SEO TRENDS 2018

47 EXPERTS ON THE FUTURE OF SEO

WRITTEN BY
DANNY GOODWIN

SEO
TRENDS
2018

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DANNY GOODWIN

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47 EXPERTS ON THE TOP SEO TRENDS THAT WILL MATTER IN 2018

Want to up your SEO game and be more successful in 2018?

Good! You've come to the right place.

Below, you'll find tips from some of the top SEO professionals. They will tell you just about everything you need to know to succeed in 2018.

However, before we get to our main event, I must note that after our [2017 edition of SEO trends](#) launched last year on Search Engine Journal, we heard a couple of complaints about how long it was.

Well, you'll be happy to know that this year's SEO trends post is a mere 13,014 words, down from 13,839 last year.

You're welcome.

10+ SEO TRENDS THAT WILL DOMINATE 2018

As an added bonus, this year we've added this helpful TL;DR section for those of you with extremely short-attention spans who care not about context or details but simply want to know what the most important SEO ~~trends~~ tricks will be in 2018.

If this sounds like you, here you go:

1. Mobile-first
2. Voice search
3. Schema
4. Featured snippets
5. Content
6. Machine learning and AI
7. Speed
8. Technical SEO
9. Links
10. A whole lot more! (TIE)

So go focus on all those things and I'm sure you'll be just fine.

For those of you who plan to read on, we've got some amazing insights in store for you about why all these things (and many others) will matter so much in 2018 – as well as what you need to do and how to do it.

So what SEO trends should you focus on in 2018?

Here's what you need to know, according to 47 SEO experts.

DAWN ANDERSON

Managing Director, Move It Marketing

It feels that this year has very much been around "fast is the only speed," given we know that mobile search is now so prominent and the forthcoming mobile-first index draws ever closer. Certainly, amongst the technical SEOs out there, there has been a huge focus on TTFB (time to first byte). This will continue into 2018 as sites begin to be increasingly judged on their performance on smaller screens and slower connections.

On the subject of speed, at the beginning of 2017 there was still much resistance to AMP in the SEO community overall, but as we head toward 2018 that feels to be dissipating now somewhat with a reluctant acceptance that AMP looks as though it's not going away any time soon. Google have

worked very hard at pushing forward with AMP, both from a development and a PR perspective given the education of the masses needed to encourage implementation.

There have been some impressive case studies for larger sites reported, however the 'out of the box' plugins are still trailing which still leaves the majority of businesses without considerable dev budget somewhat behind for now. One thing I would note is that the AMP for WP plugin on WordPress looks to have come on leaps and bounds this year, which could affect millions of smaller organizations positively in the future. Not perfect yet, but definitely getting there, and like anything else in a minimum viable product world things should begin to trickle through, and with them, adoption over time.

In 2018 there will be an even bigger focus on machine learning and "SEO from data." Of course, the amplification side of things will continue to integrate increasingly with genuine public relations exercises rather than shallow-

relationship link building, which will become increasingly easy to detect by search engines.

Something which was troubling about 2017, and as we head into 2018, is the new wave of organizations merely bolting on SEO as a service without any real appreciation of structuring site architectures and content for both humans and search engine understanding. While social media is absolutely essential as a means of reaching influencers and disrupting a conversation to gain traction, grow trust and positive sentiment, those who do not take the time to learn about how information is extracted for search too may be disappointed.

Furthermore, this will be particularly evident if organizations who don't invest in educating on SEO decide it's "too difficult" and pull SEO budget, failing to realize that all of these channels must work together to gain the maximum halo-effect, given the always-connected nature of the modern searcher.

It's not a case of pulling budget from one channel and putting it into another or eliminating another altogether. A blended-approach is absolutely essential nowadays, with SEO as a key part of that mix.

Voice search will continue to pick up pace and optimization for this new type of search will become increasingly important as spoken word device uptake continues. Brand sentiment will become increasingly important as the trusted source of data and "single answers" in a voice search environment, but understanding the technology behind this wave will also be essential.

OLGA ANDRIENKO

Head of Global Marketing, SEMrush

Fast, secure, mobile-optimized websites are the future. Websites should reflect the clear purpose of the company and have an easy-to-use interface.

In 2018, your SEO success won't depend on how well you optimize your website for Google. Google now looks beyond content and all technical requirements. These are now simply a must.

You have to build your brand. A strong brand ensures trust, greater user engagement, and bigger success in search.

So, on top of content marketing, SEO now should be deeply aligned with your company's PR efforts. They have impacted SEO in the past as well by

bringing backlinks, and now it's even more. Now bigger brand authority is crucial to your SEO success.

Technical SEO and on-page SEO will get you to SERPs, but it's the strong PR game that will get you to the top.

LOREN BAKER

Founder, Search Engine Journal

From a technical SEO perspective, we're going to see microdata and schema markup be important for Google indexing. But also expect Google's AI to incorporate that data into more rich snippets and featured snippets for mobile, desktop, and other users who may not necessarily click directly to a site but take action upon that data and other forms of calls to action.

I feel that page content naturally answering user questions and expectations of user intent is going to be more important as well. It's not just about having content that ranks for keywords but also making sure that that content is exactly what the searcher is looking for. Recently I've noticed the sites improving their rankings are those that address user intent and answer questions correctly and efficiently, even sites that are new or have few links built to them.

I would not be surprised to see Google replace featured snippets with advertisements, rich internal data, or with AI-built answers that are a mash-up of all of the relevant information to the query, which is being fed into Google in tables, bulleted lists, publicly accessible information, and content that has been curated from multiple sources.

I feel that technical SEO mistakes that affect crawl budget – and also pollute Google with non-SEO-friendly content such as social landing pages, WordPress media archives, offer pages and cloned e-commerce product pages – will have a more detrimental effect on sites moving forward.

In the upcoming year content budgets that are established purely for link acquisition will need to become multimedia marketing efforts and strategies that will attract targeted users via multiple different formats in an effort to build quality traffic and quality interaction, which will become more of a quality standard moving forward. Links

and technical SEO are the largest pieces of the pie, but multimedia efforts such as video, photos, and podcasts will be the game changer and differentiator in many competitive markets.

Last but not least, I predict we will see a rise in consumer brand-oriented companies acquiring traditional media companies as an alternative to the outdated advertising models that are failing those media companies today. I think we'll see this as a strategy used by companies to fast-track their content marketing efforts and acquire targeted audiences. I would not be surprised to see this start with media companies that have recently been in the news for tremendous drops in revenue.

ALEH BARYSEVICH

Founder & CMO, SEO PowerSuite and Awario

In my opinion, the biggest three SEO trends for 2018 will be:

1. **Mobile-first indexing:** Google announced it will be switching to mobile-first index in 2018. The best practice is to make a responsive website, and there's no excuse to avoid doing that in the coming year. Otherwise, your site's rankings and user experience may suffer.

2. **Semantic search:** This is about returning meaningful results based on user intent, location, search history, and other parameters. To win in the world of semantic search, you need two things: to understand the user intent and have quality and crawlable content to match this intent.

3.   **Position zero:** This is a complex topic, but I'll try to make it as simple as possible. First, you need to identify a simple question and provide a straightforward and valuable answer. Second, you need to make it easy for Google and users to find, which is to be achieved by adding the structured data markup.

Beyond the three trends above, it's crucial to zoom out of the SEO buzzwords and remind yourself of your ultimate SEO goal. And the goal is not to master the trends, but rather to build a reliable SEO process that will bring organic traffic to your particular website. This circles us back to understanding the Google algorithm and competition analysis.

The SEO trends for 2018 and the years to come are not some detached concepts you need to tackle separately. On the contrary, these trends are part of one Google algorithm, a constantly evolving and very sophisticated system, which works differently in different niches, with different languages, in different countries, and on different devices.

The only way to outsmart the algorithm is to see **how it actually works today,** in your particular niche, for the market leaders. In other words, whatever the trends for the current year are, my tip is to always start with competition analysis.

ANDY BETTS

President, Page Zero Media

Over recent years, organic search has become the largest driver of website traffic. However, opportunity has brought challenge. The changing and dynamic visual SERP has meant that organic results can appear below the fold and, in many instances, paid results can take prominence.

In 2018, SEO marketers need to up their game and shift their focus beyond rank and towards revenue. Having experience that spans multiple channels with an integrated mindset – especially on SEO and PPC synergy, combined with a performance mentality—sets up people who are new to the market for success. For marketers who were brought up in the 'traditional SEO market,' 2018 is a time to adapt or die.

Algorithmic chasers, technical SEOs, and Google Doodle followers should hone their technical skills to focus on emerging voice search technologies and AI applications. Content is key but content alone is no longer king; content, context, and relevance will drive performance of content and digital marketing, and SEO is part but not full parcel.

From a strategic and development perspective, a new era of customer-first marketing means that SEO marketers need to find new ways to understand preferences and communicate with audiences in multiple and meaningful ways and across all channels. SEO is part of a new and complex way of building authentic relationships with customers and brands.

In 2018, marketers can no longer be lazy with the content they create and the campaigns they optimize. And, to elevate personal and professional performance, marketers must learn how to up-level conversations across their organization and across multiple departments. To get executive buy-in, SEOs

need to talk a different language – a CMO is not interested in a list of rankings, they want to know the impact of SEO on performance. In 2018, SEO is content and content is SEO, content is digital and digital is content. Don't be left behind.

ALAN BLEIWEISS

Forensic SEO Consultant, Alan Bleiweiss Consulting

Every year we come out with views on trends. Every year site owners ignore what matters.

This year, however, it's going to be more of the same.

Mobile. Security. Speed. Some people will claim PWAs when they're really full of crap or just don't understand scale limitations and the harm PWAs cause.

WINSTON BURTON

VP of SEO, Acronym Media

As the SERPs continue to get more competitive, brands must be prepared for voice and mobile and should also have high-quality content and links as these are going to be the most influential factors on search visibility in 2018.

As much as we've heard it before, content is very important. With Google using intent as a signal of the quality and usefulness of your content, you must act like a publisher that creates high-quality content that is not only relevant but useful in the moment of need and meets end user intent. If you have low-quality content and the content is not engaging, you might get impacted by Panda.

Google is big on the user experience. With users moving away from desktop and using mobile phones and other devices and desktop usage declining, it is imperative you have a fast-loading website that provides a great experience across all devices and platforms so users can find what they are looking for quickly and easily.

Over 20 percent of queries are via voice search, according to Google, and users are asking more "how to"- questions along with other question-related content. This means brands must have sound content strategies that dominate quick answers.

Voice search is changing the way users are communicating with Google and other search engines to find relevant answers to their questions and it is becoming an integral part of the Google experience. SEMrush and other providers offer tools that show you what traffic is from featured snippets, etc. and it is rumored Google is working on something for voice searches in Google Analytics.

You should also use structured data to provide search engines with the information they need to better understand what's on your site to maximize clicks, visits, and conversions. The Schema Tester can help with testing your markup.

And, at the end of the day, links are still at the heart of Google's algorithm. Having high-quality links from different referring and followed domains is still important. If you make a great site with great content and your site is a resource people gain value from, you should not have a problem getting links naturally.

CHRISTINE CHURCHILL

President & CEO, KeyRelevance

Voice search is going to be more important in 2018. With the expansion of mobile and new home assistance devices like Alexa, Echo, and Google Home being developed into home products, voice search is going to grow exponentially.

Smart marketers will be seeking ways to prepare for this development and will need to optimize to find their way into the answer for voice searches. Voice searches tend to be more verbose so delivering more relevant responses may require different strategies.

Accountability of your SEO efforts is another area that is growing in importance. Going forward

SEOs need to be able to quantitatively show the value of their online marketing by identifying and implementing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which will demonstrate the value added by their SEO initiatives. If you haven't already done so, 2018 is a good year to get certified in Google Analytics.

DAVE DAVIES

CEO, Beanstalk Internet Marketing

The biggest shift I think we're going to functionally see is in content.

Historically, as marketers, we've looked at content from the perspective of driving people into the funnel we want them traveling down or as a link building/social media tool. I think what we're going to see in 2018 is a significant shift in how content is laid out and what content is put on a page or site.

As machine learning improves, we're seeing a rapid growth in Google's ability to understand not just language, but user intent. As these both advance, what we're really seeing is Google's ability to judge a page/site's ability to fulfill the searcher's intent improve dramatically.

And so when a user searches for "asparagus bicycle" Google is no longer just judging the authority of the page and it's content but what type of content it contains, and what various types of content the query may be requesting.

Is the user looking to buy such a bicycle? Is the user looking for the cooking utensil? Or do they just want to know the history of such an obscure phrase?

It's the page that offers the highest probability of matching possible intents that will win, meaning we as content producers will be looking at ways to maximize those odds by answering multiple intents. We'll be looking to attract and serve even those visitors who aren't looking for our products or services because serving them allows us to improve our probability of ranking the query that is entered by those who will convert.

And let's not forget media types. Do those various personas have different media preferences? If they do we'll be looking to cater to that as well.

2018 is going to be a pivotal year in how to approach and understand content and how content is digested by searchers and what their expectations become.

DARRELL DAVIS

SEO Manager, The Penny Hoarder

The 5,000-word ultimate guide-type article continues to be valuable for users while also ranking well. However, the length is not practical in every scenario. In some cases, creating several pieces of related content is the better option to cover a topic.

Several models exist for this method, but in my experience, there are three keys to creating clusters that rank well and promote a positive user experience:

- Start with keyword research to determine what information the target audience is looking for.

- Make sure each article covers a defined segment of the topic and avoid keyword cannibalization.

- Format the cluster so all the articles in the series are readily accessible to users. A related links section can work for a smaller cluster, but you can also use internal linking and anchor text to tie the series together. This also helps Google connect your content, increasing rankings across all the articles.

STONEY DEGEYTER

CEO, Pole Position Marketing

I think the single biggest trend we'll see in 2018 is businesses trying to figure out how to integrate AI into their content marketing strategies.

A lot of companies will spring up purporting to produce cheap, AI-driven content. These will likely be little more than advanced content spinners.

Much of the early adopters of AI-produced content will be disappointed, except for those that are happy with slightly better versions of the cheaply spun content that is being produced today.

Ultimately, by the end of 2018 or mid-2019, we'll see a swing back to "natural" content produced by real humans who can produce valuable content that actually provides value.

PRATIK DHOLAKIYA

Co-founder, E2M

Google has been hit hard this year with accusations that their algorithm is too forgiving of "fake news." It mirrors the accusations they were getting hit with about content farms shortly before Panda, only now it's happening in a hostile political climate.

They've had a patent on the books for a couple years now for an algorithm called "knowledge-based trust" that is supposed to help them identify which information is factual, and they've never had a stronger incentive to implement something like that than they have now. I wouldn't be at all surprised if sites with a reputation for publishing fake news started getting hit hard next year.

2017 also saw a long list of "Phantom" updates that targeted sites with thin content, ads above the fold, misleading links, deceptive advertising, interstitials, and other interface-breaking forms of manipulation. We can expect that trend to continue in full stride.

Finally, Google issued an outright warning this year about manipulative guest posting, which isn't the kind of thing they typically bring up without having something in the works. There's been a bit of resurgence in old-school "article marketing" style "guest posting," and I've been around long enough to see that this kind of manipulation never lasts. So keep your eyes out for a guest-posting algorithm in 2018.

ERIC ENGE

CEO, Stone Temple Consulting

Two big SEO trends to watch in 2018:

Trend 1: You Need to do More With Content

You want to know one of the most important consequences of machine learning? For Google, I believe that it's an ever-increasing ability to better understand content relevance, quality, and overall value on a topical basis.

This is going to shake up the search results over the next couple of years, particularly on informational topic. As a result, nearly all of us are underinvested in content creation and promotion.

So one thing you should do in 2018 is invest more in the content your publishing on your site, the content you publish off-site, and how you promote both.

In particular, focus on content that addresses specific user needs, and don't be afraid to address a number of very specific topics. If you execute this the right way, you'll get a strong payoff in the long run.

Trend 2: Featured Snippets

Yes, people talk about these a lot already, but I don't think they realize that they will be far more important in the near future. By 2020, one estimate (from Andrew Ng, Chief Scientist at Baidu) says that 50 percent of all searches will be via voice or image. Data that we've published at Stone Temple says that two-thirds of people already use voice commands with their phone at least some of the time.

And, according to Strategy Analytics, by 2020, 75 percent of all Internet-connected devices will be something other than a PC, smartphone, or tablet. That means that most devices will be driven by voice interaction. While many of these may

have companion screens, people will get used to interacting with them via voice, and receiving their answers back via voice.

The practical upshot of this is that you'll be getting one single canonical answer. That coming reality is the reason that Google and Bing are pushing featured snippets so aggressively.

They are striving to be able to determine the one best canonical answer, as in this new reality, it will be critical to the quality of their service, far more so than is the case today (where the first reason being wrong is not a crisis if the second one is right).

That means it needs to be a huge priority for you, too. If most of the info searchers receive will be in a list of results containing only one answer, either you're the source of that answer, or you're not. And, yes, you want it to be you, and not your competitor.

ERIN EVERHART

Senior Manager, Media Strategy & Mobile, The Home Depot

Three things stick out to make big movements in 2018:

Integration with Paid Media/Marketing

If you ask five brands where their SEO team sits, you're going to get five different answers. As an industry, we've had a hard time figuring out where to "put" SEO in the org – Is it IT? Is it .com? Is it marketing? Is it PR? – because SEO is really all of those things.

While that won't get solved in 2018, we need integrate the SEO team alongside other marketing, both paid and owned initiatives. The brands that give their channels visibility into what the other channels are doing will be the brands that win.

There Are Other Engines Out There

Google gets our lion share of attention, but it's not the only kid on the block. Customers have more options to choose from, and they're looking to social networks to start that searching, places like Pinterest, Houzz, Next Door, Facebook, and Trivago.

Paid placements exist to buy our way into these platforms, but we have to start thinking (and prioritizing) how we can improve our organic rankings in these. Let's also not forget that some 55 percent of U.S. online shoppers are starting their product searches on Amazon, too.

Optimizing for New Search Methods

Just like Google isn't the only search engine anymore, written, text search isn't the only way people are searching. Voice search and image search are becoming the new norm.
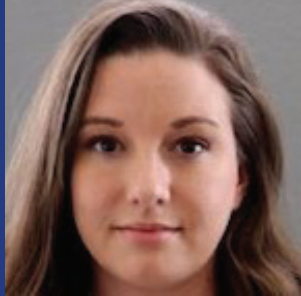
SHELLY FAGIN

Founder, Highly Searched

2018 will continue to focus on preparing websites for the shift to a mobile-first index. Google is giving us plenty of time to address issues before the switch occurs in 2018 and even then we are told, it will be a gradual rollout.

In the meantime, we should focus on continually improving essential factors such as mobile UX, page load times, and content analysis.

If you're not in an industry where there's an advantage to using AMP, take some valuable tips away from the project instead. Focus on clean, simple design free of unnecessary fancy animations and effects and do your best to load those pages as instant as possible.

You should be reading through your pages and remove any "fluff" content that doesn't need to

be there. Mobile real estate is way too valuable to waste space that's not meeting the needs of our searchers. Focus on providing a clear and concise call-to-action. Let's keep it simple.

Aside from mobile, in the past, our primary focus may have been to solely drive relevant traffic via search engines to our websites, today that is no longer enough. Our SERP competition becomes more fierce daily; personalized search influences rankings, Instant Answers, featured snippets, and more ads are occupying our organic space than ever before.

Getting the number one spot on Google doesn't hold the same value we fondly remember from the past. As marketers, we need to be equally focused on converting the traffic we do get and making sure we provide an exceptional customer experience overall.

I've seen a massive increase in the usage of chat functionality by visitors who are expecting instant answers or assistance to meet their needs. Some

sites may need a knowledgeable, well-spoken individual responding to questions while other customers are happy to book appointments or confirm purchase ship dates with a bot, it's going to vary from site to site.

In an industry whose primary product/service can be confusing or overwhelming, try reaching out first to site visitors and offer to help answer their questions. This tactic is especially useful if you've noticed they've been on a particular page for a while. Searchers today have been conditioned to want info fast and if you don't give it to them, your competitors will.

The role of an SEO is continually expanding and evolving, and it's crucial to recognize how to send the right messages at the right time. Take the time to learn about the sales journey our customers or clients may take.

If you're in front of a cold audience with your "Buy Now" button directly in their face, you might be missing opportunities, especially for

more significant ticket items. Consumers need to become familiar with your brand and build a level of trust before making that purchase.

Learning how to interpret your data and identify critical missing elements in your sales funnel. Also, see this as an excellent opportunity to open up communications with and learn from our paid search or social partners. Let's take full advantage of that opportunity.

CASIE GILLETTE

Senior Director of Digital Marketing, KoMarketing

What has been really interesting to me over the past couple of years is watching answer boxes, featured snippets, and knowledge panels take over more space in search results. It's had a big influence on our content marketing objectives and – for many of our clients – we were able to take advantage early.

Heading into 2018, I see the search results further growing and changing. As a result, understanding our users, the intent of their searches, and what the search results are showing is more important than ever.

You may not want to create top of the funnel content. However, if your audience is looking a particular phrase and it's top of the funnel, you need to think about what content you really need.

DAMON GOCHNEAUR

Founder, Aspiro Digital Marketing Agency

We spend a lot of time working with local businesses, and by far one of the biggest areas we see for improvement comes with the implementation of Schema. With new restaurant Schema types released this year, it's obvious Google leans more and more on structured data as it seeks to provide the most relevant answers.

And surprisingly enough, links still matter. Local businesses, maybe more so than any other business type, can reap some of the largest SERP ranking improvements from link building, yet are often times completely ignoring link building.

From sponsoring local events to discounts for local organizations and associations, many local

businesses spend immense resources on being part of the fabric of the community but fail to take advantage and extend those efforts to their digital footprints.

If local businesses spent time implementing Schema and making link building a priority for 2018, they'd reap the rewards of improved rankings and increased site traffic for years to come.

BRIAN HARNISH

SEO Consultant, Site Objective

In 2018, if the removal of net neutrality passes, it will likely be an even greater challenge to find traffic. While an SEO's job will likely not change much, there may be major changes and even much less granularity in terms of segmented audience channels in analytics reporting and SEO audience targeting.

As networks (presumably) increase prices and take away the ability of others without access to see those traffic streams, it will be even harder for an SEO to identify methods of optimization to attract quality traffic to their clients' websites. Much of it could end up being at the hands of the network, filtering down to the search engines as appropriate.

Under the removal of net neutrality, people with spending dollars will prioritize their more favorite

network packages (like Facebook and Twitter vs. Pinterest and Tumblr) over those who are less important to them, which can likely create greater insight into audience consumption behavior. But, the reporting will come at an ever-skyrocketing cost, likely greater than if net neutrality were left alone.

Aside from the speculation of the passing of net neutrality removal, mediums for organic reach will continue to shift towards mobile, with mobile increasingly becoming a focus of online marketing efforts. Even better site speed, responsive design, and mobile-focused elements will be more important to optimize for.

Local search and voice search will continue to be on the rise, as greater emphasis on "near me" searches increase, and people continue to use voice search as an easier means to accomplish their objective.

It will be even more important to focus on things like AMP, mobile site speed optimization, mobile UX optimization, along with local and mobile audience targeting. Conversational search keyword phrases

will also be an important consideration as voice search continues to grow. These are not going away, and likely will end up becoming deeper and more diverse as time goes on.

CHRISTOPHER HART

**Head of Client Development, U.S.,
ScribbleLive Linkdex**

Without a doubt, one of the biggest trends that has already begun to take place and will continue well into 2018 is the consolidation of niche MarTech players by larger content cloud vendors, with the role and importance of SEO increasing significantly throughout this transformation.

Last year, I discussed the [rise of the CDO "Chief Digital Officer"](#) and the transformative role this position would have, specifically around turning siloed organizations into customer-centric digital first operations. While I still see this trend in play with many enterprises still in the midst of their digital transformation, the convergence in the MarTech space is creating many synergies

and opportunities and this should be seen as a welcome development for brands and agencies who are looking for an edge in regards to their SEO driven content marketing or outreach strategies.

In this new environment, the digital marketer who views SEO in a broader context will certainly come out ahead of the competition in 2018 and beyond. By expanding SEO from just a tactic or strategy, to become more of a role that encompasses the entire buyer journey, digital marketers will find that their SEO initiatives can be far more effective.

What would this look like?

A more holistic approach to SEO would begin in the content ideation and planning phases, and extend into content creation, publishing, distribution, and promotion, covering all content and outreach across the entire end to end buyer journey. SEO that encompasses all stages of the

content lifecycle and embeds itself into every step of the buyer journey is a far superior approach, and will reveal incredible actionable insights with the right reporting in place.

While this may have seemed unrealistic in the past, content cloud vendors are making it easier for digital marketers to break out of a channel mindset and keep the end user clearly in focus across the entire buyer journey, over every channel, and from any device.

BILL HARTZER

SEO Consultant

Fairly recently, I've seen a resurgence of on-page SEO factors making a difference in search engine rankings. While links are still important and it's incredibly difficult to rank well without links from other websites, content and on-page SEO is becoming increasingly important.

For 2018, I recommend making sure you have your website's link profile in the best shape it can be: devoid of spammy, low-quality links. Have a good link acquisition plan in place. Then, for 2018, focus on on-page and on-site SEO.

Focus on your website structure first, then work on reviewing your individual pages' on-page SEO. Optimizing each individual webpage, adding additional content when needed, and using proper markup (heading tags, bulleted and numbered lists, tables, etc.) when appropriate.

Schema markup opportunities should be reviewed, as well. Having the right combination of great content, on a page that's properly optimized for visitors, can lead to great search engine rankings.

Featured snippets, for example, are one of the rewards of properly marked up and optimized content that helps visitors answer questions or helps them get the information they are looking for.

Take a look at your current pages that are underperforming on your website (not getting as many visits as other pages), and ask the following questions:

- Is the content on this page outdated and can it be revised?

- Does the page go in-depth enough to answer questions visitors could have about the topic?

- Could you add more content (text, images, photos, graphics, quotes) to the page?

- Is the web page linked enough from other pages on the site? Does it have the appropriate number of internal links?

- Is the page optimized (as in SEO)?

- Does the page reference a main keyword, a secondary keyword, and related keywords? If not, you can find those secondary and related keywords fairly easily. Look at the bottom of the Google search results for the main keyword under "searches related to", and then review the Google auto-complete search for the main keyword.

- Are you using the appropriate heading tags on the page, such as H1, H2, H3, and H4 tags?

- Are you using a proper title tag and meta description tag on the page?

  Those are just some of the on-page optimizations that can be done that are often overlooked. The

emphasis now should be on on-site and on-page search engine optimization for 2018, especially if you have overlooked it in the past and previously just focused on links.

JIM HEDGER

Creative Partner, Digital Always Media

This is the weirdest year to try to write predictions about technology and search. Many others have written about voice search and mobile-everything, please read each one carefully, and assume I agree.

I have to write about politics. I think the business environment will have a greater impact on our world than any changes Google or Facebook might make.

However one might feel about the Trump administration and for whatever reasons Mr. Trump was elevated to the Oval Office, the tech community in the United States, like virtually every other sector of the population and economy, is going to suffer. The year-old Trump administration

has isolated America and the detrimental effects of that isolation are beginning to show.

America is losing its grip on the tech world. The Trump administration is actively preventing some of the smartest technical brains from learning or working in the United States because of their places of origin.

Now many of the biggest tech businesses are relocating teams to Toronto and Singapore and Zurich and Vancouver rather than setting them up in California, Texas, or Washington State. Alphabet alone is investing tens of billions in several projects spread throughout the Greater Toronto Area and the surrounding region.

Uber, Bing, Amazon, and Tesla have also refocused billions away from the United States and into other nations because the high-level R&D they're doing is simply too critical and way too expensive to place them in what has essentially become an unstable environment.

In the final weeks of 2017, the FCC repealed the protections that enshrined Net Neutrality in law. Ultimately this will make everything on the American Internet more expensive.

It won't make the Internet more expensive in Canada, Europe, Asia, or in the South Pacific. The Swedes, Danes, Nords, and Finns will not pay more for the Internet because the American FCC canceled Net Neutrality, but Americans will.

Every American will, including American tech businesses.

Voting for incompetent administrators has consequences. Increased business costs are apparently going to be among them. Some business will not be able to continue operating in the United States and will either shutter, move, or simply not open in that environment, to begin with.

Because the Trump administration has stopped engaging in multilateral international agreements the most successful trade arrangements in history,

NAFTA is likely to be abrogated. This will have extraordinary effects on the manufacturing supply chain and likely cause economic dislocation in several industries, including tech.

As it stands right now, the tech, business, and academic worlds are relatively seamless between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. While specialized visas are still necessary to work between the countries, those visas are relatively easy to obtain, most often at the point of entry. We might revert to a system where we have to apply for a working visa to simply speak at a conference on the other side of the border.

The Internet is too important for the global economy. It is very likely that 2018 will be the year the International community actively worked specifically to remove responsibilities for it from American hands.

American businesses will have to work harder to beat the bottom line next year. Consumers will

have less spending money and businesses reliant on the Internet will have higher capital costs to bear each month.

It stinks and it's unfair and it's not the near-term future the American people deserve but it's the one a sufficient number voted for to make it a reality for all of us. And so it goes.

America will rebound. It always does. But the nation will have to go through a rough time first.

JON HENSHAW

Senior SEO Analyst, CBS Interactive

Google will continue to consume and find more ways to use structured data in 2018. Brands and businesses have an opportunity to create more search visibility by increasing their use of structured data on all of their pages.

I recommend using as many relevant Schema.org item types as possible. There should also be liberal use of lists and tables to better position content for featured snippets.

UX will also continue to be important to Google. Brands and businesses need to focus on site speed, above-the-fold rendering, and reducing their bounce rate from search engine result pages (SERPs).

Going forward, we should assume that if any part of our pages creates a poor user experience,

Google will eventually turn their attention toward it. Focusing on good UX not only future-proofs your site for Google, it can also increase repeat visits and grow your site beyond the SERPs.

BILL HUNT

Global Strategy Consultant, Back Azimuth Consulting

For 2018, I believe there are three key areas of opportunity for SEOs.

Understanding Searcher Intent

Everything – from Hummingbird to machine learning – is pointing to the requirement to really understand why a person did a query, what type of content they were expecting to get and ensuring it returns your content that matches that interest.

When companies take the time to understand this ecosystem, we can see exponential gains in performance. The days of bait and switching content to achieve the marketer's goals are over.

You can no longer hijack a searcher looking for

basic information and try to get them to download your sales-oriented white paper. Smart companies are asking an additional question of "If I show the user this content what is my opportunity and how do I nurture them to the next step?"

This will be critical to be successful in the new AI world, especially with some of the rudimentary rules that are prevalent. If we take the time to understand these key steps and adjust we can reap the awards. I have seen cases where just changing a snippet or a landing page header has improved conversion by 10 to 40 percent.

Improving Findability

Unfortunately, SEO – and search in general – is typically soloed into focusing on "The Google" and not really considered for other tactics. Depending on your industry you need to optimize for Instagram, Facebook and especially Pinterest.

We also need to think about alignment across mediums. I have a few clients that are seeing

significant searches after a specific tweet or Facebook post. Since it is nearly impossible find that content in those mediums they turn to a search engine.

By simply monitoring Google Search Console, you can often see the collaborative impact of social media increasing awareness that prompts search. A great practice is to review the other campaigns and ask the question "If I need to find this later how might I search for it, and do I show up? "

HREFLanguage Implementation

A number of sites are missing out on significant conversion opportunities since the wrong page shows in a local market.

For example, we had a client that realized their Argentina pages were ranking in Peru and while the rank report showed a high ranking they were not getting clicks. Once they implemented HREFLang and the Argentine page was replaced

with the Peruvian page, they had an 80 percent increase in clicks and similar sales increase in the first month.

Unfortunately, as many as 76 percent of companies are implementing HREFLang incorrectly based on a recent SEMRush study. Many companies are making some very basic mistakes. If you sell globally, you should invest the time to ensure the right country or language version is showing in each market and make the appropriate adjustments if not.

MARK JACKSON

President & CEO, Vizion Interactive

Google is trying to move from being such a link-based algorithm (has for some time), but things will continue to be sorted out. Google has tried to address link-based spamming by way of [Penguin,](#) but how so might they address spamming targeted towards creating signals, outside of link spam?

For example: Click-through-rate may be an indication of why Google might want to surface a particular website/webpage for a set of queries. However, what if someone were artificially inflating those numbers by way of a bot or macro? (Yes, I have evidence of an SEO firm doing this for themselves). How so might Google correct that type of spam?

All along, Google has tried to emulate human behavior. Google's RankBrain is supposed to do this.

What if a human (SEO) is not human, after all, but has created mechanisms that "look/act human" (much like RankBrain)? Battle of the machines?

Google is evolving to try and incorporate more "human-like" signals (Click-through-rate; brand; social signals), but many of these can be artificially influenced. It's pretty easy to create a mechanical method of "human-looking" machines searching for a brand, or finding their domain (or a particular page) and clicking or pumping up "engagement" with social posts.

We call this whack-a-mole. Fix the link spam issue and create other (more complex?) issues.

So, I would say that 2018 is a challenge for Google, as much as it might be for SEOs.

For SEOs, we should focus on getting better at information architecture, taxonomy, and content (those things that we can directly control). We should also focus on the user experience and

conversion rate within the websites, to – again – focus on things more in our direct control.

By optimizing the websites to ensure that they are mobile friendly (same content on the mobile version as the desktop?) and presenting quality content that is relevant to queries that we know can lead to getting prospects/sales into the pipeline, we are fulfilling our end of the bargain.

Now Google needs to do their part to ensure that artificial signals don't prevent "the right thing" from working.

DIXON JONES

Global Brand Ambassador, Majestic

I think the big "OH MY GOD!" moment will start around May. That's when Europe (including the United Kingdom) starts to enact new legislation known as "General Data Protection Regulation" (or GDPR, as it will be known).

To start with, U.S. companies won't care – just like drinking and driving was not seen as important in the '60s or smoking in public places was acceptable until the '90s.

But when a U.S. company, selling to an EU citizen, is seen to tread on that individual's personal data, and when that US company realizes the fine is 5 percent of their worldwide revenues – per instance – then I rather think this could reframe the mindset of digital marketers.

KRISTOPHER JONES

Founder & CEO, LSEO

2018 will be the year where Google's machine learning algorithm RankBrain becomes increasingly smarter. Expect Google to get more and more intelligent at automatically sniffing out content and links that are unnatural.

As an SEO, this means that you have to significantly raise your standards around quality content and links in order to achieve top search engine rankings. Moreover, Google will continue to elevate the importance of usability and technical SEO factors, such as site security, page speed, mobile friendliness, and navigability.

SEOs will need to collaborate closely with designers and developers to prioritize technical SEO and usability search engine ranking factors to gain a competitive edge.

RYAN JONES

SEO Director, SapientRazorfish

Mobile! Things like AMP and PWAs are still very young and offer lots of opportunity. Plus there's Google's mobile-first index, which hasn't officially launched yet. So yeah, mobile is still big.

But if we're looking for a bigger trend it's that SEO and what we call "real marketing" will continue to blur the lines between them as the job of an SEO becomes that of a traditional marketer – having to understand the user, the competitors, the marketplace and also the implementation side.

I started off talking about AMP and PWAs and those are very technical things – so technical SEO will continue to be more important as well.

But really, mobile.

JULIE JOYCE

Owner, Str0ud LLC and Link Fish Media

Just as I was [concerned with mobile last year,](#) I'm still trying to make sure clients understand the importance of it for 2018. I really think that looking at your traffic/conversions from mobile is critical now.

In addition to this, I'd expand that to trying to really get better at tracking and analyzing how people are finding you and what they're doing on your site. I still deal with some clients who almost never look at their Analytics or Search Console, and a few people haven't set it up! If you aren't watching, find someone who will watch for you.

I recently did an audit where I discovered that a large percentage of visitors were visiting the

contact page but apparently the client was not getting any contacts. A quick contact form check revealed that there was some broken code so nothing was being sent.

We all need to be better about making sure that processes that once worked still work! Anytime something seems off, you really need to dive in and see if you can figure out what's happening before things get worse.

I've seen people block their whole site with robots.txt files for the last 10 years and that's still happening. They're not blocking staging sites.

It makes me think that with so many bits and bobs to focus on, it's easy to lose sight of the really simple ones.

MICHAEL KING

Managing Director, iPullRank

Frankly, I don't think there are too many remarkable changes that will dramatically impact what we're doing that are on the horizon.

If your site is fast, your data is well structured and marked up, your content speaks to specific audiences in alignment with their expectations and it's all well-linked both internally and externally, then you're positioned to continue to perform.
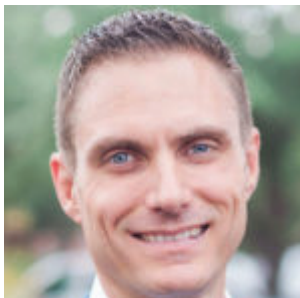
JEREMY KNAUFF

CEO, Spartan Media

One of the trends I expect to see in 2018, which will have a significant impact on all aspects of SEO, is the increasing role of artificial intelligence.

AI will force marketers to shift away from tricks, traditional "keyword phrase" thinking, and manipulative linking practices, instead focusing on solving their visitors' needs.

While this holistic approach will eventually eliminate a lot of the issues created by some SEO practitioners over the years, I suspect that search engines' engineers will initially overestimate the precision of their AI, leading to Penguin-level collateral damage.

If you've been following artificial intelligence for any length of time, you've probably already heard about some of the unintended consequences it's

produced. That's exactly what I expect to see when it starts trying to evaluate content on a large scale to determine where webpages should be ranked. Even though humans can fairly easily evaluate a piece of content, it's still incredibly difficult for AI to understand it in the same way we do.

For marketers, this means producing amazing content — and providing additional context to help the search engines understand that content. This could include things we're already familiar with, like **URL structure** and structured data, as well as things that have yet to be invented.

Ultimately, success in SEO in 2018 and forward will depend on creating amazing content and making it as easy as possible for search engines to understand exactly what that content is about.
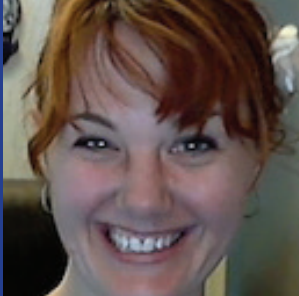
CINDY KRUM

CEO, MobileMoxie

Mobile SEO in 2018 is going to be all about Progressive Web Apps (PWAs). Google has begun to treat PWAs just like normal apps in their Android OS, and has also started spinning off some of their specific-interest knowledge-graph style resources into PWAs; this includes Sports, Restaurants, Weather, Contribute and Traffic PWAs.

PWAs are especially important as fewer people seem to be actively searching or browsing for apps. While the number of apps being created and maintained keeps going up, the number of people searching for apps is not keeping pace. PWAs may help companies build a bridge between the discoverability of the web and the engagement and satisfaction that users experience with apps.

They have unofficially indicated that PWAs will be added to their Google Play app store, and Windows has done the same. There are also indications that Google may begin to test sponsored App Pack rankings.

Google's mobile-first indexing update will hopefully launch in 2018. It may be a stretch, but my new prediction is that this is more about moving the web into Google Play, rather than moving apps into more search results.

This is important for desktop too, because everyone is starting to realize how useful PWAs are on desktop too, especially as Windows pushes their desktop OS to be more app-oriented and phone-like.

It is also relevant for iOS – If you missed it, in 2017 Apple made it clear that Safari would soon support the ServiceWorker files that make PWAs so fast, so it seems like they have flipped, and

really see the benefits. Just this month (on the 12th), in their quest to eliminate the use of app templating services, Apple endorsed PWA's as a better option for companies with limited budgets than templated native apps!

AMP will probably have to make major changes or face a reckoning in 2018; despite the faster speeds, there are still significant problems that need to be resolved in terms of UX and measurement.

Other things to keep watch on are the push to mark up everything, including product databases and other kinds of databases into Schema, so that the information can be parsed and presented on non-traditional devices, through voice search and interaction – like with Google Assistant, Google Home, Android Auto. This is also a big deal with non-Google products like Amazon Alexa, Siri, and voice-enabled TV remotes.

JOE LARATRO

President, Tandem Interactive

Answer box results are powerful. Answer box results drive lots of traffic. Answer box results are the Holy Grail for organic search optimizers right now. Answer box results are not forever.

The competition is heating up for "position 0" results. The basic strategies for obtaining this type of result are well agreed upon. We need great content that answers the question on an optimized platform (good site speed, mobile-friendly, etc.).

Answer box results are getting sniped by someone writing a better piece of content that better answers the question, on a more optimized platform. Google created an all-out war for generating amazing content!

The net result of this content war makes the search landscape on Google much brighter, but the

online world changed dramatically in 2017. We saw the swift shift from desktop to mobile, consumer behavior tilted from email towards voice calls (not counting e-commerce sites), and voice search is impeccable with the rise of screen-less devices like Alexa and Google Home.

What do these changes mean for organic search? Commitment.

The path to success is a steady commitment to holistic SEO. The smartest brands must constantly focus on improving their content, streamlining their user experience, and utilizing the most innovative trends to stay top-of-mind, all of which will help them crush SERPs.

Final thought: Watch for the integration of screen-less devices like Amazon's Alexa and Google Home with smart TVs and phones. Paid search and organic search win when there are ways to choose the result.

ROGER MONTTI

Owner, Martinibuster.com

There should be two big trends for 2018:

Content Optimization, Focused on User Needs

- **Answer Box Optimized Content:** This is critical for all sites, whether you're an e-commerce or advertising based publisher. While the search queries that trigger an answer box typically do not lead to sales, these kinds of queries represent an opportunity for the merchant to gain visibility with an audience that may need or recommend their products somewhere in the future.

- Images: Images are increasingly important for ranking.

- **Video:** Video is exploding and the good thing about video is that you don't have to spend a

fortune on production software to make good videos. If you're not producing videos, go check if your competition is already there and see if that convinces you of the importance of this kind of content.

- **WordPress Optimization:** As good as Yoast is, there is no single plugin that can make your WordPress SEO decisions. There is no button to push for this one. Yet many plugins and themes come with features built-in that are very unhelpful to your optimization efforts. Page Builders, plugin developers, and theme designers are years behind our needs for SEO. If you're not analyzing every plugin and theme for improvements then you're not going to be properly optimized.

Link Alternatives, in the Form of User Satisfaction

SEO is conducted on the understanding that webpages rank because of how relevant a webpage is to a search query and how many links point to that webpage.

But that's not the reason why webpages rank anymore. Site speed, geography, content that fits the format of the Answer Box, mobile friendliness – none of that has to do with keyword relevance or links.

Nor does it have anything to do with 200 ranking factors. In fact, set aside the notion of 200 ranking factors if you really want to understand why site A ranks and Site B does not. The site with the most links doesn't always rank at the top.

This is bad for traditional SEO. Traditional SEO is focused on building (keyword relevant) links and (keyword relevant) content. But search engines aren't ranking sites that way anymore.

The reason any site is ranked is based on how likely that page is going to satisfy a user. How popular or well known a site is can also influence the search engine.

I have doubts about how much a keyword popularity tool, anchor text ratios, and other "traditional" kinds of ranking metrics might help one understand why the search engines rank a site.

The reason the top three rank at the top are often different from the reasons why positions four through six are ranked. The sites are so different the reasons why they're ranked can't be in the same ballpark. No current SEO tool can punch you out of that paper bag.

It all comes back to user satisfaction, satisfying different groups. When you look at the SERPs through that filter, they begin to make more sense. Which is why I say that consideration of user satisfaction will be a major trend for 2018.

BRITNEY MULLER

SEO & Content Architect, Moz

Search is changing at an alarming rate. New SERP Features will occur, voice will get better, and traditional SEO fundamentals (like the recent longer meta descriptions) will shift.

In order to stay ahead in 2018, SEOs will need to stay informed, be nimble, execute changes quickly, and test often.

LEE ODDEN

CEO, TopRank Marketing

One area of focus for greater marketing and SEO performance in 2018 is the confluence of content, influence, and social.

In the way that customer-centric topic focus works in search to provide clear signals to people and search engines what the best answer is for a query, the same is true with integrated social signals, media coverage, and influence.

Brands that architect topically specific content programs that are optimized, socialized, publicized, advertised, and influencer activated will create a superior "best answer" experience, wherever customers are looking.

CHUCK PRICE

Founder, Measurable SEO

Thanks to the increasing role of machine learning and artificial intelligence in the Google search algorithm, successful marketers will be focused on user intent in 2018. By matching search results to user intent, Google provides a better user experience. Google's interest in providing the best user experience is far from altruistic – it's what keeps users coming back to the platform and drives ad revenue.

That said, there is no indication that [top ranking factors](#) are going to be any different in 2018. Still, a well-reasoned and thought out approach will be needed.

Measuring the impact of what you are doing is also key. This will give you the insights necessary to develop and execute strategies for improvement.

Ranking Factor #1 (or #2): Content

Think about the purpose of the content that you are creating.

Is it genuinely useful? Does it meet a user's needs or intent? How does is stack up against the competition? Are there any gaps to fill?

For measuring purposes, I recommend adding Avinash Kaushik's **Page Efficiency Analysis Report** to your Google Analytics account.

Ranking Factor #2 (or #1): Backlinks

Link building in 2018 isn't about numbers, but quality. Link relevance replaced PageRank years ago as being the most important consideration when building links.

The best links are those that appear on pages where it would be natural for a user to have an interest in clicking on it.

Rather than obsess on whether link building improves the ranking of a particular keyword, a better measure is impact on the overall number of keywords that rank and improvements in organic search traffic.

Ranking Factor #3: RankBrain

This isn't something that one optimizes for independently. Think of RankBrain as a form of artificial intelligence that connects the dots.

By focusing on user intent and relevance, you will be aligned with the missive of RankBrain.

PATRICK REINHART

Senior Director of Digital Strategy, Conductor

Voice search will continue to be included in discussions around the industry and not only its impact on the space, but what the best way to track it is.

Moving ahead we will see a slew of new technologies come out that we will interact with, one more advanced than the next.

I have always said that the Echo, Google Home, and Home Pod are the Wii's of voice search, or v1, whereas the Google Glass was v0. v0 introduced the concept and made it real, where as v1 brought it to the masses and made it commonplace.

Even though most Wii's are sitting in a corner collecting dust, they made motion control a must-have for all gaming consoles. I believe these devices will work the same for voice search.

The big question that remains here, again, is how should we track it? Is there a difference between a voice command and a voice search (maybe)? Do we report on each individual device (yes)? What will the device mix become for everyone and do we report on those clusters as a new type of demographic (only time will tell)?

Meanwhile, websites will continue to trend in the direction of becoming online experiences, rather than destinations to simply gain information or buy something. With an increased focus on user experience, Google has challenged the SEO community to pay more attention to the overall experience of a website and how the content interacts with users, rather than just the basic elements that most optimize toward.

A larger focus on the design and structure of a site – and how it affects page speed, user interaction, clickthrough, and conversion rates – will continue to be larger parts of the discussions in 2018, where they were always a day two project for most folks over the last couple of years.

Google will continue to push webmasters toward having a better holistic experience between devices and sites that comply will be rewarded with higher user engagement and performance within Google's SERPs.

KRISTINE SCHACHINGER

CEO & Founder, Sites Without Walls

2018 will be a year of change for SEO. Make sure you are proactively adapting your strategies to address these shifts:

Mobile-First Indexing

This will be the largest shift in Google's approach to organic results since the move from strings to things. If you are using responsive design, you probably won't have to do much to prepare. If not, however, you'll want to make sure you've checked your site for any potential issues.

Schema

With the mobile results adding more features (carousels, knowledge panels, etc.), sites will

want to make sure they are using more than just the basics as the traditional "10 blue links" get pushed further down the page.

Voice Queries

Know how they work and understand how they affect your bottom line. With home devices use surging, are you prepared?

ELI SCHWARTZ

Director of Organic Product, SurveyMonkey

I believe that 2018 is going to be the year where voice search transforms how users search and SEOs need to optimize.

In 2016, Google declared that [20 percent of all Android searches](#) in the Google app were conducted by voice. They have not updated this stat since then but that percentage is likely to have grown significantly given the growth in functionality of voice search.

As an additional point, if you look at Google's holiday promotions from this, they ran some very aggressive deals on their Google Home Devices which saw discounts of up to 50 percent. At the same time, Amazon which is the other significant driver of voice search devices also dropped prices on their Echo devices for the holiday season.

Flooding the market with voice search devices will encourage people to conduct voice searches as they find uses for their new toys. Users that talk to their home devices will invariably end up searching by voice on their phones too. (Disclosure: I am speaking from experience as my Google Home led me to search via Google Assistant on my phone even more.)

Over the last year, the results/responses surfaced by these devices have been getting better as more people used them, and the Google, Apple and Amazon search engineers built in more integrations.

This new paradigm of users relying on voice search for many of their search needs will be a game changer for SEO.

Getting a website ranked in the top 10 is no longer good enough when users are looking for quick answers. A successful SEO effort needs to move beyond building content to rank on highly searched keywords and should have a heavy focus on

providing answers for genres of unique queries that many people might search by voice.

This means that popularity of a topic as measured by trends, social media, and seasonality will become the new metric that drives content creation rather than just keyword search volume.

GRANT SIMMONS

VP of Search Marketing, Homes.com

2018 (I believe) will be a lot of catch up on current SEO themes, with the biggest "trends" occurring around voice queries to search results.

With voice search comes two areas of interest to SEO folks wishing to connect with consumers: intent and context.

Neither are new concepts, but both will gain more importance as voice query search results become a standard, and search engines seek to provide the best answer in the most easily consumable format.

Fully understanding intent and context in a voice-as-the-primary-search-interface world means understanding; where the user question is being asked, what the best result would be based on

location influence, and which is the best format to present the best result based on the available screen or interface.

Key to the last point I believe that automotive screens and voice responses will be a major battleground for advertisers in 2018, with many cities considering autonomous vehicles policies, the "connected commuter" will be primed for search and content consumption.

For SEOs this means an even more granular understanding of location relevance and the probable emergence of new (or better) tools and beacon technology to help target the commuter wherever they may be with intent-aware, location-relevant, and context-driven results – and these results may be presented as voice, visual (think inside the windshield), AR (think overlaid on the real world outside the car), or sent to a screen inside vehicles – in a hands-off driving experience, everything can be distracted driving!

#CommuterIntent – you heard it here first!

And where is Google in all of this? In car, they have Android Auto, Google Maps, Google My Business, Google Assistant (on many screens) and the ubiquitous Waze (which is used by many local governments for traffic analysis too!)

And as far as voice, in the past few weeks, even Google has **acknowledged** the value in understanding and reporting voice queries with the potential of integrating voice query data into Google Search Console.

Lastly, Amazon will dominate e-commerce queries in 2018 via Alexa voice, touch, and other innovative interfaces, leaving many e-commerce SEOs to focus in on the content-side of their marketing. This will be a growth opportunity for content marketing-specific agencies and a necessary and justified budget line item for in-house SEO teams.

BILL SLAWSKI

Director of Research, Go Fish Digital

I have a couple of trends that I see coming for better SEO success.

1. A Growing Importance for Structured Data

Google announced this year that they will be offering the ability to perform searches by photography, using Google Lens, which seems very similar to Google Goggles, but may be an improvement upon that technology. One of the reasons why it may work better is that it will rely upon Schema. So, using Schema to describe entities on your website, such as brands and products and businesses is a good idea for businesses.

Make sure that Google knows what your business looks like, or that you publish event information in schema markup, and product information. This

way, if someone searches using a photo of your business, they may get a lot of information back in response.

If they take a picture of a product you offer, they might receive some rich results in response to that search. Schema can help lead to richer search results and rich snippets as well, so if you haven't got into using structured data on your website, it's time to start.

Schema.org has a way of allowing extensions for different industry types of be added, so if yours isn't yet, it may be soon. Schema allows you to provide more precise data.

2. Explaining Context on Pages Better

I am seeing more information in patents from Google that talk about collecting contextual information related to query terms.

If you are optimizing pages for terms that might have more than one meaning (such as Java, or

Jaguar, or Bank, or horses) make sure you look at knowledge bases such as Wikipedia and what types of words or phrases are used on those to explain the context of the meanings behind those words.

If you are optimizing a page for a person's name, include information that is unique to that individual to let the search engine understand which person you are talking about (because many people share names with other folks.)

ALEYDA SOLIS

Founder & International SEO Consultant, Orainti

The biggest SEO change and trend I see already happening in 2018 is Google's switch to a mobile-first index, so if a site is not yet mobile-friendly and optimized for it, it's critical to prioritize this as it is now fundamental for its SEO success.

Another important trend that has already started and I can only see to become more important next year for success is AMP. Whether we like it or not, AMP is here to stay (unless our own sites become dramatically faster all of the sudden), not only to help improve mobile site speed of informational sites, but also as a way to easily implement dynamic content functionality and interactivity to transactional ones, through components like amp-bind; and ultimately, facilitating as well PWAs implementation with PWAMP.

Last but not least, will be the evolution of how Google accesses and assess JavaScript content, especially with the popularization of JavaScript frameworks usage as well as the latest news about Google not using anymore the previously required AJAX crawling scheme.

DAN TAYLOR
Senior Account Manager, SALT.agency

I'm really excited about the advancing changes being made within SERPs themselves and the changes in Knowledge Panels, featured snippets, and other special content results blocks (SRCBs). While to Google this is a relatively new change, anyone used to optimizing for Baidu will be well versed in dealing with fewer organic results on a given SERP (thanks to Baidu Baike and other features).

Google is getting better at understanding and recognizing search intent and common interpretations of phrases, and as a result SCRB's will become more common and take up a lot of SERP real estate.

I think it's also important to stop seeing featured snippets and other features as "position 0". These features attract clicks, and traffic, and are viable

optimization targets – and in a lot of SERPs, there aren't 10 blue links anymore.

While there is no golden rule to optimizing for featured snippets, making sure your webpages are technically sound is a good start – utilizing semantic HTML markup for example. It then comes down to your content and your content's layout.

Explaining these changes to clients, and getting them engaged with this strategy, will be vital to seeing results.

A key part of this comes down to reporting and how information is portrayed – for example, showing how the longer-tail keywords with a more focused search interpretations drive more enquiries than the big high search volume marquee phrases with multiple common interpretations.

MARCUS TOBER

Founder & CTO, Searchmetrics

In 2018, I think the smartest brands will be focusing more closely on how they define their market. We already see this trend in lots of places, like extremely precise targeting of social ads — but a lot of brands still approach SEO and content creation with a one-size-fits all attitude. This is why a lot of brands are losing out in organic search.

The more granular search engines get and the more factors affect the results displayed, the more closely brands have to define the portion of the market they want to own. With all the plug-ins and cheap SEO tools out there, anyone can apply a few basic, general SEO rules. And if anyone can do it, doing it isn't enough to be successful.

This means the companies that will succeed in 2018 are the ones that do the most work in

precisely defining their market and their users, and producing content that is specifically built to meet these users' needs.

The smartest companies won't necessarily produce the most content or the longest content, they'll produce the content that most closely reflects the requirements of the most precisely defined market.

JENNIFER VAN IDERSTYNE

Senior Account Manager, SALT.agency

To me the answer to SEO success in 2018 and beyond is to pay close attention to where marketing in general is going. We can see an overarching trend of technological integration to help improve both recognition and personalization. So how does that apply to SEO?

Google Analytics is amazing. But it's time to invest in and incorporate CRMs and tracking programs that better monitor and attribute user behaviors from all channels, but particularly organic search.

This includes keywords driving a user's visit, their entry point and their journey through the site. This intelligence should also be used to recognize

organic search visitors who engage across multiple touchpoints.

Users are increasingly prone to change devices and channels throughout the course of their brand engagements forcing us to attribute and analyze all points of action. It's the same notion as "the assist" but we must consider all of a user's interactions between first and last click.

Using search data to better understand the user's original intent, and subsequent actions, provides essential insight into their needs. This in turn can drive the presentation of content for frequent organic entry points. Particularly as it relates to non-branded search. This can also inform the creation of content.

Speaking of creating content we can also use content strategies that better align with predictive and suggestive search. This also includes amping up the implementation of content pathways that anticipate a user's next search before they make it.

MINDY WEINSTEIN

Founder & President, Market MindShift

SEO isn't going away and will evolve with the search engines and searchers. Here are my top two predictions:

1. SEO Will Become Even More Technical

SEO has always been technical, but with more technologies available for web developers, it is going to require an even more advanced knowledge on the part of the SEO analyst.

Take JavaScript as an example. With all of the various types of frameworks and libraries that exist, it's critical to understand the impact they have on the search-friendliness of a website. That is just one example.

Let's consider mobile-first. We have to ensure there are no underlying technical issues that are bogging down the mobile experience.

2. We Will Need to Focus on Voice Search

I included this one in **my opinion for 2017,** but it is just as relevant, if not more, for 2018.

Voice search is all around us. We can talk to our watches, phones, computers and voice-activated speakers. We rely on personal assistants to find what we need. This technology has found its place in our society and it is only going to grow.

In terms of SEO, that means you can't just focus on the traditional one-word, two-word and three-word keyword phrases. You also have to consider the questions people might ask and how they are going to describe their problems.

Here's to SEO in 2018!

TONY WRIGHT

CEO, WrightIMC

In 2018, we'll most likely finally see a true mobile-first index. This is going to cause a lot of folks some issues if they haven't figured out mobile yet. To the readers of SEJ, having figured out mobile by now seems like a no-brainer, but when I look at the vast majority of small, median (and even large) businesses, their mobile presence is abysmal.

Speaking of mobile, I don't think that anyone who is doing content marketing can afford to ignore AMP in 2018. AMP pages rank. Period. If (and it's a big if) Google continues with its AMP strategy, SEOs can't ignore it.

With Danny Sullivan at Google, I'm hoping that 2018 will be the year Google gets a bit more transparent. The current communication from Google on all things SEO feels a bit haphazard.

We sometimes get conflicting answers or answers that can be interpreted in several different ways. Sullivan's communication skills will be invaluable to all of us if he can work on streamlining the information coming out of Mountain View.

As always, good content is important. But I think we'll see a continuation of 2017 next year where technical SEO can make a huge impact in a short amount of time for most folks.

We consistently see the quickest and largest gains in SERPs just by fixing technical items. Page speed, proper schema, use of H tags – all the basics we've been doing for years are still showing amazing results.

In 2018, I think we'll continue to see less real estate for true organic results. It's so important that SEOs understand this and diversify tactics. You need to know how to show up in all the different parts of SERPs. Ten blue links doesn't exist anymore.

I believe 2018 will not be the year of voice search. For most companies, optimizing for voice search doesn't

make sense yet. And this year we're going to see some fierce competition in Voice – and that won't bode well for optimizing voice search queries. There will be too many variables.

And who knows where the majority are going to flock – Echo, Google Home, Siri or something we haven't even seen yet. Voice search is coming – but not this year.

Think of voice search like mobile. Every year since 2005 or so, people would predict, "this will be the year of mobile." When mobile actually did take off, we realized it wasn't the year of mobile, but a seismic shift in audience behavior. That will happen in voice search too – but not this year.

Final bold prediction: I think we might get some clarity on some additional signals Google is using for rankings. Maybe confirm that CTR is a fact. Or dwell time. Or many other factors that some have been saying are factors – but no one really knows definitively.

Perhaps Sullivan will tell us. We can only hope.