data](#) in a way that helps search engines to better understand not only what is on a page, but also how each element relates to other elements on the page, and how that page relates to other pages within the website," Knauff said.

Ultimately, you want to be understood, found by your customers through any channel and be well-positioned to take advantage of future features from Google and other structured data consumers like Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft, and AI Chatbots, said **Martha van Berkel**, CEO, Schema App.

“Done right, structured data becomes your marketing data layer,” van Berkel said. “It will allow you to publish your content for any machine/search engine/voice assistant/chatbot with context to provide service to your customers across any surface and at any moment of interaction.

“Smart SEOs will start leveraging their structured data to enhance their analytics so that they can gauge what part of their content is driving results and use this data to influence content strategy, marketing strategy, product features and more, across their companies,” she added.

Also, don’t assume that because you marked up all the most common data in early 2019, you are good, said **Shelly Fagin**, SEO, Highly Searched / Brand Ambassador, SEMrush.

“New types of markup are continuously being added or improved upon,” Fagin said. “I also expect to see a lot more manual penalties related to poor implementations of structured data. Don’t automatically trust some plugin you’ve installed to structure your data correctly.”



7

ENTITY & KNOWLEDGE GRAPH OPTIMIZATION

The search of the future increasingly is about real-world objects, said **Bill Slawski**, Director of SEO Research, Go Fish Digital.

“Google is finding ways to include entity related information in search results through things such as augmentation queries,” Slawski said. “You can optimize entities that your site is about by doing things such as optimizing those for Google’s Knowledge Graph and making sure that they appear in Knowledge Panels.”

As pointed out by **Greg Gifford**, VP of Search, SearchLab Chicago, local search is the forefront of entity-based search, so everyone should pay attention to what’s happening in this space.

“Local SEO has been entity-based for years – you’ve always been able to rank local businesses even if they don’t have a website,” Gifford said. “Google is tracking real-world visits already and recently received a patent for using ‘quality visits’ as a ranking signal.”

Dixon Jones, Founder, DHJ Ventures, said you need to tie large amounts of your cornerstone content to definite entities, which Google either recognizes or doesn’t. Writing around semantically close entities helps to better answer user journeys not just through better content, but also content that Google can see will be a good result.



“I think in 2020, internal linking will come to the fore, but again based around things, not strings,” Jones said. “Understanding the unique knowledge graph our web presence makes will empower us to be able to link those concepts together better within the content under our control, to the benefit of users and crawlers alike.”

Want your brand or business be seen as an entity? Here’s some advice from **Alina Benny**, SEO & Content Lead, Nextiva:

“If you publish original industry reports, compile new expert advice, and are among one of the dominant voices in the market, Google will start seeing you as an entity,” Benny said. “It’s these entity-related signals that are going to help you keep ranking.”



8

LINK BUILDING & BRAND BUILDING

Want to acquire top-tier links in 2020? **Shannon McGuirk**, Head of PR and Content, Aira Digital, said it's time to move link building from the dark ages into a consumer-first approach for 2020.

That means focusing on three types of journalistic writing:

- Planned editorial: Topics that are covered by journalists every single year at a given point (e.g., Black Friday, Valentine’s Day).
- Planned reactive editorial: Features written by journalists on a topic that ties to a seasonal event or theme that we know is being covered due to time frame, but we don’t know the exact story until editors or journalists write it on the morning of their editorial meeting.
- Reactive editorial: Features written in the here and now that are unplanned and can’t be predicted and are dictated due to a news story breaking.

Carrie Rose, Co-founder / Creative Director, Rise at Seven, said link building will be more about brand building in 2020.

“The responsibility will fall on SEOs to build links and media placements that drive traffic and push brand, not just links that help with search rankings,” Rose said. “Now our link building activity has to be on-brand, or there’s a realistic chance that there won’t be any brand-building activity at all.”

Building a brand people trust and want to do business with is essential, according to **Casie Gillette**, Senior Director of Digital Marketing, KoMarketing.

“Customers are getting smarter and they expect more when it comes to marketing,” Gillette said. “The more they trust you, the more they are willing to share your content (links), talk about you (value), and buy your products (revenue).”



9

FOCUS ON VISIBILITY, NOT JUST BLUE LINKS

Zero-click searches have been a big reality in 2019. [On-SERP](#)
[SEO](#) will only continue to grow in importance in 2020.

Thus, adapting to zero-click searches will be key, according to **Cyrus Shepard**, Founder, Zyppy.

“More and more brand marketing is happening on Google itself, and not necessarily on your website,” Shepard said. “Smart marketers will need to learn how to adapt and take advantage of this by getting more strategic about the information shown in search snippets.

Shepard said this includes basic tactics to increase actual clicks over impressions, such as featured snippet optimization, using newer schemas (e.g., FAQ and HowTo), image targeting, and favicon optimization.

But it’s more than just zero-click searches we need to plan for in 2020. We need to optimize for much more than blue links, Krum said.

“Ranking number 1 under a Knowledge Graph, Found on the Web or a Featured Snippet is different than ranking number 1 without those things,” Krum said. “Similarly, even if you are not in Position 1, ranking just below a People Also Ask result or Interesting Finds will not get as much traffic, because those things look better and thus, drive more clicks in the search result.

“Further, I think we will continue to see more localization in search results, with more Map Packs, News and Events ranking and taking clicks from traditional organic rankings,” she added.



10 PROGRAMMING

In 2020, you should tap into programming languages like Python and R to eliminate your most time-consuming and redundant tasks, according to **Britney Muller**, Senior SEO Scientist, Moz.

SEO automation will free you up to harness the power of marketing fundamentals:

- Branding.
- Creating great customer experiences.
- Storytelling.
- Speaking your customer's language.
- Listening to your target market & providing thoughtful/timely responses.
- Providing easy to consume content (in the way in which your users want it).
- Being human.

As **Paul Shapiro**, Head of SEO, Catalyst, put it: Programming makes SEOs better SEOs. And we're starting to really see increased adoption.

“There are real advantages to moving beyond Excel for analysis. It permits a more sophisticated analysis of your own data, as well as the ability to:

- Incorporate other data sources for insights.
- Apply machine learning to solve complex problems.

Make decisions that normally would be difficult and require human input (for which there is limited time to provide human input).”

WANT MORE SEO TRENDS & INSIGHTS FOR 2019?

This only scratches the surface of what you'll find in our new ebook, *The Biggest SEO Trends of 2020, According to 58 Experts*. Ready for more?

You'll get more uncensored and unfiltered insights and tips straight from these SEO experts on how to succeed at SEO in 2020:



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LOREN BAKER



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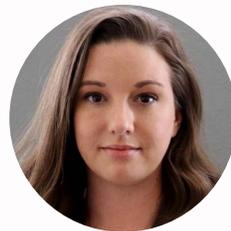
DAVE DAVIES



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ELI SCHWARTZ



DAN SHURE



GRANT SIMMONS



BILL SLAWSKI



ALEYDA SOLIS



KELLY STANZE



DAN TAYLOR



MARTHA VAN BERKEL



TONY WRIGHT

AREEJ ABUALI

SEO MANAGER, ZOOPLA

As new regulations are coming out to meet accessibility requirements, there will be a major focus on making the web more accessible and open for all.

Everything from tags, semantic HTML, color contrast, resizable text, navigation, image optimization, transcriptions and assistive technology aid will be vital.

Accessibility should no longer be an afterthought. In fact, it can enhance your SEO efforts (and sales) because it's good for any of your users with disabilities.



LOREN BAKER

**FOUNDER,
SEARCH ENGINE JOURNAL**

AUTHORSHIP & FACT-CHECKING

Opening up NoFollow as a hint was an attempt by Google to better understand the sources of news stories, the sources, and references in large papers and academic study.

Match that with the credentials of the author (which can be defined by structured data markup) and any fact-checking oriented schema, and we have an easier way for Google to weigh authority and trustworthiness of a piece of content, whether a news or publishing story.

CONVERSION-ORIENTED CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketing which drives a sale, signup, response, action... etc. or is a defined part of the funnel, and not living on an island.

I whole-heartedly believe that micro-conversion tracking will be part of how Google measures audience interest (eventually via ChromeUX) and other methods.



JASON BARNARD

OWNER, KALICUBE.PRO

KNOWLEDGE GRAPH

Google's Knowledge Graph is the rather elephant in the room breaking all the china ;) It is going to change search out of all recognition.

If you want to get an idea of where it is taking search, just fire up Google Maps and start searching.

Google Maps is a functioning Knowledge Graph that can solve geo-spatial problems in real-time.

The rest of search is heading that way. Fast.



ENTITY-BASED SEARCH

Without doubt, entity-based search is key to 2020 and beyond. If you are in local SEO, then you already know how it works.

If you aren't, then get a crash course from someone in the local SEO crew (Greg Gifford, Mike Blumenthal, Andy Simpson, Claire Carlile...) - they have been doing entity-based search for years and are the best people to ask about how this is likely to pan out.

DELIVERABILITY

Google is increasingly delivering chunks of content directly to the SERP (think featured snippets, video, images, Tweets, etc). Optimizing for deliverability is going to be vital.

At its core, deliverability means presenting content in a Fraggles (fragment with a handle - thanks Cindy Krum) and in the format that is best suited to the user, the query and the context (including user preference).

Importantly, that format will increasingly be multimedia (using that word in the loosest sense), so our content strategy will need to include more and more video, lists, tabular data, images, sound files, etc.

THE SLOW DEATH OF THE BLUE LINK

As Google SERPs become increasingly multimedia, and as rich elements increasingly dominate the SERP (see [Darwinism in search](#)), blue links have gradually been losing their importance. That is set to continue, so thinking “beyond the blue link” becomes essential.

The knee jerk reaction of writing a blog post and competing for a blue link is less and less likely to be the tactic that will win the game.

We will increasingly need to create richer content that we multi-purpose to efficiently satisfy the user’s needs within their specific context (type of query, device, internet speed, user consumption preference, etc.)

This could still be a blog post, of course, but increasingly it will be video, lists, tabular data, images, sound files, etc.

Overcome the demise of the blue link by thinking multimedia and multi-purposing.

BRINGING THE OFFLINE ONLINE

The offline is coming online! With entity-based search, the Knowledge Graph and the rise of E-A-T, our capacity to create an accurate and convincing online representation of our offline world will become a major differentiating factor.

All those offline events, conferences, awards, partnerships, etc. that Google cannot see suddenly take on enormous importance.

Pull them online and push them to Google to feed its need for understanding and credibility.

Link Building That Will Survive All of Google's 2020 Algorithm Updates

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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MANAGER



Google's algorithm is constantly changing, adapting, and getting smarter.

As they collect more information from their users, they can fine-tune how they show results, meeting their mission of "organizing the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR LINK BUILDING?

We know that Google plans on continuing to use backlinks as a way to show authority. However, they are continually adding [filters to their algorithm](#) to make sure their results are as accurate as possible.

So, as Google's filters get smarter through machine learning and AI, the quality and relevancy of link building efforts will only matter more and more.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It means link building will continue to play an important role in Google's ranking factors. But, the content around those backlinks and the relevancy of sites they are coming from are more important than ever.

Link building is a long-game strategy that will produce long-term results.

SO HOW SHOULD YOU BUILD LINKS IN 2020?

Through keyword-focused, consumer-centric content.

The following is our surefire method to build high-quality, white-hat backlinks.

Focus on Guest Posting

Writing blogs and articles for other people's websites is a great way to build high-quality, relevant links now and into the new year.

Guest posting is great because it allows you to have control over the anchor text which, as we know, is extremely important for improving overall keyword strategy.

Being able to ensure that your anchor text is relevant to your backlink helps to improve your overall keyword strategy.

Another great benefit of guest posting is that it allows you to target specific websites that meet your custom metrics. This means that you will only post content on sites that you trust (see the outreach section to know what metrics to be checking).

Lastly, guest posting is incredibly natural-looking to Google, so you can count on your backlinking efforts improving your site's overall rankings.

But that doesn't mean that guest posting doesn't come with its own set of challenges.

The downside is that this process takes time and it can be difficult to establish relationships with relevant publishers and bloggers.

In addition to time and resources, you need to always think three steps ahead regarding your content strategy.

Not only do you need to create an article that brings value to the site you're posting to, but you need to make sure that the page it is linking to (on your website) is also optimized.

This requires keyword research and content optimization to ensure that the links that you build, hand-in-hand with your optimized website, will move the needle and get you to rank higher.

None of this is to say that guest posting isn't worth your time.

It definitely is.

In fact, by some estimations, guest posting is **5X** more effective than creating new content for your blog.

So it may take some time, it may take some forethought, and it will require a custom strategy, but ultimately guest posting is a search-friendly tactic that pays off.

Use Keyword Research to Determine Your Link Building Strategy

Keyword research is vital in almost all SEO strategies, including link building.

By identifying [the best keywords](#) for your company and industry, you can determine what type of content to create, where to publish it, and how to get the most authoritative backlinks to your site.

While conducting your keyword research, you'll want to get an idea for the monthly search volumes those keywords carry (you can find this information using a site like Ahrefs).

Comparing monthly search volumes and the difficulty of ranking for those keywords can help you nail down your strategy. Once you have your strategy, make sure the landing page you are trying to rank is optimized for that keyword.

Additionally, do some [extra legwork and determine how many backlinks](#) your competitors have to gain a better idea of how many links you should be building.

Remember, the more optimized your page is for the keyword you're trying to rank for, the higher your chances are for ranking on the first page for that keyword.

Ultimately, You can build as many backlinks as you want, but if your landing page isn't optimized those links will do little to nothing. Your strategy is only as strong as the on-page content you'll be linking to.

Take a look at you and your competitors' backlinks and determine the quality of those links.

Are they spammy, low-quality links built in an attempt to game Google's algorithm for short-term "wins" or are they high-quality links that are passing good authority?

In the end, the quality of your backlinks is more important than the quantity.

Once you've analyzed all of these different elements in your keyword research, it's time to develop your strategy, create content, and start working on outreach.

Think through the entire process, because it has to be planned out from start to finish.

You have to find keywords that walk that line between high-traffic volume, a relatively low difficulty, and keywords relevant to your product or service.

Ultimately, we want to provide the searcher a solution to their problem.

Start Working on Outreach for Your Guest Posts

Outreach is the process of finding blogs in your niche that will accept your content. This process is very time consuming and focused on building relationships. I recommend using project management software (like Streak) for outreach.

Almost all of your link building efforts will require outreach. Because it is so time-consuming, you want to have backlinks from websites that are relevant to your industry or niche that also have good metrics to pass authority.

The following are some great [metrics](#) to use to determine a quality website:

- Indexed regularly
- DoFollow links
- Relevant organic keywords
- Organic traffic 500+
- Not a PBN
- No Payment Required to Post

If you make sure the sites you are posting to follow all of the above guidelines, the backlinks will pass authority to your website and can limit your possibility of getting penalized.

These metrics will help make sure that none of your outreach work will be in vain.

Make Content a Focus Throughout the Link Building Experience

When you're building out your link building strategy, the content has to take a starring role in the process. If guest posting drives traffic to your site, then the content is what will keep them there.

And poor content leads to a higher bounce rate which tells Google you shouldn't be ranking for that term in the first place.

This content-focused approach starts with keyword research. As you get the list of keywords that you want to rank for, start planning out your on-page content strategy.

From there, you can start to develop your outreach plan, focusing on relevant sites in your niche. Make sure that your guest posts are high quality.

Think of this as an exchange, you are giving them content, they are giving you a backlink.

Have a Link Building Action Plan

Now that we've gone over the most important parts of a link building strategy and how to go about planning your strategy, here are the actionable items broken up into on- and off-page SEO:

ON-PAGE

- Start with keyword research.
- Once you've determined your target keywords, focus on your on-page content.
- Make sure that the content you create is focused on the user intent for the keywords that you're targeting.

OFF-PAGE

- Now that your on-page SEO is optimized, it's time for outreach.
- When vetting sites, check the above metrics to ensure that building links from those sites will pass authority.
- Verify that the site is relevant in your niche before building any links from it.

- Once you find sites that meet those metrics, it's time to start guest posting.
- Content relevancy is extremely important as you are building a partnership with the website.
- Create content that is beneficial to the website and your links will stay live for the lifetime of the site.
- As you follow this plan, you will start to see rankings increase hand-in-hand with your organic traffic.

Build your action plan taking everything we've discussed into account. Follow your plan, and regularly review the results you're seeing.

If you notice that something isn't working, then you should revisit your plan and rework it to fix the problem.

Quality Link Building Is Worth The Effort

Google will continue to refine its processes for handling link building. It will be harder and harder to get away with low-quality link-building.

The sooner we accept this fact, the sooner we can focus our time, talents, and resources on link building methods that last.

This link building strategy will take both time and effort. Guest posting does not give you quick wins.

But what it will give you is long-term, sustainable growth that's Google-friendly and customer-centered.

If you haven't taken the time to develop a proper link building strategy, now is the time to start.

ALINA BENNY

SEO & CONTENT LEAD, NEXTIVA

LOSING TRAFFIC BECAUSE OF THE NO-CLICK RESULTS & SERP FEATURES? NAIL YOUR BRANDED + NAVIGATIONAL CONTENT

Here's why: While Google can take away SERP real estate from you, you're still the most relevant result for anything brand-related or navigational.

So, optimize those high-volume, low-difficulty pages:

- Build authority around brand pages - high-DA backlinks, internal linking, easy navigation and UX (forms, CTAs, copy), and schema.
- Start with your login pages or gateway pages and then optimize your product pages for, say, an easy checkout.



YOUR NEW CONTENT STRATEGIST MIGHT BE COSTING YOU TRAFFIC OR CONTENT STRATEGISTS NEED TO GET SEO IN 2020

Ever looked up the job description for a Content Strategist? Most often, it has vague asks like “knowledge of web development technologies.”

Instead, imagine you only hired content strategists who are familiar keyword research, on-page SEO, and most importantly search intent.

What are you saving? Hours spent building long content briefs or slapping SEO onto copy that doesn't match user signals in the first place.

DO MORE OF THE THINGS YOU CAN'T SCALE

How's this relevant in SEO? It comes back to the classic quality vs. quantity debate. Invest more time and money into content that's unique to you.

If you publish original industry reports, compile new expert advice, and are among one of the dominant voices in the market, Google will start seeing you as an entity.

It's these entity-related signals that are going to help you keep ranking. Your competitors can't simply swipe these rankings from you. So, let's get rolling on those things you can't scale!

USE NEED-STATE RESEARCH TO ALIGN YOUR SEO & PPC EFFORTS

Marketers have a habit of putting buyers into buckets way too soon.

It's just ToFu, MoFu, or BoFu, right? So, you serve ad or website copy that is a direct mapping across this funnel.

Wrong.

Think with Google gives a fantastic example [with their "near me" searches](#). While most of these queries look identical, they fall into different parts of the buyer's journey.

How much time are you spending on understanding these identical queries in your industry?

This is where you go beyond your obvious branded search terms and dig into the longer-tail keywords in your vertical.

Then, map this to the need-state of the buyer and serve content that aligns with this.

TAYLOR BERG

**SR. ASSOCIATE,
ORGANIC SEARCH, MINDSHARE**



LEVERAGE NEW GOOGLE FEATURES & TOOLS

Tactic: Product data submission via Google Merchant / Manufacturer Center for featured snippet optimization.

In 2019, Google provided retailers with an abundance of [new features](#) to support product data submission and reporting.

Features such as the Products report in Search Console, as well as the new Merchant and Manufacturer Centers, were some of Google's biggest search enhancements of the year.

In 2020, we should expect to see more SEOs making use of Google Merchant and Manufacturer Center as their main route for sending product data to Google.

By sending product data via feed, this allows Google to accept data in real-time, which in turn ensures immediate accuracy of product information on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP).

Google recently opened the Merchant and Manufacturer Centers to allow all marketers to leverage this functionality for their businesses - completely free of charge (not unlike many other useful Google SEO tools).

The only requirement is to create a Merchant Center account and submit a feed to participate: it's really that easy!

Now that these free features are open for all to use, I think it's safe to say that the process of product optimization is about to change.

Gone are the days of simply adding schema markup to your product pages to optimize for featured snippets.

SEO's and marketers should expect to see feed submission as the new standard of sending product data to Google as part of their featured snippet strategies.

ASHLEY BERMAN HALE



**DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SEO CONSULTING,
DEEPCRAWL**

Spend time on your site every day, preferably on mobile and on a slow network.

Spend time in your data, there are stories there waiting for you to unravel them.

Remember there are humans behind every algorithm, tool, and mistake.

Scream into the void when you need to.

And be good for goodness' sake!

Optimizing for Maximum SERP Visibility

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



FULL SERVICE INTERNET MARKETING & TOOLS

JIM BOYKIN
ANN SMARTY



Search engine optimization (SEO) isn't dead, but it has evolved.

The focus isn't just SEO anymore: It's SERP (search engine results page) marketing, specifically within Google.

More than 90% of Web search volume occurs within Google (including Google Images), and less than half of those searches now result in a click, according to Jumpshot's [2019 "Google Uncensored" report](#). Why?

Featured snippets, "people also ask" results, images, and videos all dominate Page 1 for an increasing number of search queries, and that trend doesn't seem to be slowing down anytime soon.

Just in the past two years, we've seen SERP features grow at a tremendous rate, as shown in these figures reported by [Mozcast](#):

	January 2018	October 2018	October 2019	~ 2 Year Growth
Featured Snippets	14%	14%	16%	+ 14%
People Also Ask	30%	58%	91%	+ 203%
Images	14%	19%	23%	+ 64%
Videos	11%	24%	24%	+ 118%

Take the phrase “burial insurance” as an example. At the time of this writing (November 2019), on a mobile device, searching for this phrase in Google turns up 18 things a user can click on before reaching the #1 organic result. These include:

- Four images
- One featured snippet
- Four additional snippet drop-downs
- Four “people also ask” results
- Four “interesting finds”
- One link to “10+ more stories”

A more transactional query, “garden sheds,” produces a very similar result and also includes three local results on top of the 15+ other clickable options before reaching the #1 organic result.

If you’re not optimizing for all of that real estate, you’re missing out on one of the biggest SEO opportunities heading into 2020.

The quickly changing SEO landscape calls for new tactics and more integrated approaches. Here are some of the things you should be doing to dominate Google search results pages.

Diversify Your Content Marketing Tactics

This will help you on two fronts:

1. You'll be able to rank in more of Google's search elements than just the blue organic links and generate brand visibility through video and image carousels.
2. You'll be able to discover and use more channels to build traffic from.

Any time you work on a new content asset, come up with ideas to repackage it into more content formats. For example:

- **CREATE VIDEO TAKEAWAYS:** Tools like Lumen5 and Wave.video make it incredibly easy to turn text content into quick, engaging videos. This will help you maintain a consistent YouTube presence as well as grab more organic ranking opportunities, including in video carousels.
- **VISUALIZE STEPS IN FLOWCHARTS AND GRAPHS:** Tools like Visme and Venngage help you create visual tutorials by using their many templates. No design skills are required. Furthermore, infographics still make great linkable assets, so if you keep doing this consistently, you may attract more organic links.

Optimize for Featured Snippets

Due to their prominent placement, featured snippets are key to organic search presence.

On top of that, getting featured brings voice search visibility, as a featured snippet is what a smart device will generally read in response to a voice search query.

According to multiple studies, 99% of featured snippets already rank in the top 10 of Google, with most of them ranking #1 organically.

So if you are already ranking high for related search queries, you have very good chances to get featured.

This means that the first step to getting featured is to rank higher, which means that organic positions are still important.

RESEARCH YOUR KEYWORDS

When performing keyword research with featured snippets in mind:

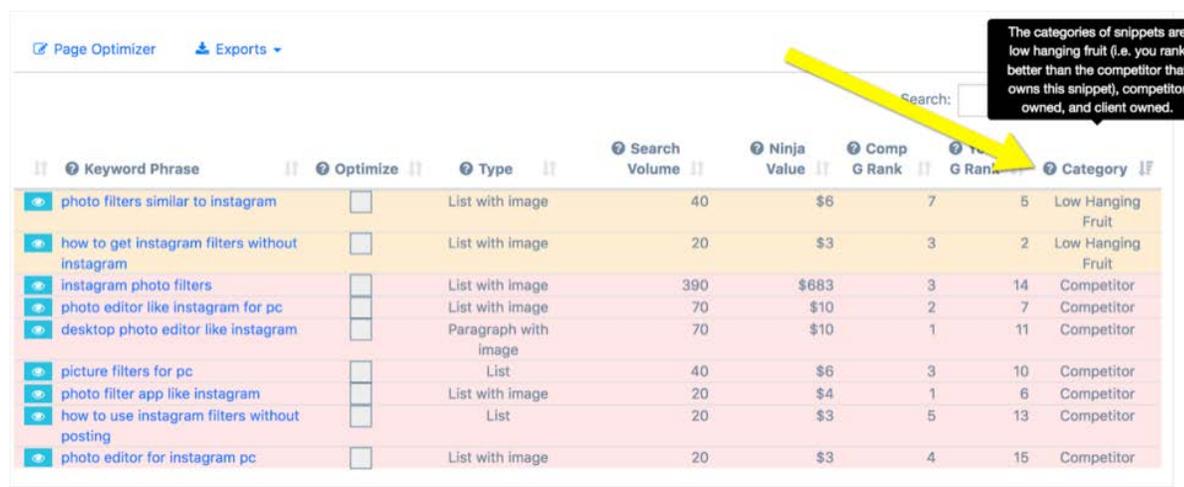
- Start with question-type search queries (those containing question words, like “what,” “why,” “how,” etc.) because these are the easiest to identify.

● Target informational intent, not just questions. While featured snippets aim to answer the user's question immediately, question-type queries are not the only ones that trigger featured results. According to an Ahrefs [study](#), the vast majority of keywords that trigger featured snippets are long-tail queries with no question words in them.

UNCOVER YOUR CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

Your lowest-hanging fruit are the phrases you already rank highly for. These will be the easiest to get featured for after you optimize your content for SERP features (more on this below).

The [Featured Snippets+ Tool](#) helps you identify your own featured snippet opportunities by going through your top rankings and showing you where you have the highest odds to get featured:



Keyword Phrase	Optimize	Type	Search Volume	Ninja Value	Comp G Rank	T G Rank	Category
photo filters similar to instagram	<input type="checkbox"/>	List with image	40	\$6	7	5	Low Hanging Fruit
how to get instagram filters without instagram	<input type="checkbox"/>	List with image	20	\$3	3	2	Low Hanging Fruit
instagram photo filters	<input type="checkbox"/>	List with image	390	\$683	3	14	Competitor
photo editor like instagram for pc	<input type="checkbox"/>	List with image	70	\$10	2	7	Competitor
desktop photo editor like instagram	<input type="checkbox"/>	Paragraph with image	70	\$10	1	11	Competitor
picture filters for pc	<input type="checkbox"/>	List	40	\$6	3	10	Competitor
photo filter app like instagram	<input type="checkbox"/>	List with image	20	\$4	1	6	Competitor
how to use instagram filters without posting	<input type="checkbox"/>	List	20	\$3	5	13	Competitor
photo editor for instagram pc	<input type="checkbox"/>	List with image	20	\$3	4	15	Competitor

(Low-hanging-fruit featured snippet opportunities are those Google queries where you rank higher than your featured competitor. These are usually easy to snatch: You just need to address that exact query in your copy!)

On top of that, the [Featured Snippets+ Tool](#) helps you:

- Find “people also ask” and “searches related to” opportunities.
- See images and videos that show up in Google searches for your important queries.

The tool also includes a page optimizer that helps you optimize your content for all kinds of existing organic opportunities (including featured snippets, “people also ask,” images, videos, etc.).

AIM TO ANSWER EACH QUESTION CONCISELY

Generally, Google prefers to feature an answer that’s given within one paragraph.

A [study](#) by A.J. Ghergich showed that the average length of a paragraph snippet is 45 words (the maximum is 97 words), so let that be your guideline as to how long each answer should be in order to get featured.

To adjust your writing style just a bit:

- Ask the question behind a target query in your article (this should be an h2/h3 subheading).
- Immediately follow the question with a one-paragraph answer.
- Elaborate further in the article.

Most importantly, be factual and organize content well. Google loves numbers, steps, and lists. We've seen this again and again:

More often than not, answer boxes will list the actual ingredients, number of steps, time to cook, year and city of birth, etc.

MAKE SURE ONE ARTICLE ANSWERS MANY SIMILAR QUESTIONS

In their research of featured snippets, Ahrefs found that once a page gets featured, it's likely to get featured for lots of similar queries. This means it should be structured and worded to address a lot of related questions.

Google is very good at determining synonymous and closely related questions, so you should be, too. There's no point in creating a separate page answering each specific question.

Turn Your Site into THE Destination

You cannot win the SEO game by chasing existing opportunities. You need a high-level, long-term strategy for turning your site into a niche knowledge hub.

Creating truly informative and useful content is still the key to organic visibility. The difference is that you need to really become strategic about your informative content creation.

Here are a few steps to creating an effective content strategy:

- Research niche queries and questions to understand your target customers' struggles.
- Organize those queries based on goals and further actions.
- Get content created through collaborating with niche influencers and/or creating a content team.
- Create more than text content to engage your visitors, get found through more channels, and capture more ranking opportunities.
- Create a content editorial calendar to keep your team organized.
- Create a conversion optimization strategy to convert your content readers.

The future of SEO is challenging, but where there is a challenge, there is an opportunity. Organic visibility is still key to online growth.

It's the signals and opportunities that are changing. Google can tell real authority and true quality, so focusing on those is the only way to create a long-term organic search presence.

The future of SEO is embracing more integrated approaches, creating diverse content, and focusing on higher-quality, customer-centric content.

Core Updates, Rankings & Bringing It All Together

As noted earlier, ranking well organically is still a requirement to capture visibility for a variety of these SERP features. If you don't have the basics in place, it will be difficult to compete for SERP visibility in 2020.

Google has rolled out 3 core updates in 2019 (so far) and various other unconfirmed updates that were heavily noticed by the search marketing community.

Every time there's an update, we as marketers try and figure out what changed, who was affected, and what we need to do in order to stay ahead of the curve.

Was it content? Links? Mobile experience?

The reality is the more things change, the more they stay the same, and so the advice is always the same:

- “You need better links and a disavow.”
- “You need better content.”
- “Be more trusted, it’s all about E-A-T.”
- “No, it’s Your Money or Your Life (YMYL).”
- “You need a better and faster mobile site.”

If your site isn’t ranking well organically, you’ll first need to focus on core ranking signals including those listed above to become eligible for most SERP features and snippet opportunities.

From there, you can use the tactics and tools mentioned throughout this guide to build a content strategy designed to identify and capture the best ranking opportunities for your website, maximizing your SERP visibility and dominating Page 1 of Google in 2020.

For more information on optimizing for SERP features, visit <https://www.internetmarketingninjas.com/tools/resources/>

ANDY BETTS

**C-LEVEL ADVISOR AND
CHIEF MARKETING CONSULTANT**

I think the biggest trend we will see in 2020 is the elevation of SEO into broader digital marketing roles.

SEO is no longer a silo or a side project for a digital marketing campaign. It is front and center of marketing campaigns offering insights into paid media, social media, display, and email marketing.

AI is empowering both digital marketers and SEOs with real-time insights into the customer at scale and intelligent automation is helping them keep pace with change and respond with precision and speed.



If utilized correctly, this can have a massive impact on digital marketing campaigns beyond just chasing a specific SERP position.

The lines between the role of a digital marketer and an SEO may blur a little as voice search and visual search provide more opportunities than ever for marketers to be dynamic with the content they create and the digital experiences they help deliver.

2020 could be the year that SEO changes forever and becomes the go-to channel for understanding the customer and aligning cross channel digital campaigns.

Whether the industry as a whole evolves is all dependent upon how people embrace AI and automation (the billion-dollar question for SEO in 2020) in particular and how they view their career path - to sit still in the sandbox or to stand up and evolve.

FABRICE CANEL

PRINCIPAL PROGRAM MANAGER, BING

REAL-TIME CONTENT INDEXING TO SATISFY SEO NEEDS FOR NEW GENERATIONS

It's safe to say that the SEO community should intensify their focus on generating fresh, relevant new content, or updating content, matching the queries of the day for anyone who is seeking the latest trends, latest news, latest discounts, etc.

To support getting this fresh content indexed quickly, Bing is intensifying its focus on giving websites and web Content Management Systems API access to the crawler (URL submission API) allowing SEO professionals to get their content indexed as soon as they published it online.



By adopting this new paradigm, SEO professionals will sleep well, knowing that the search engines will discover and index their new or updated content in seconds, allowing them to satisfy the searches of these generations and test new content ideas.

An extra bonus is that the ability to submit updates drastically reduces the crawl traffic bandwidth needed to discover changes and there is less wasted crawl capacity.



CLAIRE CARLILE

**CHARTERED MARKETER,
CLAIRE CARLILE MARKETING**



The importance of local search in 2020 is likely to continue to grow as an increasing number of searches have local intent (mobile searches tend to be inherently local) and as brands and organizations realize the power and utility of Google My Business (GMB) for the purposes of entity management.

In local SEO, “engagement” is likely to be a key topic in the new year on a number of levels. Business owners will need to realize the power of active engagement with GMB as a platform and as a communication channel.

Google will increasingly use their own data to track and measure user engagement – giving higher prominence to businesses that are ‘winning’ in terms of quality of engagement metrics.

ENGAGEMENT WITH GMB AS A PLATFORM & AS A COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

First, business owners will need to engage with GMB as a platform.

Moz's [2018 Local Search Ranking Factors Study](#) awarded great importance to GMB signals in terms of local pack rankings, and in 2020 a business will need to fully engage with the GMB platform valuing it in terms of a hub for entity management, and as a showcase for their products and services.

New functionality (often apparently not user-tested before launch, see the [short names fiasco](#)) rolls out often, and businesses will need to:

- Take advantage of existing opportunities (Photos, Q&A, Google posts, Product Editor, Businesses short names).
- Keep an eye on new features as they emerge.

Businesses will also need to:

Actively engage with GMB as a communications channel to reach and respond to clients and potential clients.

Be responsive via GMB by requesting and responding to reviews, actively monitoring and responding to Q&A, and where possible using messaging via the GMB app.

User engagement with the GMB profile is of great importance, and businesses will need to focus on encouraging interaction, such as:

- Asking for (and responding to) reviews.
- Creating photo opportunities at their location (and encouraging customers to post their photos).

Google's Use of 'Real World' Engagement Factors

Next, we need to consider the data that Google holds about the customers, and potential customers, 'real world' engagement with a local business.

Say, for example, you've got a craving for Margarita. You search for 'best pizza near me' on Google using your mobile phone, see a great looking Italian restaurant in the local finder, you click through to their listing. You click to call straight from the SERP or you use the booking integration, and you book a table using reserve with Google. Later on that evening, you use Google Maps to navigate there,

you pay using Google Pay. You snap some pics of your meal and post them (gotta get those Local Guides points!) and then, just before you go to sleep, you leave them a glowing review on their GMB profile.

That's one helluva list of engagement data points that Google has collected!

Google already has all of the data on our entire search journey beyond the search...**



Google



Google



Google



Google



Google

*possibly *sometimes

David Mihm [called](#) it in 2017 when he predicted that the power of links as competitive difference-makers will fade over time as Google is able to ingest a broader range of engagement signals.

Now Google has access to a whole smorgasbord of those signals, and new patents such as the [Quality Visits Score](#) give us an insight into how Google can use this data in an algorithm that rewards real-world engagement over potentially more easily manipulated signals such as links.

THE GOOGLE MAPS APP — DISCOVERY & LOYALTY

In 2020, businesses that have already started to engage with strategy and tactics for local SEO in Google as a search engine, will also start to explore the Google Maps app as a discovery channel for customers and potential customers who turn to their mobile device while they're in a micro-moment, looking to do, do or buy something with a local intent.

Clever marketers are already exploring the Google Maps app in the context of it providing a social-transactional platform where they can nurture relationships and encourage repeat visits.

Perhaps in 2020, the Follow button in Google Maps will gain traction and relationship-centric marketers will manage to push their marketing messages (via the new follower offer and Google posts) straight into the For You tab of an engaged Google Maps app audience.

Time will tell!

JACKIE CHU

SEO LEAD, DROPBOX

SMALLER SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

A trend I'm seeing is a decreasing emphasis on long-standing domain or brand authority.

I think this shift started gradually with a decrease in reliance on backlink volume alone, which is why newer players and startups are starting to impressively penetrate traditionally difficult fields like law and real estate.

A common theme expressed during the Google Webmaster Conference was they want to show a diversity of results. Things like E-A-T and BERT should be able to elevate these micro-influencers in search, especially for long-tail queries improving the diversity and freshness of search results.





POSSIBLE MONETIZATION OF OTHER RICH RESULTS

As a public company, it would make sense that Google continues to find opportunities to expand their advertising footprint.

Google has been playing around with restaurant delivery in the knowledge graph for some time, so I imagine it's only a matter of time before they start testing other rich snippets for possible monetization opportunities which might mean less opportunities to rank for these organically.

BRODIE CLARK

**SEO CONSULTANT,
BRODIE CLARK CONSULTING**

In 2020, I believe we're going to see some big developments with SERP features for product-related queries.

At the beginning of this year, we saw the rollout of Organic Product Carousels (Best Products, Popular Products and Similar Products) in the U.S., with further expansion coming very soon.

These features work quite differently compared to your standard organic results. They use structured data and also feeds through Merchant Center and Manufacturer Center.

No other organic SERP features work in this way, and there's plenty of room for Google to expand on this even further. This is why I think ecommerce SEO is really going to evolve over the next year and SEOs are going to have to adapt and learn new skills.

Keep an eye on the Organic Product Carousel space. And in the meantime, make sure your products feeds are set up correctly in preparation.



ANNA CROWE

**ASSISTANT EDITOR,
SEARCH ENGINE JOURNAL**



There is one thing that has been and will continue to be the lifeblood of SEO: Content.

Content affects everything in SEO. From your site structure and internal linking strategy to the types of links you build.

With BERT's NLP, we know that Google understands the meaning of language. It's vital to provide answers to consumer queries to meet search intent.

This means that intent-driven, long-tail, hyper-targeted content will be like the peanut butter to your PB&J sandwich.

As Google continues to introduce new schema, using structured data will be vital to organic traffic as they reinforce the textual content on all your pages.

DAVE DAVIES

CEO, BEANSTALK INTERNET MARKETING

There are two core trends I'll be watching in 2020. One for its impact in the year, and one in preparation for 2021 onward.

The biggest trend I'll be watching for its direct impact on the year isn't machine learning. We can already see where that's going and while it'll continue to push the boundaries of what's possible from a search engine perspective, what it will accomplish in the short term is fairly predictable.

No, the biggest area I will be monitoring in 2020 is the continued march forward of featured snippets, Knowledge Panels and other setups that keep users in the increasingly walled garden that is Google.



I suspect we're going to see a focus on areas that will target consumers that would have gone to Amazon specifically.

We'll also see a lot of larger pushes into verticals.

For beyond 2020, I'm going to be watching with great interest what acquisitions Google makes in the device space, and how they start integrating it into search targeting.

Part of this is that I think 2020 is going to be the year where we truly set the stage for voice, and where the pieces start to fall into place for the inter-connectivity of devices and by extension a far broader targeting and use capabilities.

I have a hunch we're going to start seeing Bing gain a bit of ground (but that's a hunch and not something I can see evidence of).

The legal battles Google is finding itself in, as well as the assault their bottom line is facing from Amazon, may potentially keep the two giants engaged and distracted, leaving openings for market share gains by smaller rivals - and Bing is well-positioned to take advantage of that.



FRÉDÉRIC DUBUT

SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER, BING

Recent advances in natural language processing (NLP), driven by deep learning and large language models, have search engines one step closer to their ultimate goal: providing users with high quality and relevant content that they can trust.

There's no sign of NLP and deep learning research slowing down anytime soon, and you can expect search engines to shift even further from keywords to intent in 2020.

One of the most exciting things we'll see next year is the first-class support of dozens of languages by these large language models, including rare languages for which training data availability is an issue.

While these models have been historically biased towards English, efforts to transfer all this intelligence and concept understanding to other languages are showing a lot of promise.

On the other hand, as these models become more and more complex, they will also require more human supervision to make sure they are not reinforcing systematic biases learned from training data.

Search engines will also need to address new kinds of spam that haven't been invented yet, and they will need to bring clarity to the SEO community when it comes to acceptable uses of these large language models for content generation, or "deep machine-generated content".

There are some key implications for SEO. The most obvious one is that keyword research, at least as we know it, is going to become obsolete.

Both practitioners and tooling providers will need to shift their efforts towards "intent research" and fulfilling user needs.

On the other hand, as machines get better and 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.

ERIC ENGE

**GENERAL MANAGER,
PERFICIENT DIGITAL**



For me, the clear leader in terms of big trends is the continuing evolution of Google and how we all respond to it. The algorithm updates that started in March 2018 saw a clear drive by Google to improve their understanding of the likely user intent for a given search query as well as the ability of sites/pages to meet not only the immediate needs implied by that intent, but the associated follow-on needs and questions related to that intent.

In addition, the ongoing explosion of new search features continues to reshape the organic search landscape. The number of traditional blue link results available on a page continues to decline.

How we respond to these trends will define our ability to succeed or fail in our SEO efforts in 2020 or beyond. There are two key aspects to this:

OPTIMIZE YOUR SITE TO IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF SHOWING UP WITHIN GOOGLE'S SEARCH FEATURES

Learn how to create content more likely to get featured snippets, People Also Ask boxes, Knowledge Panels, image carousels, shopping search, consider creating video content, optimize for local search if that applies, etc.

CREATE INFORMATIONAL CONTENT FOR YOUR SITE IN BOTH DEPTH & BREADTH

Make it your goal to have the best content on the web for your topic, or at least an important subset of your topic.

This allows you to compete effectively for long-tail searches (which still remains about 70% of all search queries), will help build your site authority and demand for your content, and can be done in a directly ROI positive way.

In addition, this type of approach to content is exactly what Google is looking for to satisfy user needs and represents the type of market investment that Google will likely never make, because Google is about doing things with massively scalable algorithms.

So in a sense you are future-Google-proofing your business.

This is a critical time for webmasters and SEO professionals everywhere. Either you see the shape of the picture unfolding in front of us, or we don't.

Make sure you don't get left behind, or better still, get out in front of this and proactively solidify your SEO position for the long term.

SHELLY FAGIN

**SEO, HIGHLY SEARCHED /
BRAND AMBASSADOR, SEMRUSH**

Late in 2019, Google implemented BERT into its algorithm. BERT is a model for Natural Language Processing or NLP. This update will allow Google's search algorithm to better understand all forms of searches.

Google tells us BERT will affect 10% of all searches. This will allow Google to better understand the intent in our searches by taking into account all the words in the query.

What does this mean for you?

If you've focused on writing content written for humans visiting your site, it could mean you'll start seeing not only more traffic but even more exciting, it'll be more relevant.

If you've been optimizing for bots and more focused on injecting your target keywords into your content at every opportunity, you most likely will see the opposite occur. I also believe this will be huge for voice searches.

Right now, the mass majority are not utilizing voice search for more complex queries, but as they get better at interpreting conversational queries, that will change.



In my experience, people have a tendency to publish and forget about it – especially content that is 5+ years or older.

The older your site is, the better the odds that at some point, someone was writing and publishing content that does not read as naturally to a human reader. Most of your common SEO tools will most likely not detect this content either.

2020 should be the year you prioritize auditing this older content. Is it even still relevant today?

If not, get rid of it. If it is, have it rewritten to the higher standards I know you must be applying to the content you are publishing today. The days of getting by with crappy content are coming to an end.

Structured data will continue to be increasingly important. Don't assume that because you marked up all the most common data in early 2019, you are good.

New types of markup are continuously being added or improved upon. We all know that video is huge, and this past fall Google announced Clip Structured Data to mark key moments in your videos with timestamps to allow search engines to better understand the content within the video.

Video content is highly useful for How-to and instructional content and this will allow us to include those steps in our structured data.

I also expect to see a lot more manual penalties related to poor implementations of structured data. Don't automatically trust some plugin you've installed to structure your data correctly.

Always test and verify and do so on a regular basis to make sure your code is staying in compliance.

DUANE FORRESTER

VP, INDUSTRY INSIGHTS, YEXT

For 2020 (and beyond), people should be focused on intent and answers.

More specifically, there is a need for brands to provide verified answers, rather than third parties posting answers to questions on their behalf.

This happens in almost every SERP today, and businesses can better represent themselves and secure valuable engagements via organic search with a deeper focus on the consumer's intent, and answers to questions related to that intent.

If we look beyond the search engine result pages, there also needs to be a focus on internal site search.



Often, when a consumer uses this service on a website, they are highly engaged in problem-solving and/or purchasing. In short, if someone is using that site search function on your website, there is a high chance they will convert.

But if your site search results are poor, misleading, unordered or bringing back out-of-date information, that customer simply bounces back to the SERP, where – you guessed it – a third party is waiting for their next click and engagement.

We've all wanted to focus on intent for the last several years, and better understand what the journey of our customers looks like.

Now it's become such an important part of the landscape, it's integral to the survival and growth for most online businesses.

If you focus on the customer's intent, you'll clearly understand where you fit on that path. By providing the best answers for questions on that path, you can more reliably capture and convert customers. This impacts your content strategy, technical aspects of your site like page load speeds, being secure and mobile-friendly.

Everything in organic search marketing today is advanced, there are no shortcuts. With consumers just wanting answers, you need to be sure your programs align to support brand verified answers.

After all, no one is as much of an expert about your products or services than you.

AJA FROST

HEAD OF CONTENT SEO, HUBSPOT

Google is clearly focused on giving users a diverse set of results.

In July, we saw the domain diversity update, which meant a domain could show up twice maximum for a single query.

In November, an SEO **noticed** the domain winning the featured snippet was no longer ranking in the main SERPs. (Ranking on page one of the SERPs is generally considered a prerequisite for winning the snippet.)

It makes sense - the more variety in the SERPs, the likelier the chance the searcher's question or intent will be answered.

However, from an SEO's perspective, this change probably calls for a new content strategy.

If your website covers the same topics again and again, even if you're covering these topics from different angles, your pages are going to knock each other out of the results.

It's like content cannibalization, except it's no longer a head-to-head fight: one page is going to win before the SERPs ever load.



I'd recommend auditing all of your content for overlapping rankings and merging, redirecting, and archiving as needed so every page ranks for a unique set of keywords.

Google is now indexing podcast audio - not transcripts. That means it can find a snippet of the episode relevant to a searcher's query and display the specific episode right there on the SERP.

I predict that, in the near future, Google won't just surface an individual episode. It will select the exact clip that matches the user's query, just as video snippets are surfaced as "suggested clips."

What does that mean for SEO?

Right now, the typical podcast creator is focused on creating engaging, high-quality content that drives listeners to subscribe to their channel and helps them get chosen for manually curated lists or directories (like Apple's featured shows.)

That's going to change. People will start creating podcasts designed to rank in search, just as they currently create pages designed to rank in search.

These podcasts will likely be shorter and based on search volume. They'll answer a target query in a succinct, Google-friendly way (the same way you might structure a section so it will appear in the featured snippet).

Because podcasts are fairly inexpensive to make, and this new type of search feature will likely have huge first-mover advantages, I'd start thinking about what your podcast SEO strategy might be.

GREG GIFFORD

**VP OF SEARCH,
SEARCHLAB CHICAGO**



In 2020, everyone needs to pay attention to local SEO.

Thanks to mobile search, Local has become more prevalent – and marketers and business owners need to catch up.

Queries that used to pull ecommerce SERPs are now pulling local packs (try “charcoal” or “patio furniture” for example) – and as more queries get flipped over to local intent, more businesses will lose out on customers if they’re not using local SEO.

Local is also a lens to the future of SEO in general – we know that Google has been working on entity-based search for years, and now machine learning is finally making it possible.

But here’s the thing: local SEO has been entity-based for years – you’ve always been able to rank local businesses even if they don’t have a website.

Google is tracking real-world visits already and recently received a patent for using “quality visits” as a ranking signal.

Local is the forefront of entity-based search, so everyone should pay attention...

CASIE GILLETTE

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING, KOMARKETING

As we head into next year, I'd like companies and SEOs to really put more focus on brand authority. Not for the sake of E-A-T or QRGs but for the sake of their business and customers.

Customers are getting smarter and they expect more when it comes to marketing. We have to build brands they trust and they want to do business with.

The more they trust you, the more they are willing to share your content (links), talk about you (value), and buy your products (revenue).

And when it comes to search, while there are certainly poor quality sites doing just fine in search, I am seeing clients with less authority being hurt by recent updates.

SEO has definitely evolved more toward this over the past few years but there is still a ways to go.



KEITH GOODE

SR. SEO STRATEGIST, IBM

I don't want to be an SEO that is trying to ride the coat-tails of BERT, but I do feel like BERT is a harbinger of things to come in 2020.

As Google and the other search engines try to understand language better, we, as SEOs, are going to have to focus on how our users talk about their issues, problems, and needs at each aspect of the buyer's journey much more.

Additionally, we're going to have to extend our efforts far beyond the purchase in that journey to include content that addresses needs after the sale - support, opportunities to advocate, community-building and staying relevant for future purchases.

As users feel freer to use natural language in their queries, we're going to have to stop being so keyword-obsessed and truly begin to understand how people are talking about the broader topics and sub-topics around the products and services we support.



If we haven't fully vetted out those journeys, we'll be ill-prepared to succeed in 2020 and beyond.

Additionally, while I believe Google will do a lot to compensate for our site's own poor technical foundations (e.g., canonical corrections, hreflang corrections, etc.), it's going to become increasingly more important for SEOs to focus on shoring up their technical foundations.

I don't think it's accidental that Martin Splitt spends as much time as he does promoting good technical best practices from Google's perspective. We should consider that a signal in and of itself.

Lastly, (and this is me being hopeful) I believe that we're going to have to wade deeper into data privacy issues and protections as SEOs.

As more data leaks occur and further incursions into consumer's lives companies like Google and Facebook reveal, the legal backlash will expand beyond Europe's GDPR.

A move like that in the U.S. and APJ would force us to make some pretty rapid adjustments in order to comply.

2020 will be an interesting year.

SARAH GURBACH

**SENIOR ACCOUNT MANAGER,
SEARCH AND AUDIENCE INSIGHTS,
SEER INTERACTIVE**

In 2020, I think smart SEO professionals will move away from big data and focus on thick data.

A term coined by the brilliant Tricia Wang, thick data uses qualitative research to understand the context behind big data.

It looks at the behaviors of humans, the values, the needs, the wants, the perceived risks to understand the "why" behind the "what."

We have to remember that our customer is the person behind the device, driving all of these data points that consume every day.





Without talking to our customers and understanding why they are behaving the way they are, we are limiting our ability to create a smart and holistic strategy.

So in 2020, I recommend you go and sit down with your customers.

Talk to them, ask them to tell you about their journey to purchase, how they used search, what they thought of your site. Use that data in every decision you make.

In a world consumed by efficiency and using as many data sources as possible and getting as many data points as possible, we need to take a step back and remember that data are people, too. So let's talk to them more in 2020.

BRIAN HARNISH

OWNER, PRESIDENT, SITE OBJECTIVE

I think Google will continue to want great content. That hasn't changed.

What has changed is how Google implements the identification of SEO signals at the core of their algorithms, and with further algorithm updates I am sure that will continue to evolve and deepen as the years go by.

In the past 10 years, we have seen a major shift from keywords and phrases to entities and natural language, and this fundamental shift in SEO has caused reverberations throughout the industry.





From technical SEO to link building. I think Google will continue to focus on deepening their AI aspects and rolling out deeper entity-based changes.

These changes will also move toward deeper and more involved natural language processing, and perhaps several development phases from now we will see some type of supercomputer AI who can think for itself and make judgments in a real-life scenario.

I'm trying to avoid saying Skynet here because I think there are safeguards in place to keep that from happening. (Who knows?)

With the rise of Google's recent accomplishments in quantum computing, these trends are only going to continue to deepen and get more challenging to decipher in 2020 and beyond.



SAM HOLLINGSWORTH

DIRECTOR OF SEARCH, ELEVATION TEN THOUSAND

If you're not already utilizing structured data, you need to be.

Schema markup is a joint effort by tech powerhouses Google, Microsoft, and more that has been making an impact in search for some time already.

That impact is growing and will continue to grow as search continues to progress and more types of Schema vocabularies become fully supported, thus continuing to alter search results.

Long expected to have a large impact in the search world (and taking nothing away from the impact it has already had thus far), schema markup still has not reached its full potential.

We've seen it become supported more in search as time has progressed, and that will continue as search gets smarter and faster.

This means Google and similar search engines will deliver more and more answers directly on the SERPs, as well as serving even more relevant search results than it was previously.

By doing this, search becomes more reliable, useful, and convenient. A better product means a bigger audience. (And that means more ad revenue.)

Another major SEO component that should be focused on for 2020 and beyond is not really new, but it's creating content with the customer in mind - not search engines.

Sure, we should remember to use SEO best practices as they pertain to general website visibility, usability, and crawlability, but we should be **creating and marketing our content in a natural manner** that is easy to read, useful, and also enjoyable.

Google Search continues to improve, and its latest algorithm update dubbed [the BERT update](#) further supports this.

Google search is smarter than ever before right now. We don't need to connect the dots for it the way we used to; it's advanced enough to understand search queries and even the intent behind them.

The future is here, and search is only getting smarter from here on out.

My third and final element to focus on for SEO in 2020 is definitely not something new: focus on the customer always.

Too many brands forget or fail to realize what it takes to attract and impress potential customers. They want real value.

Just like in a brick-and-mortar establishment, customers want to know that you're on their side, that they can trust you, and that you are a reliable partner in what is going to be a long-term - hopefully lifelong - relationship.

Marketers, especially SEOs, need to think this same way. This isn't rocket science; this is good business.

And good businesses rarely fail.

MOTOKO HUNT

PRESIDENT, AJPR

I think one of the biggest SEO trends in 2020 would be to go after zero-click and position zero opportunities for many website owners.

I predict that many SEOs would propose some shortcuts and tricks. But in order to make the most of it, the website owners must realize the importance of basic SEO.

The markups, good content, etc. would only perform for you when those are built on a well-optimized website.

For international SEO, poorly localized website content will lose performance in the era of AI and Google BERT.

Many global websites have poorly translated content that hasn't been edited for the local tongue.

The audience may be able to understand, but if the sentences sound awkward to the local audience, it won't be competitive against other local websites.

It's not the placement of the keywords, it's about how well your content is written for the local audience.

I hope global website owners will invest in good localization of local website content.



KAMERON JENKINS

**DIRECTOR, BRAND,
CONTENT & COMMUNICATIONS,
BOTIFY**

I think we're only going to start seeing more big brands prioritize SEO in 2020. For the longest time, big brands relied heavily on their reputation for traffic and revenue.

Then many of them started to realize, "Oh shoot, our websites are a mess, and we're losing out in search results."

I think we're at this point where a lot of big brands have started to take SEO seriously, cleaning up the technical SEO issues that have been holding them back.

So when it comes to succeeding in 2020, I think clean technical SEO will start to become table stakes for many big brands, and they'll need to start looking for their competitive advantage to win in organic search.

Don't get me wrong, plenty of large brands still have a ways to go when it comes to cleaning up their website (and there's massive opportunity to increase organic traffic and revenue when you do).

But when clean sites start to become the standard, and "not being broken" isn't enough of a differentiator, big brands will want to be prepared with innovative growth strategies.



DIXON JONES

FOUNDER, DHJ VENTURES

Semantic search and entity-based SEO have arrived with a bang.

Some SEOs say the way to optimize for this is to answer questions and user problems rather than writing pure informative content, but underlying this are concepts like “Things not Strings”.

You need to tie large amounts of your cornerstone content to very definite entities, which Google either recognizes or doesn't.

Fortunately, tools are now starting to come on board that will help identify not only entities but what entities are semantically close.

Writing around semantically close entities helps to better answer user journeys not just through better content, but also content that Google can see will be a good result.



I think in 2020, internal linking will come to the fore, but again based around things, not strings.

Understanding the unique knowledge graph our web presence makes will empower us to be able to link those concepts together better within the content under our control, to the benefit of users and crawlers alike.

Lastly, people will start to properly create the schema that is needed to help machine learning understand these concepts.

I also believe that the move toward position zero, entity search and voice search will surface some underlying problems with machine learning algorithms.

I imagine Alexa and Siri coming out with some absurd inaccuracies as the machine learning systems start exposing and extrapolating inaccuracies within training data, including schema.org protocols and Wikipedia entries.

Whether this causes a big issue or merely a few wry smiles is yet to be seen, but sometimes a result is far from black and white, which will be a problem when voice search tries to give a binary result.

On a potentially positive note for the storytellers, if Google's move towards understanding more complex sentence structures continues, perhaps we can all stop writing content in lists and start to increase our grammar and vocabulary in 2020 and cease having to write in sentences designed for machines and children rather than scholars and intellectuals.

KRIS JONES

FOUNDER / CEO, LSEO.COM



It's Time to Get off the Sidelines & Go All-In on Mobile
SEO

Let's face it - the default way to visualize SEO is a person typing a keyword into a web-based browser.

As a result, most SEO best practices continue to favor web-based SEO despite the fact that over 50% of searches in 2019 will be conducted on mobile devices.

Wait! What?

Truth is, the game has changed and you can no longer stand on the sidelines as the percentage of mobile versus web-based traffic continues to favor mobile. It's time to take action.

The good news is that there are several mobile SEO best practices you need to incorporate into your overall 2020 SEO strategy.

First, if you don't have a mobile-friendly website you need to take action immediately. You can't wait any longer. If you are unsure if your site is mobile-friendly, you can see for yourself [here](#).

Second, being mobile-friendly isn't good enough. You have to ask - is the mobile version of your site search engine optimized?

To answer this question, you'll need to leverage your site analytics and compare traffic patterns and conversion rates for web versus mobile.

Often you'll need to optimize your mobile design so that the core aspects of your business are prioritized.

For instance, positioning your phone number, value proposition, and call to action to display at the top of the mobile browser will likely improve mobile conversion rates.

Finally, all of your online reporting must reflect insights into your mobile performance as a priority.

Instead of visualizing a person sitting at a desktop computer you have to realize that most of the time people will find your website via a mobile device.

Every strategy meeting and decision regarding SEO must reflect the new normal - that mobile SEO is a priority when it comes to growing your business in 2020 and beyond.

Make prioritizing mobile SEO a must, and you won't get left on the sidelines.

RYAN JONES

**SEO GROUP DIRECTOR,
PUBLICIS SAPIENT**



I think there's going to be a few trends for 2020. Let's start with the smaller ones.

There's still a lot of brands playing catch up when it comes to mobile and accessibility. I think companies will continue to give that more focus.

In the SEO space, we're going to see a lot of talk about machine learning and natural language processing and whatnot. But at the end of the day, the biggest trend is going to be integrating SEO into a holistic marketing strategy.

Now more than ever, companies are going to have to stop treating SEO as a condiment that they just add on to their digital strategy, and instead treat it as a key ingredient of their business plan.

SEOs are going to have to grow their skillsets to understand the full marketing and digital stack.

It's going to be less about fixing SEO issues and more about fixing marketing and business issues.

GRACE KINDRED

**JUNIOR TECHNICAL
SEO ANALYST, NEWS UK**

BING OPTIMIZATION

Bing have stepped up, and they're more visible at conferences and encouraging webmasters to pay them attention.

Search marketers will still optimize for Google first, but may apply some of the same rules to Bing as "good practice".

If Google was down for a day (an actual horror story), Bing would probably be the next used search engine.

SCHEMA MARKUP

Several studies have shown that when users are presented with unbranded SERPs, the majority prefer Bing's results. Bing has some smart features (search for Brexit) which is the one area where they're probably better than Google.

I think Google will encourage mark-up even more heavily (especially seeing the recent additions to link attribution and rise in semantic search) and this will be a way to get ahead of the competition in the war of the SERPs.



With more/better schema and clarification of content, Google will be better able to serve queries with the correct content. The challenge will be ensuring schema is implemented correctly and isn't abused.

Google may consider implementing schema markup spam penalties in the future.

UGC CONTENT

With the inclusion of rel='ugc' link attribution, user-generated content is clearly something that Google sees as being important.

With the recent accusation against Google of showing preference towards certain publishers for political queries, they'll be more aware of showing a wider variety of results.

MOBILE-FIRST

Build sites for mobile-first, then make them compatible for desktop. That way those sites don't have to be optimized for speed after launch.

TRUST

For publishers, there will be a strong focus on quality content and fighting against fake news.

It will be more important than ever to focus on the trust value of authors (verifying authors and showing their authority for particular subjects) and sites as a whole.

CLICK-THROUGH RATE

With new snippets and SERP features on the rise, it's more important than ever to encourage click-throughs and testing out compelling meta descriptions.

A/B testing titles and descriptions is invaluable.

IMAGE SEARCH

With the rise in users consuming news through Instagram and media on Twitter, optimizing images and adding alt tags is a quick task for potential long-term gains.

For example, in the case of natural disasters, once users are aware of what's happened they'll turn to visuals to get a grasp of the disaster, rather than just reading descriptions and stories.

Many publishers have access to unique images which are lost in articles and nowhere to be seen in image search. It's a big opportunity that often gets overlooked.

OTHER

I think it will still be a few years before voice search fully takes off, changing user behavior/habits takes time and voice search engines still have a way to go.

If a website isn't optimized for voice (depending on the business type), I don't think it will make a huge difference in 2020.

Google My Business needs to be vastly improved, the way it is at the moment isn't always helpful for users or businesses.

Q&A can be easily manipulated and reviews aren't that trustworthy, there have also been cases of businesses missing orders and reservations due to the lack of education from GMB.

JEREMY KNAUFF

CEO, SPARTAN MEDIA

I expect to see high-quality, in-depth content continue to play an increasingly important role in search as artificial intelligence helps the algorithms to better understand and deliver results based on searcher's intent.

But because AI doesn't yet understand context very well, I also expect to see hints that help them do so begin to play a more critical role.

This means **structuring the data** in a way that helps search engines to better understand not only what is on a page, but also how each element relates to other elements on the page, and how that page relates to other pages within the website.

It also means incorporating multimedia, including images, video, and even audio content.



In fact, earlier this year, Google started displaying podcasts in the search results, and they are already transcribing the content to allow for more comprehensive search capabilities.

This will give them a tremendous amount of natural language data to more effectively train their AI algorithms.

I think marketers will start to face new challenges as AI becomes better at understanding context, though. This is because Google's behavior in recent years shows that they are quite comfortable using publishers' content, but cutting them out of the picture whenever they have the opportunity.



CINDY KRUM

CEO, MOBILEMOXIE

We are seeing more and more nuances in search results that are getting left out of even the best reporting tools.

Most SEO reporting tools still focus on desktop results, even though Google says that now 60% of worldwide searches are mobile.

Tools need to start to focus on more, and also report more on the actual visibility of a search result, and what is happening around it, that might take clicks, or distract users.

SEOs need to understand that ranking number 1 under a Knowledge Graph, Found on the Web or a Featured Snippet is different than ranking number 1 without those things.



Similarly, even if you are not in Position 1, ranking just below a People Also Ask result or Interesting Finds will not get as much traffic, because those things look better and thus, drive more clicks in the search result.

Further, I think we will continue to see more localization in search results, with more Map Packs, News and Events ranking and taking clicks from traditional organic rankings.

As SEOs, we need to optimize for all of these assets now, not just blue links.

Most of all, SEOs need to be looking at real, mobile search results, to know what they are up against, what kind of traffic they can expect, and what kind of optimization will actually be successful at impacting the bottom line.

JESSICA LEVENSON



SEO & CONTENT STRATEGY CONSULTANT

DECREASED CLICKS & A NARROWING FUNNEL

As a result of Google's focus on understanding searcher intent (hello, BERT!) and keeping searchers on their own properties, we can absolutely expect continued increases in zero-click searches as more interactive SERP features like People Also Ask boxes, video carousels, embedded videos, suggested video clips, refineries, and other interactive feature sets roll out across the SERPs.

With all of that noise and shrinking organic real estate and clicks, and Google updates and frequent searcher intent shifts, SEOs and publishers are dealing with a narrowing organic traffic funnel.

In order to meet business objectives, we first have to satisfy the right searchers in the right ways.

UNDERSTANDING SEARCHER INTENT & FOCUSING ON TOPICAL RELEVANCE INSTEAD OF KEYWORDS

Searcher intent isn't a new concept. But it needs more attention from content creators.

It isn't just making sure that results are about the same topic you think a query matches, it is understanding in-depth what searchers are looking for and how best to deliver it.

It is moving on from targeting individual keywords, pageview chasing, and a content "spray and pray" approach to adopting a deliberate and methodically organized cluster of content that delivers comprehensive and intuitive topical experiences while meeting business objectives.

Know what answers the user needs next. Boiled down:

- Understand who your audience is and how they search.
- Understand the intent behind the questions they are asking or problems they need to solve.
- Give them solutions or answers in the formats they prefer via on-point, quality, and authoritative content.
- Execute in this fashion for every stage of their journey to create a satisfactory topical experience that serves their needs again and again.
- Iterate because just because you do it well once doesn't mean intent won't change or someone else won't do something better.

YOUTUBE AS A SEARCH ENGINE

We've all seen the data from Jumpshot, and we know that YouTube is the third largest search engine behind Google Search and Google Images.

And if you've been digging in on SERPs, you've absolutely seen that searcher intent shifts have translated to more video carousel dominance in the SERPs.

The carousels are pushing down traditional organic results and the majority of the time, that ranking video content is on YouTube.

It comes as no surprise given how much traffic is mobile, how much video is consumed on mobile devices, and that YouTube is owned by Google.

2020 is absolutely going to demand that our content strategies are holistic, including a video strategy.

Circling back to searcher intent, it's imperative that we suss out opportunities to use video to help and engage searchers in new ways and give them relevant and helpful videos.

By pursuing video on YouTube, we're actually widening the funnel as there are billions of searches happening on YouTube in addition to Google.

One of the biggest challenges we'll continue to face as an industry is how to capitalize on the traffic that exists on other platforms like YouTube.

Optimization of YouTube video features like cards, end screens, and backlinks will absolutely play a role in driving viewers back to your site.

Buckle up, because in addition to nailing technical SEO, we have a lot of work to do to give people a reason to engage with our content.

CAROLYN LYDEN

**LEAD SEO/OWNER,
SEARCH HERMIT**

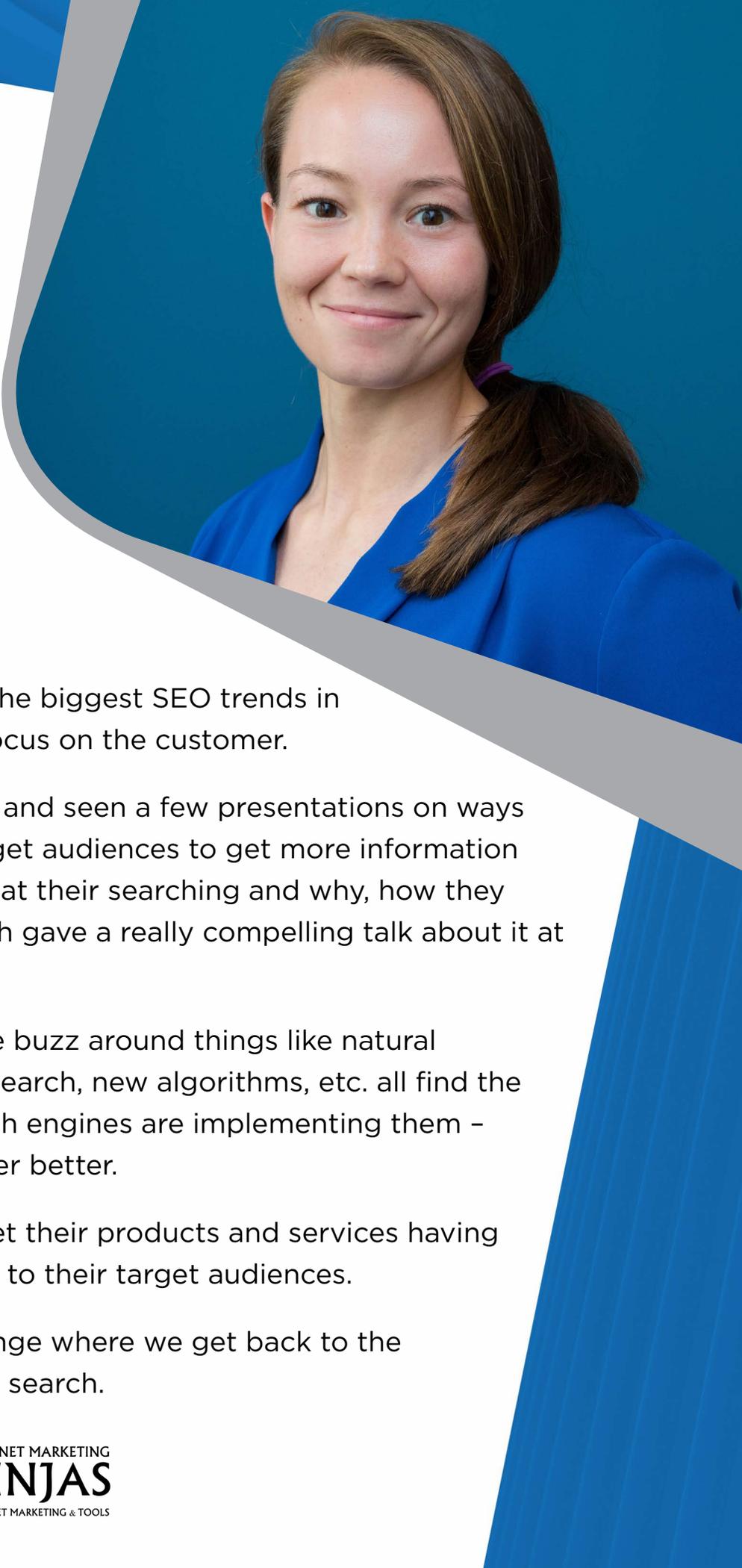
I am hopeful that one of the biggest SEO trends in 2020 will be a renewed focus on the customer.

I've read so many articles and seen a few presentations on ways to actually talk to our target audiences to get more information on their user journeys, what their searching and why, how they search, etc. Sarah Gurbach gave a really compelling talk about it at CTAConf this year.

But I'm hoping that all the buzz around things like natural language processing for search, new algorithms, etc. all find the center around WHY search engines are implementing them - and that's to serve the user better.

So many marketers market their products and services having never spoken one-on-one to their target audiences.

I hope 2020 brings a change where we get back to the qualitative, human side of search.



JENN MATHEWS

SENIOR SEO MANAGER, GROUPON

SEO professionals will need to look backward while they look forward to 2020.

Google is continually updating to optimize search results based on user intent rather than a focus on content/page to keyword matching.

SEOs need to understand the nuance of what this means with their content as well as have a firm grasp on Google's past updates leading to this trend.



Patents like Authoritative Document Identification, Merging Search Results and all that goes into [local optimization](#) are a base for where Google is headed.

Google's focus on [neural matching](#) and machine learning in the many core and BERT updates of 2019 provide SEOs with the learnings they need to know where to focus their efforts.

New SEOs breaking into the industry in the last few years should look back to the Panda and Penguin updates, and fully understand the [Rank Transition](#) patent to avoid falling into the spammer trap.

Large, complex enterprise ecommerce sites will need to shift their focus on directories and pages that serve their consumers' comprehensive experiences that include assistive content focusing on Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-A-T).

By understanding Google's past, SEOs can look to the future to comprehensively optimize websites and provide holistic experiences that convert users.

JESSE MCDONALD

GLOBAL SEO STRATEGIST, IBM

I think one of the biggest trends you will see SEOs gravitating towards in 2020 will be moving away from the obsession with keywords and focusing more on topics.

This will be especially true for SEOs that are heavily focusing on the conversations around E-A-T and BERT that want to improve their sites.

The goal of switching the mentality to more of a topic-focus is to create content that addresses an entire conversation holistically as opposed to just worrying about the single keyword a page should be targeting.

This not only helps expand the potential rankable terms for the content being created but also helps build authority for these topics, especially when paired with a logical information architecture structure and internal linking strategy.



BRIAN MCDOWELL

PRINCIPAL DIGITAL STRATEGIST,
BLOOMREACH



BUSINESS-FOCUSED EDUCATION/APPROACH TO INCREASE BUDGET

SEO needs to evolve more in terms of business impact, measurement, and reporting. Coming from enterprise consulting, it amazes me that SEO is still vastly under-invested.

2019 saw a drastic decline in YoY growth deltas for organic search for the first time in a long time. This was reported by multiple trustworthy sources like Merkle, Bloomreach, and SparkToro (zero-click).

As channel managers, we need to address that inaction leads to further depreciation and there is an opportunity cost for not being agile in experimentation.

Margins are an oft-ignored KPI for established brands whereas smaller brands need deeper education from tenured professionals.

At the end of the day, SEO is still a very profitable channel that is often misunderstood at the C-level. Margins are shrinking thanks to the dominance of mobile views and Google's self-monetization ... get on it!

SHANNON MCGUIRK

**HEAD OF PR AND CONTENT,
AIRA DIGITAL**



When it comes to SEO trends for 2020, digital PR and link building will continue to play a huge part in any robust strategy to improve a brand's traffic, rankings, and revenue.

However, our approach to link building needs to move from the dark ages into a consumer-first approach for 2020 that is tailored around content-driven campaigns that appeal to different types of journalist's writing.

So to secure top tier links next year, the three types of journalist writing that you need to focus on are:

- **PLANNED EDITORIAL:** Topics that are covered by journalists every single year at a given point such as Black Friday or Valentine's day such as offers, discounts or tips for shopping. If you know these are coming up, it's likely you can produce a large-scale campaign for link building.

- **PLANNED REACTIVE EDITORIAL:** Features written by journalists on a topic that ties to a seasonal event or theme that we know is being covered due to time frame, but we don't know the exact story until editors or journalists write it on the morning of their editorial meeting. This could be new data being released on Christmas advert viewing figures and might work well as a static data visualization.

- **REACTIVE EDITORIAL:** Features written in the here and now that are unplanned and can't be predicted and are dictated due to a news story breaking. The content format might be a comment or an interview that you pitch to drive links.

At Aira, we call creating different types of content for different types of writing the Digital PR newsroom.

This change in strategy places less of a focus on rigid campaigns produced to deliver just links and instead broadens horizons because you'll be mixing different campaign formats and visualizations from producing comments to data-visualizations through to placing interviews and launching GIFS.

Before you know it, you'll have a content bank of evergreen assets you can pitch to press throughout the year to produce consistent link building results.

It's time to supercharge your link building in 2020 with the [digital PR newsroom](#).

COREY MORRIS

VP OF MARKETING, VOLTAGE

I'm seeing some distinct things for SEO going into 2020 that are important and will be hard to ignore.

Starting with an increase in importance in technical factors like site speed in mid-to-late 2018, and coupled with aspects of context and language that are as important as ever 2019, we're seeing some filtering out of tactics and strategies focused too narrowly and/or too broadly.

That might sound contradictory, but I've found that companies and agencies who don't have in-depth SEO expertise are finding that gaining traction is becoming difficult.





The depth needed for both technical and content aspects of SEO is increasing. That's exposing a lot of strategies built on basics and a general understanding of SEO.

Likewise, it is also becoming harder to own a niche or to focus on a single aspect of SEO.

We're circling back to a time where SEO depth and expertise is needed and valued.

Talent will be at a premium and the commodity feel of SEO that has crept in over the past few years will slow down as true results will be tied to getting content and technical factors right while understanding and optimizing for the full range of technical, on-page, and off-page factors within strategies that are both end-to-end across all signals, plus deep in each area.

BRITNEY MULLER

**SENIOR SEO SCIENTIST,
MOZ**



With Google [getting stronger and stronger in understanding language/content](#), SEOs should focus on SEO automation and marketing fundamentals in 2020.

Meaning, tap into programming languages like Python and R to help solve for your most time-consuming/redundant tasks.

SEO automation will free you up to harness the power of marketing fundamentals:

- Branding.
- Creating great customer experiences.
- Storytelling.
- Speaking your customer's language.
- Listening to your target market & providing thoughtful/timely responses.
- Providing easy to consume content (in the way in which your users want it).
- Being human.

BROCK MURRAY

CO-FOUNDER, SEOPLUS+

The biggest trend that smart SEO professionals should focus on in 2020 for greater success is UX – user experience.

This includes the overall experience from the initial interaction in the SERPs, to the overall landing page experience, and even the experience after they leave your site (think remarketing, drip campaigns, personalization for returning users).

Be clear and concise in your technical markup, your content, and improve both internal (navigational) and external linking.

Get straight to the point and reduce “fluff” and truly think about how you can help your users have the best possible experience while truly pondering what value you can provide to them during their visit.

As always accessibility, speed, and security should be paramount and you will never regret investing in firewalls, CDN’s, and improved server technologies.



HELEN POLLITT

**HEAD OF DIGITAL,
AVENUE DIGITAL**

SEO 2020 — GET YOUR SHARE OF THE SEARCH ENGINE REAL ESTATE

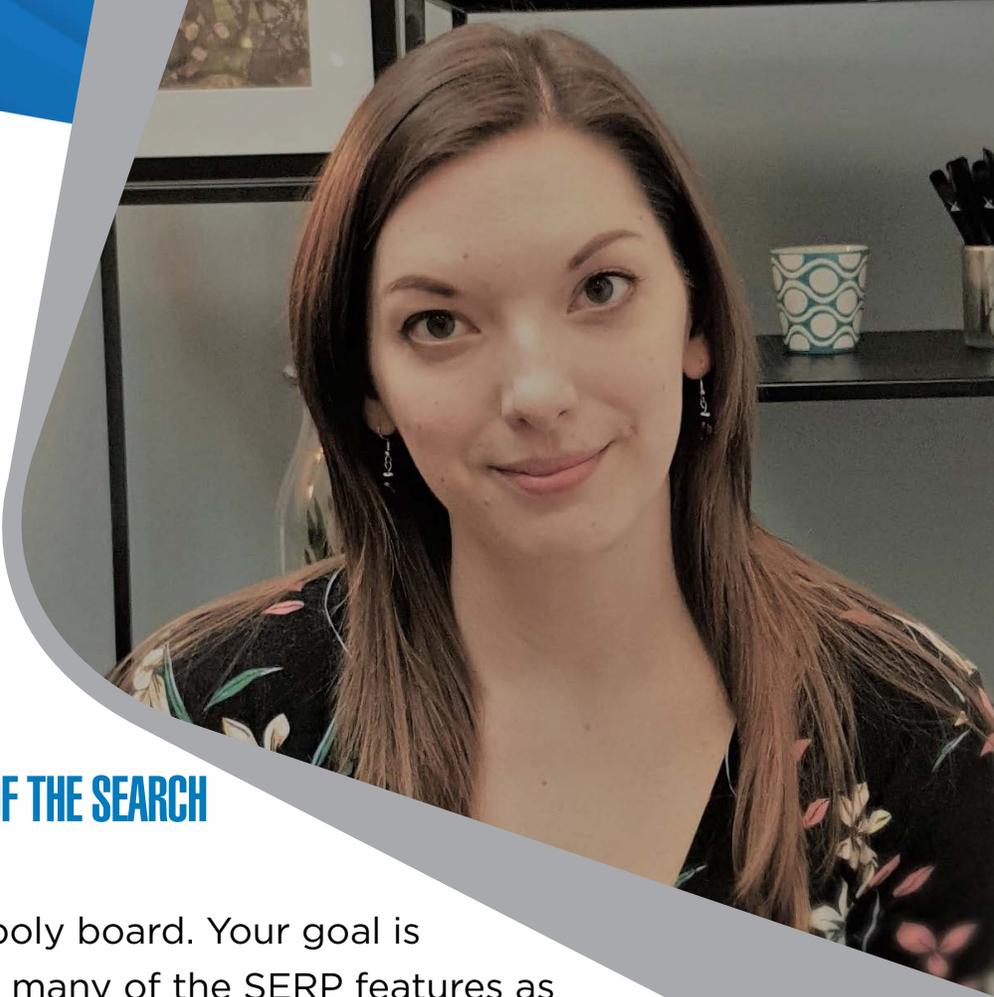
Treat Google like a Monopoly board. Your goal is to get your property in as many of the SERP features as possible.

This means going beyond optimizing purely for the 10 blue links or featured snippets. Consider how you can expand into features like the local Knowledge Panels and the image carousel.

With more and more searches resulting in zero clicks each year, it is essential that your brand is visible in as much of the relevant SERPs as possible. This increases your chances of being one of the lucky few who get a click.

Utilize structured markup and other methods of labeling content where possible to remove any ambiguity. This will give the search engines the certainty that your content is relevant to a search query.

For example, make sure your unique images are optimized for image search by adding keyword-rich alt attributes.



Use Video Segment structured markup, as it becomes available, so relevant clips from your videos are displayed in a response to a query.

Ensure your events and jobs content are utilizing the available schema to pull them through to otherwise inaccessible positions on the SERPs. You can use these to leapfrog your competition to the top of the search results.

Remember that the “All” results are not the only Google SERPs to work with. You should be focusing on optimizing your content for the relevant searches. Google’s products include Flight search, Finance search, and Shopping search.

You can bet that it will be expanding this further over the next year. Keep an eye on Google’s [structured data reference guide](#) as a clue to what functionality they may be trialing in the SERPs.

As Google depreciates some markup, like Social Profile and Corporate Contact in favor of discovering this information for itself, it becomes increasingly important to ensure your information across the web is accurate.

Make sure you apply to be an official representative of your Knowledge Panels so you can suggest changes directly.

The key to your brand being served in as many key places in the SERPs as possible is ensuring Google understands the context of information on your website.

Do not neglect structured data markup and make sure you do not have conflicting information across the web.

LILY RAY

SEO DIRECTOR, PATH INTERACTIVE

In 2020, it will be more important than ever to focus on the trustworthiness and reputation of your brand online.

Google will continue to ramp up its ability to understand entities and their attributes, and among those attributes are brand reputation, credibility, and authoritativeness.

For this reason, implementing structured data is no longer optional for SEOs: it is a requirement Google now uses for websites to be eligible to appear in many different types of rich results, which Google continues to expand over time.

Strategies such as implementing structured data, optimizing your Google My Business profile, claiming your Knowledge Panel, and leveraging rich results like FAQ schema can also help ensure Google displays the correct information about your brand in the search results - where more and more content is displayed directly to users without them needing to click on your website.



It is also abundantly clear from Google's Search Quality guidelines that Google wants to focus on the overall reputation and E-A-T (Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness) of a given company and the individuals who publish content on behalf of that company.

It will become increasingly difficult to receive organic visibility for YMYL (Your Money, Your Life) queries without the proper expertise and credentials to write on those topics.

Companies that struggle with a poor reputation, customer service issues, or other trust issues will have a harder time competing. These trust issues not only manifest themselves as reviews and feedback about your brand, but they also take the form of technical or security issues on your site.

Invest in maintaining a good experience for your users, respond to customer feedback, and invest in technical SEO and user experience to ensure you're offering your visitors a good experience on your site.

All of these factors combine to create a positive experience for your customers, which in turn creates a positive feedback loop with search engines and will surely improve your success with SEO.



MICHELLE ROBBINS

VP PRODUCT & INNOVATION, AIMCLEAR

While I don't know if it will become a trend adopted by SEOs in 2020 - though I remain hopeful - a critical point of SEO success for 2020 will be brand marketing, and the adoption of a brand marketing mindset instead of the tunnel-vision or siloed approach we often see in search marketing.

Brand marketing fundamentals - things like consistent message, tone, branding - are often sacrificed to the optimization gods in search of playing to the latest algorithm shift.

Happily, the BERT update at Google and Bing's ongoing Intelligent Search rollouts underscore the need for people to seriously, finally, take a hard look at the quality of their content. And optimizing that content for users and not search engines.

The engines seek to provide real-world answers and information to their users. Providing high-quality brand content remains crucial. This goes for image and video content as well as written content.

Successful SEOs will approach content marketing and optimization the way one would a commercial, billboard, or print ad. You wouldn't keyword-stuff or otherwise pander to a bot with those, you don't need to do those kinds of things in web site content either.

So in a way, the key to staying successful in search marketing 2020 is the same as it ever was - put out good content, with consistent brand messaging, in all your channels.

As the search engines become ever more adapted to natural language understanding, the best-written content - in all forms -- will win the day.

It's (past) time for budgets to increase for hiring professional writers.

CARRIE ROSE

**CO-FOUNDER / CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
RISE AT SEVEN**

LINK BUILDING TO BE MORE ABOUT BRAND BUILDING IN 2020

The responsibility will fall on SEOs to build links and media placements that drive traffic and push brand, not just links that help with search rankings.

More and more we are seeing on-site content pieces being produced in order to drive backlinks to client's sites.

These pieces of content have little relevance to the products or services but are successful when it comes to landing links in quantity.



But how many people are clicking on these links and engaging with the site?

How many are then exploring the site more, wanting to hear more about what that brand has to say?

How many go away and revisit the site because of this content?

How many even remember the name of the brand that produced it?

It's becoming more clear that Google ranks brands, and therefore wider brand and content marketing campaigns that are more closely related to the business are key to SEO success.

So many companies are being forced to cut budgets across advertising and marketing that every bit of work we do in the coming years has to work that much harder to drive an ROI.

We can't rely on TV, print and out-of-home advertising to drive brand awareness for us.

Now our link building activity has to be on-brand, or there's a realistic chance that there won't be any brand-building activity at all.

ALEXIS SANDERS

SEO SENIOR MANAGER, MERKLE

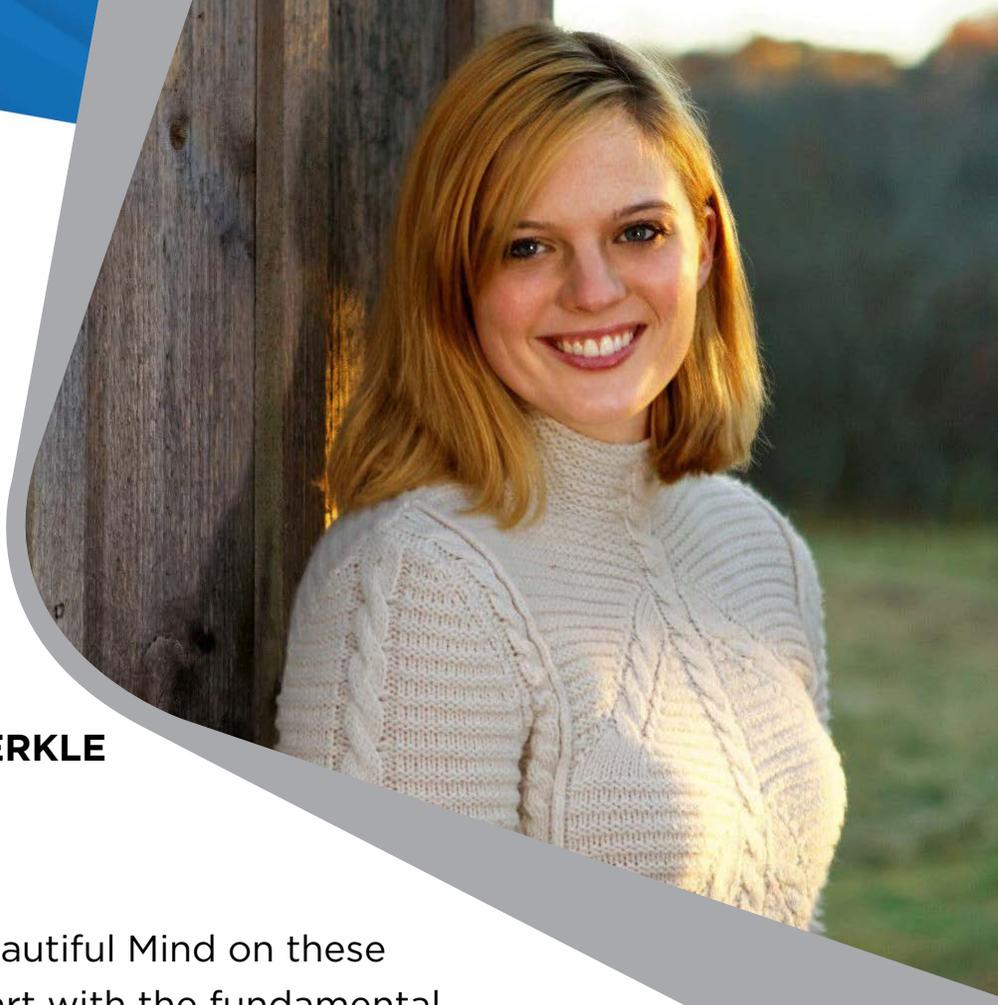
2020 VISION FOR SEO

Before I start going all Beautiful Mind on these 2020 predictions, let's start with the fundamental concept that - search has always been (and will continue to be) about presenting the best result to the end user (the core strategy upon which Alphabet's finances rely on).

The best result demands reliability, credibility, authoritativeness, expertise, and trustworthiness. While these traits are required, they are not enough to succeed in digital marketing.

Companies must:

- Command attention for excellence in their sectors.
- Stand out to relevant audiences in meaningful ways.
- Offer seamless user experiences.
- Ultimately, must have a digitally-based competitive advantage.



Digitally-based competitive advantage can be a variety of things:

- Supply chain excellence (e.g., delivering within 2-days (or less) with relevant status updates).
- Customer service (e.g., ability to answer the user's question with minimal friction).
- Digital charisma / branding (e.g., Having users seek you out, because they want to do business with you? Do most of your reviews look more like love letter?).
- User experience (e.g., is your experience more convenient/ useful/ simple?).
- Price.
- Niche products.
- Etc.

Google will continue to focus on:

- Higher precision on question's answers (including **zero-click SERPs**).
- Imagery (including **shopping**, real-time **translation**, **sharing**, etc.).
- Personalization (features like **Discover**).
- Usage/expansion of structured data (including more **support for voice-enabled structured data**).

- Search that affects our health (creating **reliable, precise resources for doctors, collecting health data**, finding additional opportunities to collect data (cough... **Fitbit** ... cough), **empowering customers with their health data** (think **Apple's Health Records**), and trying to tap into the **\$3.5 trillion** health market).
- Supporting travelers with an aim to become the searcher's booking agent (fully integrating with voice, of course).
- Web security (continuing efforts to protect Internet users, with efforts similar to **no longer supporting Flash**).

SEO teams should focus on:

- Integrating critical SEO elements into development processes and unit testing (white-box testing).
- Setting up automated black-box testing of critical SEO elements on top KPI-driving pages.
- Working SEO into the content team's processes.
- Working with UX on developing meaningful, frictionless experiences that are crawlable/indexable/renderable to bots.
- Working with marketing communications teams to develop branding (**perhaps even developing a literal brand voice**).

- Working with management to identify features that could drive a competitive advantage based on user interest, competition, and industry research.
- Integrating efforts with paid search, email, display, CRM, TV, and other top channels.
- Start with getting together a list of large site events and campaigns.
- Understand top campaigns and projects.
- Ensure all indexable landing pages are optimized and integrated into the overarching website.
- Report on shifts in organic (when another channel launches campaign).
- Build case studies on what happens when different levers are pulled across digital.
- Use knowledge to iterate on strategy.

BEAUTIFUL MIND PORTION OF THESE PREDICTIONS (SO, UHHH, TAKE 'EM FOR WHAT THEY'RE WORTH)

2020 ELECTIONS

2019 was not an easy year in tech. The EU has been specifically active, including: Google's [\\$57 MM privacy suit](#), [Google fined for \\$1.7 B for unfair advertising](#), and [cookies being shifted to opt-in](#).

Google has had a particularly challenging year:

- The **YouTube Kids fiasco** (resulting in **shifting child video policies**).
- **Genius lyric debacle.**
- **Struggles to scrub GMB reviews (especially in specific industries, including legal, HVAC, women's health).**
- **DOJ labeling them a "digital gatekeeper".**
- **Politicians accusing bias** (including recurring accusations by the **President of the United States**).
- And even **anti-trust investigations.**

To top it all off, we're heading into an election year. Large tech companies, notably Facebook and Twitter have both attempted to absolve themselves of responsibility to police political campaigns (Facebook opting to allow and **not police**; while Twitter opted to simply **not serve political ads**).

As Google faces pressures from the DOJ, the FTC, and both Democrats and Republicans, we're going to get some quirky updates.

Hopefully, this results in the prioritization of some features, which not only empower individuals with the information they want but also the information they need, such as:

- Multi-faceted answers
- Providing resources for contrarian opinions.
- Fact-checking concrete, known information.
- Marks of authority/ reliability on websites in SERPs.
- Surfacing of data and tools to help engage with it and receive insights from it.
- Sweeping updates to the **fake address listings and slanderous, false ratings.**

DIVIDED UNITED STATES

The U.S. has been developing a series of divisions that Google (as the starting point of online user journeys) may attempt to subtly address.

Examples:

- Rich vs. poor
 - Rich vs. taxes
 - Fun side fact: Jeff Bezos makes \$3,182 / second, which means that he makes the median US yearly salary (\$61,423) slightly less than every 20 seconds.
- Poor vs. poor
- President Trump vs.
 - House of Representatives
 - Democrats
 - Media
 - Logic
 - Tech
- House Democrats vs. Senate Republicans
- Democratic socialist vs. fiscal conservative
- Corporations vs. taxes
 - Amazon paying \$0 in taxes
 - FedEx paying \$0 in taxes
- On and off again, U.S. vs. China
 - NBA vs. China (or... maybe not...)

Tension and pressure are fickle things, they can produce breakthroughs and/or breakdowns.

Google has some of the widest reach and access with Americans' daily lives. They may find ways to:

- Support knowledge and information exchange to combat confirmation bias with data, insights, and education.
- Allow us to open our minds to differing opinions (combatting online, personal echo chambers).
- Attempt to serve as a platform for finding/ identifying truth versus a high recall information retrieval system.

SIDE NOTE

[Amazon's \(\\$10B\) ad platform](#) will only become more competitive. The competition will likely result in a higher focus on organic within Amazon.

JES SCHOLZ



INTERNATIONAL DIGITAL DIRECTOR, RINGIER

As SEOs, we need to focus beyond the borders of the search engine result pages.

Universal search (a.k.a. what was once 10 blue links) is increasingly becoming crowded by rich snippets that are powered by the larger Google ecosystem, such as Google News, Google for Jobs, Google Images.

We are also seeing Google pushing Discover, Lens and Assistant, all three of which often don't land the user within the universal search result.

The shift from keywords to topics is old news. SEOs need to focus on the shifts from answers to journeys, from queries to feeds and most importantly from Google being a traffic conduit to becoming a content hub that engages searches deeper into their own ecosystem.

Expect to see more [enriched search results](#), which essentially replace the functionality of website category pages, coming in 2020.

Expect for Google to ingest and refactor more content than just a small snippet. Thanks to API or feed triggered crawling and structured data, search engines can index and aggregate more content than ever.

This aggregated content can then be personalized and proactively provided to the user via the Google ecosystem.

Why visit multiple news websites when Google can show you coverage of topics you care about from trusted publishers all in one place?

Why visit multiple job boards when Google offers deduplicated, relevant listings with useful filter functionality all in one place?

These experiences are undoubtedly more convenient for the user, but this can be either an opportunity or a threat for brands.

How will you stand out when it is put side by side with competitors?

What is distinctly valuable about your brand?

When content is aggregated on Google, why should I click on your website to convert?

And most importantly, what does this mean in terms of how you measure success. If you are still focussed on keyword ranking or traffic – you are woefully unprepared.



PAUL SHAPIRO

HEAD OF SEO, CATALYST

Smart SEOs everywhere have been leveling up their skills and learning to program. There are clear advantages to having programming knowledge in SEO.

For web development-oriented programming, SEOs gain a unique perspective around working with the developers they often have to cooperate with. They understand better what can go wrong, what less-obvious factors that should be considered, and how to better prioritize recommendations.

On the flip-side, there is computer programming that is more oriented toward data analysis and data science.

I've been evangelizing for years the usage of R and Python in the SEO industry, and we're starting to really see increased adoption with myself, Hamlet Batista, JR Oakes, and many others leading the charge.

There are real advantages to moving beyond Excel for analysis. It permits a more sophisticated analysis of your own data, as well as the ability to:

- Incorporate other data sources for insights.
- Apply machine learning to solve complex problems.
- Make decisions that normally would be difficult and require human input (for which there is limited time to provide human input).

Programming makes SEOs better SEOs.

On the flip side, testing becomes increasingly more important every year.

Search engine algorithms are less and less predictable, and the application of science becomes necessary to make the best SEO recommendations.

It is imperative that SEOs test their assumptions in 2020.

CYRUS SHEPARD

FOUNDER, ZYPY

ADAPTING TO ZERO-CLICK SEARCHES

With the number of “zero-click” searches increasing – especially on mobile – and Google increasing the amount of website content it shows in search results, marketers are growing more focused on SERP appearance, as opposed to actual clicks generated.

More and more brand marketing is happening on Google itself, and not necessarily on your website.

Smart marketers will need to learn how to adapt and take advantage of this by getting more strategic about the information shown in search snippets. This includes basic tactics such as:

- Featured snippet optimization.
- Utilizing newer schemas such as FAQ and HowTo.
- Image targeting.
- And even favicon optimization.

Other marketers will continue to evolve to use these tactics to increase actual clicks over impressions.



ELI SCHWARTZ

GROWTH CONSULTANT AND ADVISOR



With the incorporation of BERT this year into the ranking and featured snippets algorithm, Google has taken a huge leap forward into making search really about intent matching rather than pure string matching.

This has been a trend that has been happening for years with many milestones along the way including entity-driven search, local intent, and real-time.

With BERT, Google can now parse obscure queries into something that makes sense rather than just matching strings.

This advancement will lead to many changes in the coming year. Content will truly have to be written to user intent rather than just strings that a user might search.

Keyword research tools may even become less relevant with the primary dataset for content creation coming from suggested queries.

At the same time that BERT narrows the search landscape by forcing queries into previously understood buckets, it will also widen it.

Queries that previously could not be bucketed into understandable strings (think of those really long queries where you search an entire paragraph), now have the opportunity to be bucketed with other similar queries.

This will likely have a huge impact on the quality of search as obscure websites or even PDFs will no longer rank on those long queries just because their words happen to match the query.

In 2020, the really smart SEOs will get up from their desks to talk to customers so they can find out what their audience really wants from them.

A second trend that I think we will see occur in 2020 is that the already tight SEO labor market will get even tighter.

For a number of reasons, the demand for SEO is skyrocketing while the supply of good talent is not growing at the same pace.

If you are one of those talented SEO's this is the year to leverage your skills for career advancement wherever it is that you work.

If you are in-house, it will mean stepping up to the executive table; while external consultants will be able to command higher prices for their services.

If you are in a management position, know that your people have choices and are in-demand: wine and dine them to stay.

DAN SHURE

**CONSULTANT, EVOLVING SEO /
PODCAST HOST, EXPERTS ON THE WIRE**

My advice to achieve actual SEO success in any year is to ignore most “trends”. So while 2020 might be the year of voice, zero-click SERPs, BERT, further NLP, continued core updates and more – you will see success by really getting the fundamentals right:

- A solid site architecture.
- Proper alignment of keyword/topic to user intent to content to on-site experience.
- The pillar fundamentals of crawler accessibility.
- Not being sloppy with redirects/canonicals/status codes.

These are just examples – and the list goes on and on.

But across 10+ years of doing SEO helping hundreds of sites, the path to success despite many trends has always consistent: get the core fundamentals right.



GRANT SIMMONS

**VP, PERFORMANCE MARKETING,
HOMES.COM**



I was looking over 2019 trends article and there's definitely a lot of continuity likely to happen - audience intent, structured data, great content, voice search, technical SEO (especially speed and JavaScript), and machine learning from both Google and SEO tools.

So from that perspective, "the more things change, the more they stay the same." However, I do see some more disruptive changes around how and where people consume information, and the interfaces they use (tending towards conversational discovery and presentation).

How people consume... I think they'll be a lot more "push" than pull - meaning AI and machine learning will understand our needs much better:

- Making proactive results available such as learning what news and weather information a user wants.
- Proactively delivering that info at the optimal time.

Your smart kitchen will know when you walk in, greet you and ask you if you want to hear the news, want to know the weather outside, the day's appointments or other necessary In Relevant Time (IRT) tasks that need to be satisfied.

Your Amazon-branded fridge might provide Whole Foods supermarket specials on its screen, prompting you to order (and have delivered to your door later in the day).

Getting your product and/or service into this consideration set might mean being part of the Amazon ecosystem, or partnering with smart appliance search networks.

There will still be “organic” results for more germane questions asked of our assistants, but only optional screen viewability, so “action” markup for speech will become a defacto necessity (like Google Assistant actions on steroids), so users can say “I'd like to buy that” (based on your presented or spoken information), and the smart assistant will make it happen.

Beyond a super-smart home (copyright 2020 Grant Simmons) :-), towards the end of 2020 we'll see the introduction of multiple-brand mostly-autonomous vehicles that will open up the highways to consumption on the go as well as what I coin “the connected commuter” - an audience who will change browsing and buying trends as rush hours become prime consumption hours.

Commuter intent will be a term popping up, as savvy SEO folks realize this is a perfect segment to marketing to with a distinct understanding of location, destination, route, scheduling, and machine-learned habits - putting great informational content

in front of a non-distracted driver, at the right time, right place in a handsfree environment connects many dots we already optimize for (or should be) in a controlled environment.

The "5th screen" (after TV, desktop, mobile and digital signage) will be the inside of the windshield, a marketer's opportunity to present not only sourced (found) info, but also overlay augmented reality through structured markup.

This should (will) herald the rise of additional markup pertaining to intersect of objects/content i.e., where real-life objects intersect with onscreen objects, already solved in many AR devices, but it'll be an optimization opportunity for SEOs, segmenting the visual informational component of device screens to work with AR environments.

SEO therefore, will become much more (even more) of a multi-device discipline, with an understanding of optimization across all screens - what shows there, how to inspire clicks, being relevant to device location, interactivity as a value factor - and, most importantly, optimizing relevance in any situation for the best answer to commuter/user current and future (10-20-minute drive) intent.

Yep. Queries will still drive (pun intended) results, however query anticipation and resolution will also be a large part of search engine's goals, SEO folks will help drive (still pun intended) multi-step query chains with answers that deliver value and satisfaction to users over multiple points of need.

Fun times ahead for sure.

BILL SLAWSKI

**DIRECTOR OF SEO RESEARCH,
GO FISH DIGITAL**

Google has been paying attention to things, and not strings since 2012.

Have you been optimizing your pages for the entities that your site is about, including local entities?

Are you including information about properties and classifications for those entities, and information about how they are related to other entities (covering people, places, and things)?



The search of the future increasingly is about real-world objects, and Google is finding ways to include entity related information in search results through things such as augmentation queries.

You can optimize entities that your site is about by doing things such as:

- Optimizing those for Google's Knowledge Graph.
- Making sure that they appear in Knowledge Panels.

Considering linking to citation sources about entities that Google may find reliable. Entities are sources of expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness.

Google has been showing how they may answer questions by building knowledge graphs for queries and using text from a top percentage of results as sources of triples that generate knowledge graphs - and you can have pages that are included in such results.

That is a trend of the coming year.



ALEYDA SOLIS

**INTERNATIONAL SEO CONSULTANT & FOUNDER,
ORAINTI**

GROWTH IN IMPORTANCE OF STRUCTURED DATA USAGE WITH VOICE ACTIONS GENERATION AND RICHER RESULTS

Due to the announcement of Google to support the generation of voice actions from structured data usage on websites and the increasing number of supported rich results, the incentive to use more structured data will only grow.

INCREASED PROMINENCE OF PREDICTIVE SEARCH FEATURES, VIA GOOGLE DISCOVER & ADDITIONAL INTEGRATIONS

Google Discover has been the first clear step towards the “queryless future” that Google **announced** in its 20th anniversary, and will likely be further expanded and integrated within the Google search ecosystem.

FURTHER SHIFT TO A MORE TECHNICAL SEO ECOSYSTEM FUELED BY MORE JAVASCRIPT FRAMEWORKS USAGE, PWAS PROMINENCE & NEED OF SEO AUTOMATION FOR BIGGER WEBSITES

This already started since a few years ago but has become far more obvious this year.

In 2020, it will only get bigger with the popularization of JS frameworks, app first businesses that will also more strongly shift to the web due to the benefits of PWAs, and the need for SEO task automation for bigger sites where machine learning with Python can provide a solution.

KELLY STANZE

**SEARCH STRATEGIST,
HALLMARK**



I think 2020 will be a year of reassessing user access points to search and aligning content with that.

By this, I mean taking a look at the mechanics of how something is crawled, indexed, and served in a variety of different search settings.

With users having more options than ever in how they search for things, it'll be even more important for SEOs to bear in mind the fundamentals of clean architecture and content delivery.

- Are there parametered pages that canonicalize up to a root that should be a freestanding page of their own?
- Are there limitations in your site architecture causing Google to deprioritize or completely overlook content which you'd like to see ranking?
- Or, even more granularly, is your content formatted in a way that it can easily be grabbed by rich snippets?

The technical delivery of content going into 2020 is top of mind for me, and I think with the rollout of BERT and continued emphasis on user-focused optimization, it is top of mind for others as well.

DAN TAYLOR

**SEO ACCOUNT DIRECTOR,
SALT.AGENCY**



I think the two biggest shifts in search momentum that are on the horizon include:

- Google's increased usage and advancements in machine learning.
- The apparent re-emphasis on site speed.

Search engines have been using machine learning for a while, but regardless of the search engine, or if you're optimizing for BERT or Korolyov, the underlying principle is creating good content for users, strong context vectors, and better understanding and using the relationships between entities.

There's a lot of misinformation surrounding what is deemed "high quality" content, as well as some who believe in AIO (artificial intelligence optimization), but what's important is that you don't lose sight of what makes a webpage great.



In recent weeks, Google have almost reinvigorated the discussions and focus around site speed, with the new Chrome “slow warning badges”, and the speed reports in Google Search Console.

This for many will reignite conversations with developers and in some cases lead to systems requiring almost complete redesigns of page templates and reengineering of how assets are loaded.

This can cause friction, so humanizing the conversation and ensuring it’s not seen as critique will be an invaluable skill.

MARTHA VAN BERKEL

CEO, SCHEMA APP

Structured Data. 2020 is shaping up to be the year of structured data.

Since May 2019, Google has made significant investments in features and reports that rely on structured data and have been very vocal that by adopting structured data, content is optimized for search and voice assistants.

Most recently at the Google Webmaster Conference, one of the top trends identified for 2020 was “structured data”.

Structured data is the language of search engines, and allows you to explain what your web pages are about and how they relate and are connected to other things on your site, in your company, or on the web.



It is important that your structured data strategy extends beyond a feature hunt for rich results, and includes a strategy to optimize and connect the key business elements on your website.

Ultimately, you want to be understood, found by your customers through any channel and be well-positioned to take advantage of future features from Google and other structured data consumers like Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft, and AI Chatbots.

Done right, structured data becomes your marketing data layer. It will allow you to publish your content for any machine/search engine/voice assistant/chatbot with context to provide service to your customers across any surface and at any moment of interaction.

Smart SEOs will start leveraging their structured data to enhance their analytics so that they can gauge what part of their content is driving results and use this data to influence content strategy, marketing strategy, product features and more, across their companies.

Finally, the innovators will start to re-use the knowledge graph created by their structured data to accelerate other AI/machine learning initiatives.

TONY WRIGHT

CEO, WRIGHTIMC



We've seen massive changes in Google in 2019. I don't expect 2020 to be any different.

The implementation of BERT, as well as other algorithm shifts indicates that Google is actually implementing some of the AI features we've been anticipating for several years.

This means that SEOs need to learn how to write or hire people who know how to write. It's been several years since just putting up keyword-rich text worked for SEO. But now, SEOs will have to write something that is relevant AND valuable.

Google's editorial discretion isn't perfect yet - there will still be content that ranks that shouldn't. But the day is coming when the best content will win.

Oh, and if you don't have mobile on-point, you are behind.

Almost every prospect coming into our shop has a mobile site that is a mess. To survive in 2020, you need to implement 2017 tactics and fix your mobile.