

SEO TRENDS

2021

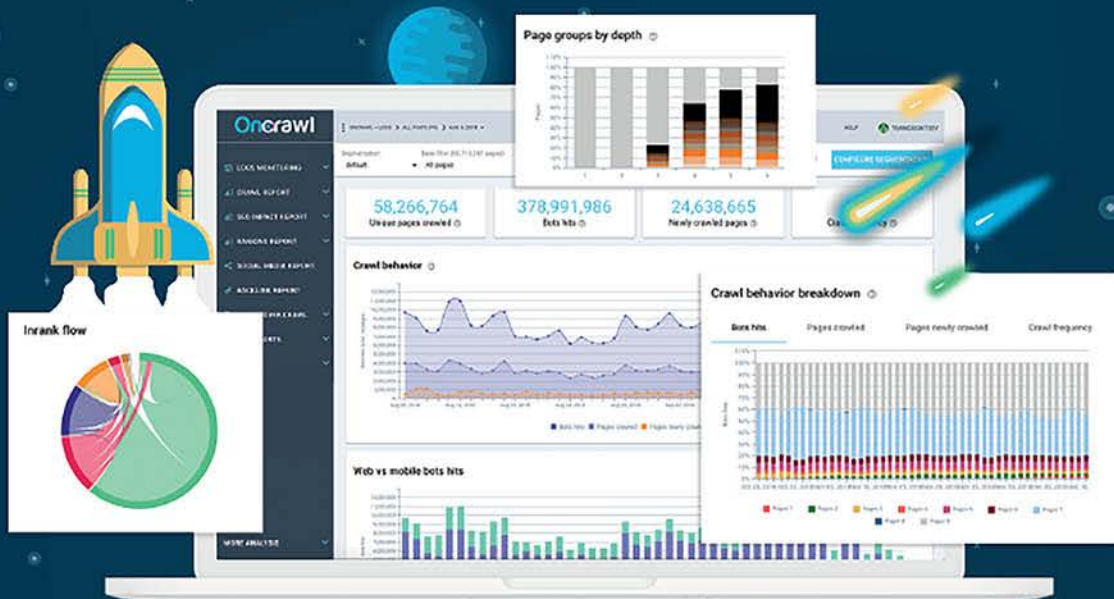


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By Danny Goodwin

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10 IMPORTANT 2021 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 2021.

If you want the TLDR, here it is via **Lily Ray**, SEO Director, Path Interactive:

“Above all, a great SEO strategy should start by putting yourself in the user's shoes and asking yourself if the content is



truly valuable, the brand is trustworthy, and the website is easy to use (especially on mobile).”

So true!

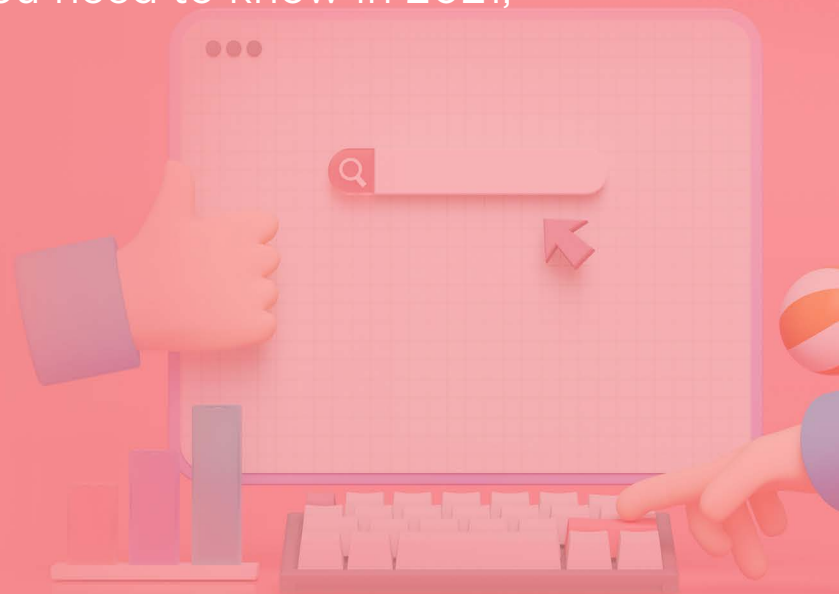
But there’s much more to dig into when we’re talking SEO in 2021.

So what SEO strategies and tactics will work and help you dominate in the SERPs and earn more revenue in 2021?

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

This year, I asked 42 of today’s top SEO professionals for their thoughts.

Here are the top 10 trends you need to know in 2021, according to the experts.





1

FOCUS ON USER + SEARCH INTENT

In 2021, it's time to focus user and search intent.

For real.

While this is hardly a new trend or concept, every year it's important to refocus because searcher intent and behavior is changing all the time. Especially after the year that was 2020 when so much rapidly changed.

“At the core, Google (and other search engines) is a place to go when people want to answer a question or to learn more about something,” said **Jenn Mathews**, SEO Manager, GitHub. “When we understand the nature of why people search and help them with content that provides the answers they are looking for then our business benefits from it.”

So what does this mean for your SEO efforts in 2021?

According to **Britney Muller**, SEO Consultant & Data Science Student, Britney Muller LLC, it means SEO pros will need to transition away from traditional best practices that will hold less value as the algorithms get stronger (e.g., trying to write meta descriptions for every single page) and focus more on better understanding what’s happening within the SERPs/ searcher intent.

“Google houses the world’s information and they know what the majority of people searching ‘x’ seek,” Muller said. “Paying closer attention to search results will give SEO pros a leg up in creating competitive content in the way that searchers desire to consume it.”

And many other of our SEO experts agree with Muller. This includes **Andrew Dennis**, Content Marketing Specialist, Page One Power.

“Google is already showing you which results it thinks serve users’ intent, use this data for your own strategy,” Dennis said. “For me, SERP analysis will be an important practice not just in 2021, but moving forward as search intents change and Google continues to become more sophisticated to keep up.”

It’s clear to **Marie Haynes**, CEO, Marie Haynes Consulting Inc., that if you want to win at SEO in 2021, you’ll need to do a stellar job of providing information to users.

“Google will get even better at recognizing when a searcher is looking for expert advice and will rank those posts above articles written by content writers who are lacking E-A-T,” Haynes said. “The SEO pros who will be successful in 2021 will be those who can truly understand how to meet a searchers’ needs.”

How? Here’s advice from **Adam Riemer**, President at Adam Riemer Marketing:

“Brands are going to need to forget about themselves and cater to their visitors.

This includes:

- Copy that addresses the visitor's needs and concerns and not copy that talks about your products, your company, or why your product is good.
- A quick website that renders and stabilizes fast.
- Not making people work to find your content or to spend money with you. No forced pop-ups, registrations, etc.”

With Google focusing more on satisfying user intent, **Steven van Vessum**, VP of Community, ContentKing, said it's more important than ever to focus on learning what a user is looking for.

“In terms of the actual answer - but also their preferred content type (e.g., video, podcasts, or PDF),” van Vessum said. “Because figuring out queries' user intent by hand is very time-consuming, keyword research tools that let us quickly do this at scale will overtake those that do not.”

Alexander Kesler, CEO, INFUSEmedia, offers some additional advice on understanding the search intent of your ideal buyer and driving meaningful revenue for your organization.

“Analyze the search data and on-site journey of any organically acquired leads - not just the search terms that they used to find your content, but also on-site search and highlighted keywords for all pages that they visited,” Kesler said. “Aggregate that data and map it to a content journey.”

A hand pointing at a glowing circuit board icon in a network of data icons. The background is dark with various icons like clouds, charts, and binary code connected by lines. A large blue number '2' is on the left side of the page.

2

CUSTOMER ANALYTICS, RETENTION & LIFETIME VALUE

SEO used to be (mostly) about driving traffic. But SEO has evolved into much more.

As **Miracle Inameti-Archibong**, Head of SEO, Erudite, noted, in 2021 you will be pushed more and more to make the traffic you have to work harder in order to close the gaps in revenue and demonstrate ROI.

So, in 2021, data on behavioral analytics will become the hottest commodity.

“With Google evolving faster and faster to give instant satisfaction, taking responsibility beyond visits, as well as marrying up UX, conversion, and revenue have become even more important,” Inameti-Archibong said. “Keyword volume will take a back seat and it will be more behavioral analytics – what your customer is doing, how they are doing it, and how we can get them to do more of it quicker – and reverse engineering that to the content you produce.”

John McAlpin, SEO Director, Cardinal Digital Marketing, agreed. He pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that keyword research isn’t always helpful when the world is in constant flux.

“In order to differentiate ourselves, we’ll see SEO pros dialing back keyword research and elevate 1st party user research,” McAlpin said. “ This research unlocks hidden opportunities with service offerings and content ideas that keyword research may not tell us.”

With fewer dollars to go around, businesses will need to focus far more on customer retention and increasing customer lifetime value (LTV) than ever before, said **Stephan Bajaio**, Chief Evangelist and Co-Founder, Conductor.

“Your post-acquisition content must answer the questions, concerns, and needs your customers are expressing in search and you need to show up for those terms. If not, you will risk others influencing them away from your brand,” Bajaio said. “It will be about understanding your customer best and providing them with valuable content, or risk losing them to someone who understands them better... introduced to them by their trusted friend Google.”

Izzi Smith, Technical SEO Analyst, Ryte, expanded on this idea. She encourages companies to provide stronger customer and self-support services online.

“First of all, establish a process with sales and support staff to ensure that you are aware of important and incoming questions or requests that can be resolved with help articles,” Smith said.

“Dig into your Google Search Console keyword data with common question modifiers to find relevant, existing topics that should be catered to. Make sure these are answered concisely and factually and published to a related FAQ topic page,” she added.

Bottom line, according to Smith: “Help centers and FAQ sections should be created with UX at the very forefront, and should not be a single, unmaneuverable page of questions.”

One of the keys to attracting and retaining customers comes down to a single word: **value**.

That’s why **Julia McCoy**, CEO, Express Writers / Educator, Content Hacker, said you should make value a heavy focus in 2021.

And a big part of that comes from your content.

“it’s easier than ever to lose grasp on the real reason we retain the trust and attention of our audience: by giving them value,” McCoy said. “We retain interest and build trust with our readers when our content is the most comprehensive, practical, and useful piece they’ve interacted with when searching Google. That kind of content requires focus, time, commitment, investment, to create.”



3

BRAND SERP OPTIMIZATION, KNOWLEDGE GRAPHS & ENTITIES

In 2021, tracking brand SERPs and knowledge panels will become the norm, according to **Jason Barnard**, The Brand SERP Guy, Kalicube.pro.

“In 2021, the reality that entity-based search starts with Google’s confident understanding of **who you are, what you offer, and what audience you serve** will gain enormous traction,” Barnard said. “Savvy marketers will truly get to grips with looking at their brand as an entity and start to work in earnest on

Google's understanding of the 'who you are' part of that trio by creating or improving their presence in the Knowledge Graph.

In fact, **Nik Ranger**, SEO Specialist, thinks we may start to see personalized knowledge graphs starting in 2021.

"Google has access to so much information about you, your search history, emails, social media, and other types of user information that they have the ability and means to scale personalized knowledge graphs," Ranger said. "Qualifying the relationships between the legitimacy of author credentials to content, in addition to the way Google perceives value from content, will be ever more important." What does this all mean for SEO In 2021?

It means optimizing your brand's entire digital presence (e.g., your YouTube channel, images) and how Google features them, said **Patrick Reinhart**, VP for Digital Strategies, Conductor.

"These days it's not just about your website, it's about all of your owned properties and how they

interact with one another on the SERP,” Reinhart said. “If they all come together through various snippets, does it tell a good story about your brand?”

John Shehata, VP, Global Audience Development Strategy, Condé Nast / Founder, NewzDash.com, goes further, adding that SEO pros must understand the complex concepts behind topics (entities, subtopics) and natural language processing (NLP) and how entities play a role in Google rankings.

“Forget about TF*IDF, keyword frequency, and start focusing on entities, topics and start utilizing Google Natural Language (and/or other similar SEO tools that provide NLP analysis),” Shehata said.

“Search engines are getting smarter by the day and they have a good understanding of queries to an extent beyond keywords used in such queries,” Shehata added. “Don’t get me wrong, good keyword research is still needed but it comes secondary to understanding the topics/entities related to the query and the intent behind the query.”

One place where there are no keywords at play is Google Discover.

So the only way to optimize for Google Discover visibility is by establishing your entity in the knowledge graph and honing how it is connected within the topic layer, according to **Jes Scholz**, International Digital Director, Ringier,

“The first step every SEO pro should take is to track their brand’s result score in the knowledge graph API,” Scholz said. “Then, work on activities outside of having great content to drive their presence in the knowledge graph.

Some of those activities to focus on in 2021, Scholz said, will include:

- Ensuring a complete and correct organization markup.
- Establishing a presence in relevant knowledge bases such as Wikidata.
- Claiming your knowledge panel to use the posts by Google feature.
- For physical businesses, setting up your Google My Business profile.



4

CORE WEB VITALS & PAGE EXPERIENCE OPTIMIZATION

With Google introducing Core Web Vitals as a ranking factor in 2021, page experience metrics can no longer be ignored, according to **Areej AbuAli**, SEO Manager, Zoopla.

“Websites and businesses need to prioritize for them to ensure they don’t fall behind their competitors,” AbuAli said. “Make the most out of insights provided via tools such as Lighthouse and Crux API. Everything from page speed, mobile-friendliness,

rendering, image optimization, and security protocols need to be optimized for.”

In addition, **Rachel Costello**, Technical SEO Consultant, Builtvisible, said we should be looking at how a page makes a user feel, not just whether the page is accessible and comprehensible to a search engine crawler.

“This will involve us taking a user-centric approach with our optimization efforts, including a keen focus on:

- How quickly and smoothly pages load.
- How soon pages become responsive to user interactions.
- How easy a website is to use and navigate on mobile devices.
- The safety and security of a site’s connection as users are browsing through it.

“Incorporating page experience into your SEO workflow will not only help to future-proof your website’s performance and rankings ahead of the upcoming algorithm update, but it can also help to improve UX and conversions now,” Costello said.

You also need to make sure that Google can access the best content on your site from everywhere – and make sure your site has a measurably better user interface than your competitors, noted **Jess Peck**, Senior Analytics Consultant, CVS.

“Measure, test, and use machine learning to look at your content – this will give you a huge leg up,” Peck said. “Google’s focus on Core Web Vitals shows that they’re starting to measure how annoying sites can be, so give your users a pleasant experience and Google will do the same for you.”



5

ALL SEO IS MOBILE SEO

Ensuring your content/website performs well from a mobile perspective should also continue to be a focal point as this is where the majority of searches are being conducted, said **Jeff Riddall**, VP Product and Customer Success, Mintent.

“What type of experience do your users have when accessing your content and trying to find answers on their mobile devices?” he said.

That's why **Brock Murray**, Co-founder, seoplus+, said a big SEO focus in 2021 must be mobile device user experience (UX)

“The best thing you can do when it comes to mobile UX is to think about the user first. Simplicity in your design is the key. Also, be sure to personalize the website content and elements based on your user.

But there are many more reasons all SEO is now mobile SEO, as explained by **Shelly Fagin**, SEO Director and Founder, Highly Searched, Inc.

“Google will essentially be ignoring your desktop site. Your mobile site will determine your rankings,” Fagin said.

So if you've been focusing on meeting the bare minimum requirements to be considered mobile-first, 2021 is the year to shift your focus to improving that experience for your users.

“Don't just settle with getting passing scores and consider it a job well done,” Fagin said. “It's time to closely review your pages and make sure they are intuitive for your users, are easy to navigate, and you

aren't hiding valuable content and images on mobile devices.

“It's OK to have a different experience between desktop and mobile, but It's important to know that Google will no longer be ranking your desktop and mobile experiences differently,” she added. “If you still have a separate mobile site, now might be the time to reconsider migrating to a mobile responsive site instead.”



6

ASSESS, ADOPT & EXECUTE

In 2021, prepared to work harder than ever before to assess, adopt, and execute, according to **Motoko Hunt**, President & International Search Marketing Consultant, AJPR.

While the basic skills and knowledge are still important, your brain needs to be flexible to adapt to the rapid changes.

“Thinking outside the box will be more important than ever. The business opportunities are still out there. If it’s not where you normally look, you just need to find where they went,” Hunt said.

It will also be important to be proactive in 2021, said **Corey Morris**, Chief Strategy Officer, Voltage.

“Maybe this is more of a theme or mindset than a trend – but seeing it as a recognized need and something many are arriving at makes it a trend for me,” Morris said. “Now is the time to get organized, build a plan, develop a process, and get ahead.”

A shift to more strategic SEO will be critical to stay relevant and stay top of mind for consumers’ attention in 2021, said **Andy Betts**, Search and Digital Advisor & Consultant. He recommends pivoting your approach from a singular focus on just consumer behavior to a dual process that involves understanding the market in which these consumers operate first.

“Take a more strategic and blended approach to understand what’s happening in the market, where demand has shifted historically, and where it is changing

in real-time,” Betts said. “Take a consultative approach to understand how economic, sociological, and psychological factors impact search demand and then look at understanding consumer behavior and intent at a granular level. Utilize all tools, platforms, and sources of business intelligence at your disposal.”



7

MORE AUTOMATION

If we look back at the increasing number of SEO tasks that we are able to automate in 2020 (structured data generation, quality content, etc.), the possibilities for 2021 will be mind-bending, said **Hamlet Batista**, CEO, RankSense

“Expect the quality and quantity of the AI-generated content to increase dramatically. It will definitely create a bigger challenge for search engines to keep

spam out of the index,” Batista said. “Human-in-the-loop automation to make sure the value is high for search users will be the main focus to avoid penalties and remain competitive.”

Jesse McDonald, Global SEO Strategist | Optimization Lead, IBM, believes one of the biggest trends in SEO for 2021, especially within in-house roles, is the continued focus on creating more scalable solutions for optimization utilizing automation.

“Over the last couple of years, more and more of the industry-leading tools that many SEO practitioners use in their day-to-day work have been releasing automated functionalities to roll out site changes. It’s almost like adding another member of the execution portion of the team,” McDonald said.

“The implications of this are particularly interesting for in-house roles because it can help implement low-hanging fruit elements without having to justify the importance of the change to move to the top of the sprint schedule,” he added. “Thus, freeing up the SEO to focus on additional strategic elements for improving site performance.”



8

SERP LAYOUT & FUNCTIONALITY CHANGES

Dave Davies, Duke of URL, Beanstalk Internet Marketing, expects to see a big change to the entire way content is viewed and laid out on websites change - thanks to Google Passage Ranking.

“Why have a page on a general topic, and sub-pages on specifics, when you can have one long page for it all and know that Google will drive the user where they need to go? Isn’t that the best of both worlds? And they’re doing similar in video.

Cindy Krum, CEO & Founder, MobileMoxie, has been talking about this – what she refers to as Fraggle optimization – for a good while now. And she said doing things to help Google identify and rank passages will be a big new SEO trend in 2021.

“Fraggles (or passages) are important because they really improve Google’s ability to find and lift exactly the information that users are looking for,” Krum said. “Strong page and schema structure help with Fraggle/ passage optimization, but it will likely also be important to have text that is easy for natural language processing to evaluate and has a high readability score.”



9

LONG-FORM CONTENT

Ron Lieback, CEO/Founder, ContentMender, said one trend to help you outrank your competitors will be consistently publishing longer-form content that appeals to Google's E-A-T guidelines, as well as emotion.

“Throughout 2020, I consistently witnessed blogs over 2,000 words dramatically outperform blogs of 1,000 words or less,” Lieback said. “Expect this long-form content trend to continue in 2021, and as more and more websites follow this trend, the length will get larger – maybe even toward that 2,500-3,000 mark for a blog to rank well over others.”



10 SEO SCALABILITY

2021 should be your year to build scalability into your SEO if you're going to get ahead of your competition, according to Mark Traphagen, Vice President of Product Marketing and Training, seoClarity.

How?

Traphagen shared these three tips:

- List all the tasks, processes, and workflows you do on a regular basis. Determine which steps in those could be automated or better handled by use of a tool.
- Set up an alert system that monitors significant changes to things like rankings of your important keywords, flip-flopping URLs ranking for the same keyword (URL cannibalization), page content changes, URL changes, etc.
- Establish SoPs (Standard Operating Procedures) for any regular tasks you can't automate so your team isn't wasting time reinventing how to do them each time they need to be performed.

GET MORE SEO TRENDS & INSIGHTS FOR 2021

This only scratches the surface of what you'll find in our new ebook, SEO Trends 2021.

Ready for all of the trends?

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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Chief Evangelist and Co-Founder, Conductor



JASON BARNARD
The Brand SERP Guy, Kalicube.pro



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AREEJ ABUALI

SEO Manager, Zoopla



With Google introducing Core Web Vitals as a ranking factor in 2021, page experience metrics can no longer be ignored.

Websites and businesses need to prioritize for them to ensure they don't fall behind their competitors. Make the most out of insights provided via tools such as Lighthouse and Crux API.

Everything from page speed, mobile-friendliness, rendering, image optimization, and security protocols need to be optimized for.



STEPHAN BAJAIO

Chief Evangelist and Co-Founder, Conductor

In 2020, COVID took a toll on the economy, consumers, and businesses.

With fewer dollars to go around, businesses will need to focus far more on customer retention and increasing customer lifetime value (LTV) than ever before.

This means that crappy, long-scrolling FAQ page you've had in place to satiate your customer service needs on the site just isn't going to cut it.

Ensuring your brand has established a service journey of content that lives post-sale is going to be fundamental to maintaining and growing your client base in 2021.

So, your post-acquisition content must answer the questions, concerns, and needs your customers are expressing in search and you need to show up for those terms. If not, you will risk others influencing them away from your brand.

Consumers are more susceptible when money is tight, they question if it's still worth staying the course with a brand, so when they are asking those important questions in Google you better be the ones answering.

How do we inform this type of content:

- Look at branded/non-branded questions being asked in Google around your products/services as well as the problems they solve.
- Ask your customer service and sales teams; they know the friction points for the consumer.
- Check your internal/site search queries. If you don't have access to this data, get it. It's your site's own users sending you signals of what they want and need (Ignore at your own risk).
- Check your customer service chat logs. Lots of great data in there.
- Discover who/what else is in the conversation. Who else ranks for these types of needs-based terms: Quora, forums, blogs, review sites?

How do we answer these concerns:

- Write to own the Google answer box as Position Zero will matter, especially on your branded terms. (Don't sleep on this and assume your content will be the answer box for your brand terms.)
- A paragraph might not cut it. Sometimes problems/concerns deserve full-page answers, so provide the value a consumer is entitled to and should expect from a brand that cares.
- Tie questions and answers into guides when appropriate, as this builds context, education, and upsell/cross-sell opportunities (not just for SEO).
- Use the wisdom of your organization to provide real value. Your organization has experts; use them to build reliable, and relevant content folks and search engines can trust.

How to measure the value of this:

- Track multi-channel traffic (not just organic) to your new/improved content. It's SEO informed content, but great customer-centric content can bring value to users beyond those finding it in search.
- Ranking for customer-centric issues can reduce call center/chat/email volumes reducing overall customer support request costs.
- Find upsell/cross-sell opportunities using this content, as this is often a great place to let your clients know about new value propositions you can provide them. It's more organic selling as it's happening on and in their terms.

In 2021, a good defense will make for a great offense.

It will be about understanding your customer best and providing them with valuable content, or risk losing them to someone who understands them better... introduced to them by their trusted friend Google.

JASON BARNARD

The Brand SERP Guy, Kalicube.pro

Your Brand as an Entity

In 2021, the reality that entity-based search starts with Google's confident understanding of **who you are, what you offer, and what audience you serve** will gain enormous traction.

To start with, savvy marketers will truly get to grips with looking at their brand as an entity and start to work in earnest on Google's understanding of the "who you are" part of that trio by creating or improving their presence in the Knowledge Graph.



An easy-to-visualize representation of Google's understanding of who you are (or its lack of understanding) is the knowledge panel on your brand SERP (the Search Engine Results Page for an **exact-match** brand search).

As of October 2020, the majority (56%) of brands don't have a knowledge panel on their brand SERP. For those brands, triggering one will rise rapidly to the top of every marketer's to-do list.

And for the 44% of brands that already have a knowledge panel on their brand SERP, savvy marketers will prioritize correcting any inaccuracies it contains and feeding it with additional information.

Knowledge panels are incredibly important on several fronts.

- **Audience:** On brand SERPs, they make an enormous visual impact, making a brand look professional and convincing to users who google their name.

- **Marketer:** They give a simple and actionable insight into what Google has understood about the brand, its confidence in that understanding, and whether what it has understood is correct (or not).
- **SEO strategy:** In the wider world of unbranded SEO, Google is increasingly using its understanding of who you are and what you offer as the basis for evaluating your suitability to provide the solution to the incredible array of problems its users are asking it to solve. What Google has understood – and its confidence in that understanding – has to be the single most important building block for any SEO strategy in 2021 and beyond. Knowledge panels provide an astonishingly simple and clear insight. :)

In 2021, tracking brand SERPs and knowledge panels will become the norm.

Looking Into 2022

Quickly on the heels of Brand SERPs, we'll see marketers looking very closely at Related Entity SERPs (a.k.a., Google's understanding of the "what you do" part of the trio mentioned at the start). And they will be just as important.

An accurate, information-filled knowledge panel on your brand SERP indicates Google is confident it has a basic understanding of the brand.

But your brand has relationships with many other entities that all deserve your attention since they can potentially bring enormous value to the table in your relationship with Google (a.k.a., your SEO strategy).

Obviously, top of the list will be your products and offers. But also think about:

- **People** associated with your brand (authors, board members, high-level employees, etc.).
- **Partners** (distributors, investors, etc.).
- **Events** you attend.
- **Awards** you win.
- **Articles** about you...

If you are smart, then optimizing your brand's presence in the SERP (including managing the knowledge panel on that SERP) for an exact-match search on any of those related entities is next on your list.

That is all fairly manageable. For 2023 and beyond, the mind boggles. :)

HOW TO AUTOMATE YOUR SEO ACTIONS IN 2021

BY **REBECCA BERBEL**

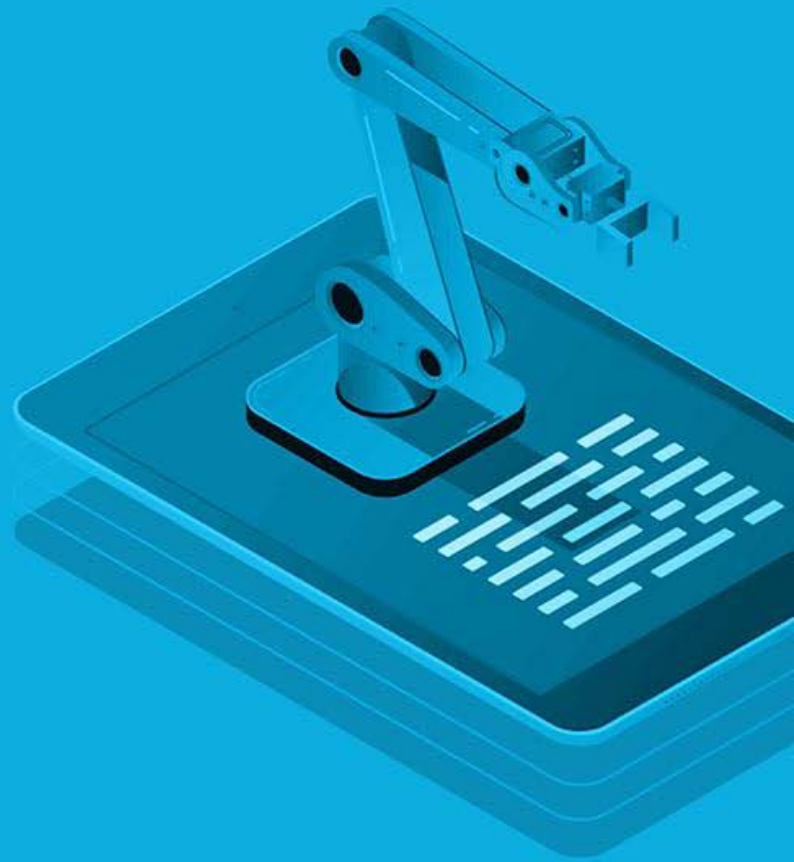
CONTENT MANAGER,
ONCRAWL (SEJ PARTNER)

Whatever your role in SEO, you're familiar with the problem: you don't have time.

Maybe you'd like to do a deep dive, but the basics aren't covered yet.

Maybe you've presented the results of a complete audit, but know only a fraction of the essentials will be implemented.

Oncrawl



Maybe you've started working on an SEO project, but you're not sure you'll be able to roll it all out. We've all been there. There is just too much to do in SEO: websites and search engines are both increasingly complex and constantly changing.

And with more webpages, more project stakeholders, and more data, even reporting and monitoring require more investment on your part.

WHAT YOU CAN GAIN FROM AUTOMATING SEO IN 2021

There is a solution: set up tools and programs to handle as much as possible.

Leave yourself free to spend more time doing the parts of SEO that require human skills and discernment to be done well.



AUTOMATE ANALYSES, AUDITS & ALERTS

The simpler strategies of keyword placement, keyword stuffing, and creating links (any links!) to your website are no longer so straightforward or risk-free.

Search algorithms are constantly changing.

And internet technologies have matured: websites are no longer a folder of files on a web server, and browsers don't just display HTML files.

If you automate analyses, audits, and alerts you need to keep up with new strategies, new search engine algorithms, and more complex website performance, you can focus your attention on the projects at hand.

SET UP AUTOMATIC ALERTS & SCHEDULE MONITORING

Many tasks are really easy to automate: there are automation options for scheduling and alerting built into almost every tool.

For example, you don't need to check Google Analytics to make sure everything is ok. Google Analytics can alert you if your website traffic is down by more than a given percent.

You can even apply this to a specific traffic segment, or trigger the alert based on a metric other than traffic:

Alert name:

Apply to: **Toutes les données du site Web** and

Period:

Send me an email when this alert triggers. Also include

Alert Conditions

This applies to

Alert me when Condition Value Compared to

Setting up an email alert in Google Analytics under Customization > Custom Alerts.

You can also schedule actions, particularly ones related to regular monitoring, such as monthly site health checks using a crawler:

Tasks

Enrich your crawls

RUNNING CRAWLS RUNNING CRAWL OVER CRAWLS **SCHEDULED CRAWLS 1**

Launch date	Recurrence	Configuration	
Dec 04, 2020 17:35 CET	Every month	default ⓘ	<input data-bbox="1214 1507 1235 1535" type="button" value="🗑️"/>

A monthly scheduled site health check in OnCrawl.



What can be scheduled easily depends on your site, your strategy, and your tools. Don't overlook the edge it can give you.

SCALE UP FOR LARGER CLIENT PORTFOLIOS, MORE DATA & BIGGER WEBSITES

In 2021, online job boards can have tens of millions of listings at any given moment, each with its own page that will be deleted after a few months at most.

Even a “simple” corporate site with a blog might include several hundred pages. If you're working at an agency, you don't have just one site to optimize, but a whole portfolio.

And even if you're working on a single site, the amount of data from different sources that you might be dealing with can be overwhelming. Automation will help you scale up.

SCALE UP FOR LARGER CLIENT PORTFOLIOS, MORE DATA & BIGGER WEBSITES

Almost all tools allow you to save reports, searches and create personalized elements. Save anything you might need to do again.

This can be as straightforward as saving templates or searches when creating them:

Datasets

- Pages
- Links
- Comparisons: Pages
- Logs monitoring: Pages
- Logs monitoring: Events

Quickfilters

- [Indexable pages to optimize: links](#)
- [Indexable pages to optimize: tags](#)
- [Indexable pages to optimize: content](#)
- [Indexable pages in structure not crawled by Google](#)
- [Inactive indexable pages in structure \(Logs\)](#)

Own filters

- [Top 10 ranking pages with traffic](#)
- [Compliant URL](#)
- [Near Duplicates with Canonicals OK still crawled by GG](#)**

MORE FILTERS ▾

OnCrawl Query Language

AND OR

AND	Canonical evaluation	is	matching	✕
AND	Has SEO visits - Logs	is	true	✕
AND	Has near-duplicate content	is	true	✕
AND	Googlebot hits - Logs	greater than (>)	10	✕

AND [ADD FIELD](#) [ADD BLOCK](#)

SAVE FILTERS [APPLY FILTERS](#)

Saving the report look-up settings for “Near duplicate pages with ok canonicals that are still crawled by Google” in OnCrawl.

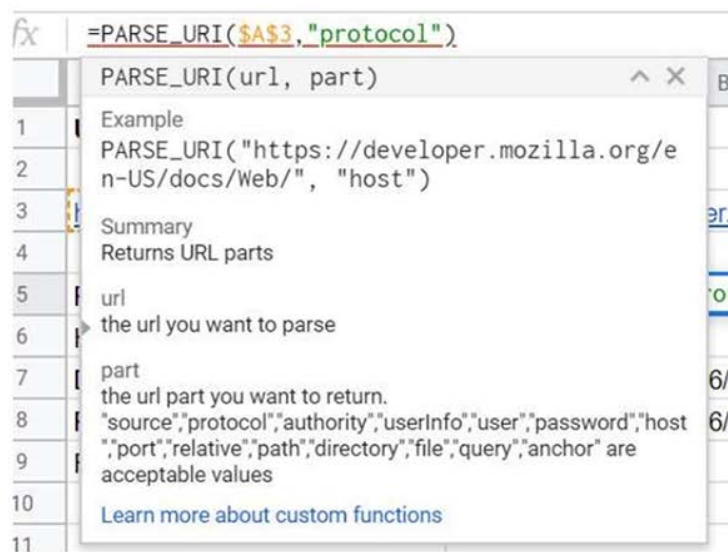
If you're a Google Sheets user, this might mean using macros, but it can also mean creating your own functions.

Dave Sottimano walked [TechSEO Boost 2019](#) attendees through sample functions created using JavaScript:

- Finding common items between two lists.
- Finding the items that are in one list, but not another.
- Parsing a URL.
- Listing top URLs for a given Google query.
- Get featured snippet information for a given Google query.
- Keyword frequency analysis.

Don't remember the formula? Just start typing.

Powered by JS Doc



The screenshot shows a spreadsheet cell containing the formula `=PARSE_URI(A3, "protocol")`. A tooltip window is open over the formula, displaying the function signature `PARSE_URI(url, part)` and an example: `PARSE_URI("https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/", "host")`. The tooltip also includes a summary: "Returns URL parts", and lists the parameters: `uri` (the url you want to parse) and `part` (the url part you want to return). It notes that acceptable values for `part` include "source", "protocol", "authority", "userInfo", "user", "password", "host", "port", "relative", "path", "directory", "file", "query", and "anchor". A link to "Learn more about custom functions" is also present.

Dave shared a [spreadsheet with all of the functions](#) that you can copy for your own use, but you can also create your own using Google's [instructions](#).

SCALE UP FOR LARGER CLIENT PORTFOLIOS, MORE DATA & BIGGER WEBSITES

The SEO pros we've talked to and worked with this past year have overwhelmingly cited the time they spend getting buy-in from stakeholders and strategic or corporate leadership.

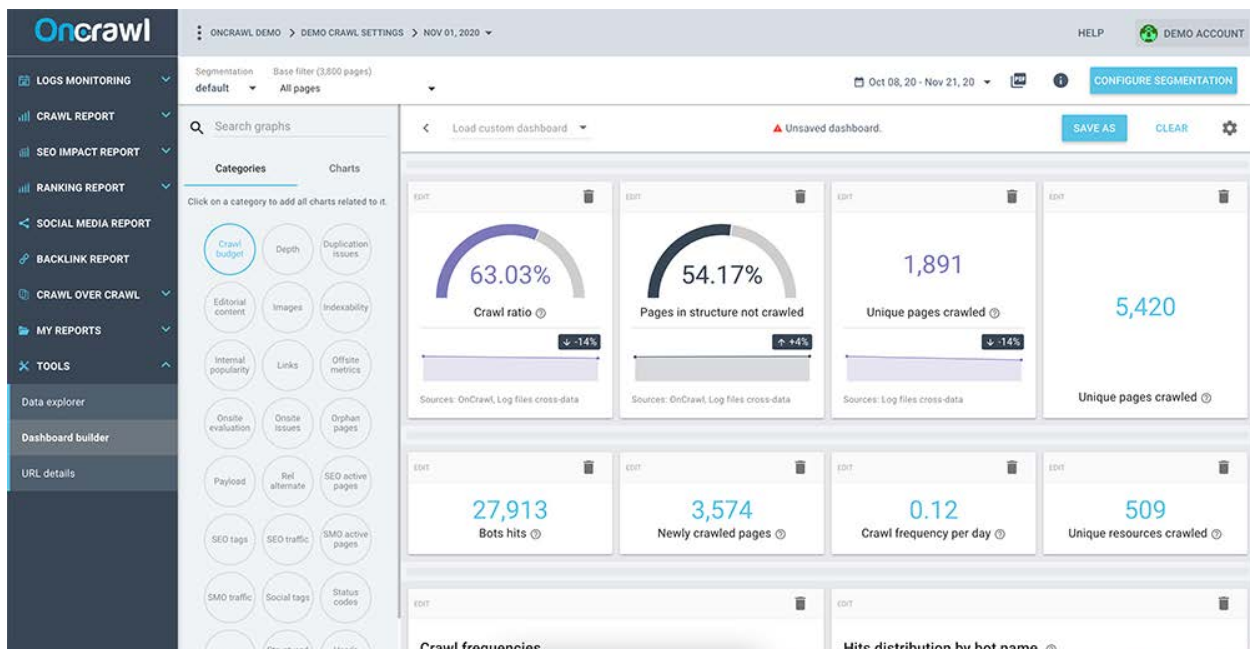
They spend an increasing amount of time on reporting and evangelization, rather than on implementing optimizations. If you're among them, automating reporting is a game-changer.

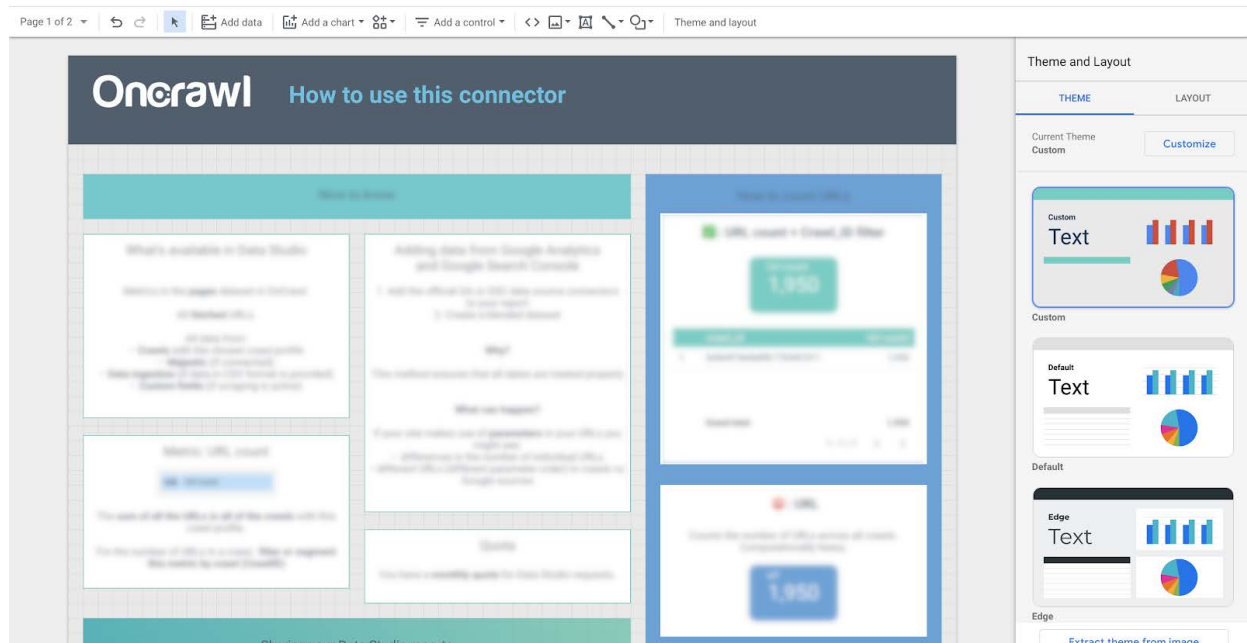
Oncrawl

Again, this doesn't require advanced knowledge. The tools you already use might have reporting options that can make your life easier.

For example, OnCrawl provides a dashboard creator, allowing you to pull the charts you need onto a single page, and set them up as a template for past future crawl reports.

If you use these graphs as a client report, you can now find them in a single place, or export them as a single file.





Many tools have Data Studio connectors, such as [this one](#) from OnCrawl.

There are countless examples of how the SEO community has adopted Data Studio. Let's take the Page Experience ranking signals coming in May 2021:

Both [Jackie Jeffers at Portent](#) and [Rick Viscomi](#) walk you through creating dashboards for Core Web Vitals.





Month: Apr 2020

(1)

Device

Core Web Vitals

Origin

https://developers.google.com

Month

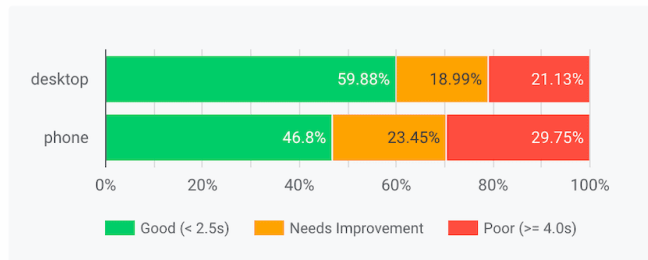
Apr 2020



Largest Contentful Paint (LCP)

LCP reports the render time of the largest content element that is visible within the viewport.

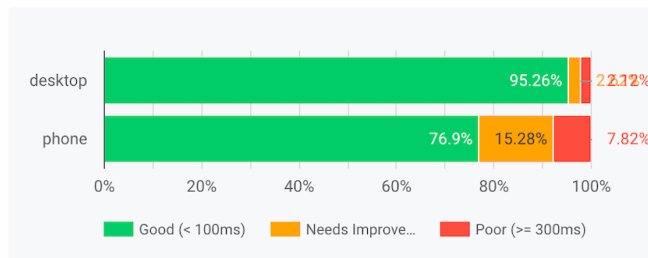
web.dev/lcp



First Input Delay (FID)

FID measures the time from when a user first interacts with a page (i.e. when they click a link, tap on a button, or use a custom, JavaScript-powered control) to the time when the browser is actually able to respond to that interaction.

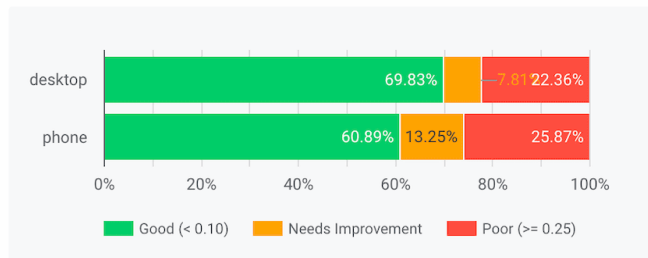
web.dev/fid



Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS)

CLS measures the sum total of all individual layout shift scores for every unexpected layout shift that occurs during the entire lifespan of the page.

web.dev/cls



Questions or concerns? Visit the [CrUX forum](https://cruxforum.com).

Create your own dashboard at g.co/chromeuxdash

CrUX Dashboard on Data Studio



They aren't alone: the SEO community has shared tons of dashboards for Data Studio:

- [**Gather all Search Console data**](#)
(Martin MacDonald)
- [**Ranking changes from Google updates**](#)
(Aleyda Solis)
- [**Hreflang needs**](#)
(Aleyda Solis)
- [**Search performance per device**](#)
(Aleyda Solis)
- [**Instructions to create a dashboard on questions people asked when searching for your site**](#)
(Noah Learner)
- [**Instructions for using Python to access Google Trends data**](#)
(Hülya Çoban)
- [**A whole collection of templates**](#)
(Ivan Pali)

CREATE AUTOMATED WORKFLOWS FOR SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

You can also automate tasks you might not have realized could be done well by machines today, such as writing meta descriptions for thousands of products, detecting website performance problems, or even making sure new content gets indexed, even on complex sites when you might not even know what that new content is.

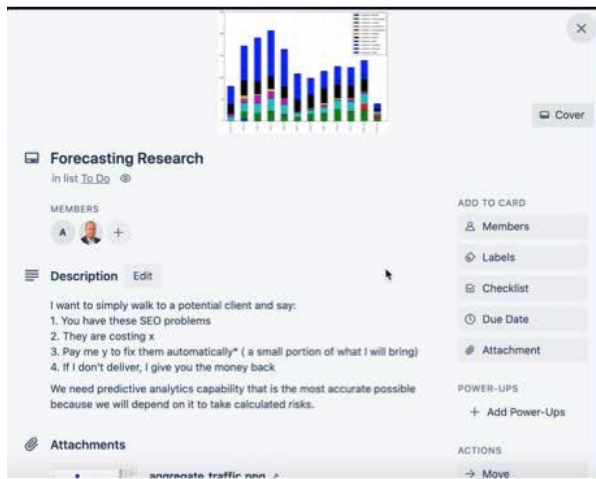
Initiatives like i.codeseo.dev and [OnCrawl Labs](#) aim to make it easier for SEO pros to create programs and workflows to tackle this sort of task by providing resources, documentation, and even code that you can work from.

The screenshot shows the iCodeSEO website interface. On the left is a navigation menu with categories like 'Resources for Technical SEOs', 'TECHNICAL SEO', 'JAVASCRIPT', 'PYTHON', and 'Data Science'. The main content area is titled 'Pull Title and Description from URL' and includes a brief explanation: 'Simple example of using the requests and BeautifulSoup libraries to pull <title> and <meta name="description" content="..." /> from live URLs.' Below this is a code block with Python code that uses 'requests' and 'BeautifulSoup' to fetch a page and extract its title and meta description. On the right, there is a 'CONTENTS' sidebar with links to various articles.

```
1 from bs4 import BeautifulSoup
2 import requests
3
4 # Use BeautifulSoup to fetch page titles.
5 def fetch_meta(url):
6     #Set UA as Googlebot as the server will only serve to GB
7     headers = {'User-Agent': 'Mozilla/5.0 (Windows NT 10.0; Win64; x64) AppleWebKit/537.36 (KHTML, like Gecko) Chrome/80.0.3987.163 Safari/537.36'}
8     result = {'title': '', 'description': '', 'error': ''}
9
10    try:
11        #Send a GET request to grab the file
12        response = requests.get(url, headers=headers, timeout=3)
13
14        #Parse the response
15        soup = BeautifulSoup(response.text)
16
17        #Extract the title
18        result['title'] = soup.title.string
19        description_tag = soup.find('meta', attrs={'name': 'description'})
20        if description_tag is not None:
21            result['description'] = description_tag.get('content')
22
23    except Exception as e:
24        result['error'] = str(e)
25
26    return result
27
28
29
30
31
```

But they're not the only initiatives. Machine learning and automation are increasingly common subjects at SEO events. Here are just a few examples:

- Britney Muller, “Accessible Machine Learning Workflows for SEO” (MozCon 2020)
- Hamlet Batista, “Automated Duplicate Content Consolidation with Google Cloud Functions” (We Love SEO Virtual Summit 2020)
- Robin Lord, “Using Jupyter to make marketing easier” (SMX Munich 2020)



- Finding repeatable success**
- Searching for a machine learning model to connect new visits to technical SEO changes
 - We focused on the impact of links, indexing, and canonical clustering

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— VIRTUAL SUMMIT —

For Search Marketing Lovers

Create Automated Workflows for Specific Problems

MORE EFFECTIVE SEO IN 2021

SEO in 2021 is, without a doubt, more complex than ever before.

Whether you're working alone, or as part of a team, you are probably being pulled in multiple different ways at once.

Oncrawl

Automation is one of the best strategies to relieve some of the pressure without dropping the ball. It can:

- Handle monitoring and scheduling.
- Help you scale actions you're already good at.
- Save time on reporting and data visualization.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, automation can improve entire workflows or resolve specific problems where a computer's speed or accuracy is an advantage.

All of these strategies have been around for years - but 2021 marks a tipping point: automation is no longer an option to consider, but an intrinsic part of good SEO.

HAMLET BATISTA

CEO, RankSense

Automation, AI-driven content generation, and programming will be massive SEO trends.

If we look back at the increasing number of SEO tasks that we are able to automate in 2020 (structured data generation, quality content, etc.), the possibilities for 2021 will be mind-bending.

Expect the quality and quantity of the AI-generated content to increase dramatically. It will definitely create a bigger challenge for search engines to keep spam out of the index.



Human-in-the-loop automation to make sure the value is high for search users will be the main focus to avoid penalties and remain competitive.

SEO pros coding to automate tasks should remain strong as more members of the community share their code and success stories.

During my WeLovSEO technical keynote presentation, we polled SEO pros and asked them about Python adoption.

- Are you leveraging Python in your SEO work at the moment? – 15% said yes.
- Are you learning Python to automate SEO work? – 38% said yes.
- If you are learning, do you find the learning curve... (a) easy, (b) manageable, (c) hard, or (d) mind-bending hard? – 11% said it's easy, 27% answered it's manageable, 62% said it's hard, and no one thinks it's mind-bending hard.

As more tasks are automated, I'm hoping to see SEO results happening faster and bigger budgets allocated to support predictable growth.

ANDY BETTS



Search and Digital Advisor & Consultant

2020 taught marketers one big lesson - market and behavior dynamics will continuously change, and those businesses that sit still struggle to survive.

To take advantage of the pandemic tailwinds that accelerated the digital transformation of business and resulted in a rise in demand for SEO, marketers have to become more creative and agile across all of their enterprise workstreams.

In 2021 (more than I ever have seen before in my digital lifetime), I see a massive opportunity for

SEO to become the central, driving function of search, consumer, and business insights that fuel the integration of search, content, and digital campaigns across organizations.

To do this, SEO pros need to be more agile in their approaches to understand both market conditions and evolving consumer behavior.

What worked for SEO six-months ago or six-weeks ago may not work today.

To stay relevant and stay top of mind for consumers' attention in 2021, pivot your approach from a singular focus on just consumer behavior to a dual process that involves understanding the market in which these consumers operate first.

Take a more strategic and blended approach to understand what's happening in the market, where demand has shifted historically, and where it is changing in real-time.

Take a consultative approach to understand how economic, sociological, and psychological factors

impact search demand and then look at understanding consumer behavior and intent at a granular level.

Utilize all tools, platforms, and sources of business intelligence at your disposal.

By doing this, you will not only be able to maximize SEO opportunities and revenue, but you will also be able to share these insights across the digital organization.

In 2021 there is a massive opportunity to combine search and business intelligence and, as a result, for SEO to become more ingrained and valued in an organization's business strategy.

JACKIE CHU

Global SEO Lead, Uber



I think a major trend next year will be E-A-T beyond YMYL topics.

Particularly this year, we've seen a lot of interference with ML-driven results. You saw this with:

- Twitter flagging and censoring tweets with misinformation.
- Google dedicating resources to create a dynamic homepage for COVID-19 queries.

- And, even more broadly, with information about elections and political activity through Facebook and other media platforms.

I think this continues a longtime trend by Google that began with efforts like rel=author, but the current political climate is supercharging to what extent and how quickly they can, or should interfere.

It's a tough line to toe, especially with the ongoing lawsuits, but I think it's a dynamic that any company that distributes information at scale will feel a higher duty to straddle.

I also anticipate seeing a lot of activity dedicated to the APAC region, which is both a booming market and one that is experiencing substantial growth, in spite of the pandemic.

THERE IS NO KEYWORD

BY **IVANO DI BIASI** CEO,
SEOZOOM (SEJ PARTNER)

Not keywords but contexts.

In 2012, Google invited us all to think of the Search as a set of “things, not strings”.

Keyword research is still the key activity to create content for each type of site.



But today, we need to clear the field of old myths and outdated techniques that make us lose sight of the goal: to understand what people want and what they expect to find on a webpage.

Already now, and even more so in the coming months with the increasing impact of Google's machine learning and AI systems, we have to mirror Neo in the Matrix in front of the spoon and repeat that, "There is no keyword."

This is the only way we can truly understand what we need for SEO.

DO NOT LOOK FOR KEYWORDS ONLY

Let's take a step back in time: announcing the introduction of the Knowledge Graph in 2012, Google focused not only on the importance of this tool, but also on the meaning of the new approach to the research, no longer based on "strings," but on things.



The knowledge graph is based on the entities that Google knows – things, people, landmarks, celebrities, cities, sports teams, buildings, geographical features, films, celestial bodies, works of art and more – and allows you to instantly obtain information relevant to the request made by users.

But, most of all, it was already defined as “a fundamental first step to build the next generation of research, which draws on the collective intelligence of the web and understands the world a little more as people do.”

THE NEW GENERATION OF RESEARCH

The direction taken (more than eight years ago!) with the Knowledge Graph shows us that even in the search system, Google does not work by keywords and simple words, but rather on elements linked by relationships and inserted in a context.



In fact, entities describe content using knowledge models known as graphs, which help machines interpret human thoughts and at the same time, allow us to find information more efficiently.

The confirmation comes a few years later, in 2015, when Google launched RankBrain, an update of the algorithm specific for search.

Based on machine learning, RankBrain aimed to improve the way the system indexes and processes information to provide the user with useful content - managing to sort billions of pages and identifying the most relevant ones for each search query.

LOOKING FOR & CREATING CONTEXTS

We are approaching the present day, with an increasingly advanced and sophisticated level of programs recognizing natural language and combining user requests and web content.



In the words of Nina Taniguchi, Consumer Insights Manager, Ads Marketing for Google, we must be able to “anticipate customer needs,” starting with the search terms they are using.

“Marketers invest a lot of money, time, and resources in an attempt to decipher and anticipate consumer intent,” Taniguchi says.

“A key to understanding that intent is getting at the underlying needs that drive it in the first place. Search would seem an obvious place to start. After all, people are literally typing their needs into a search field.”

This basically means avoiding “universal” content, going beyond “branded search terms and terms that are always associated with their category”, and understanding “the emotions driving people’s actions.”

In this way, you “anticipate the needs that drive their searches – and address them.”



A NEW APPROACH TO KEYWORD RESEARCH

We are talking about what we often call search intent, the intent that represents the starting point of the user journey.

It is the reason that prompted a person to connect to Google to search for something and, in some way, even what the same person expects to find among the result pages and content.

All the people who perform an online search hope to find something: the motivation can be the answer to a question or the desire to visit a specific site or to buy a particular product.



GENERATING QUALITY TRAFFIC

We must not forget that the goal is to not only get traffic to your website but to try and generate quality traffic – people who are really interested in what you offer.

Understanding what our target audience wants means planning our tactics and choosing strategic keyword groups that can increase the likelihood of people finding the site while searching online.

And so, in a nutshell, before creating any content it is important to know and understand what the real intent behind the specific query that affects our business is, or we risk posting online pages that will not get the results we are hoping for and writing articles that do not fit.



IMPROVING OUR KEYWORD RESEARCH STRATEGY

Understanding what our target audience and potential customers want and need means becoming able to plan our strategy in advance, choose more targeted keywords, and write more effective content, because more useful.

Utility is a central word for our work because it is related to the evaluation of the quality of our content.

Each of our pages must have a purpose - an added value for the user - and help them solve a problem, learn a skill, save time or money, increase knowledge on a topic, deepen a topic, or get resources.

Thanks to artificial intelligence and predictive algorithms, the concept of “useful” has changed



over time, and today it does not mean only relevant, but relevant according to context and relationships.

HOW TO AUTOMATE & SPEED UP THE SEARCH INTENT RESEARCH WITH SEOZOOM

There are various techniques to be able to understand what the audience of a given query wants: the classic method is to directly look at the Google SERPs and check what kind of results are offered, or if there is a prevalence of transactional or informational content or if there rather is a “mixed” presence.

It would then be necessary to analyze the individual pages more carefully to find out what kind of information they report, how the topics are covered, and so on.



It's quite the brutal work!

Inside SEOZoom, the Italian SEO suite now debuting on international markets, there are some features specifically designed to simplify the detection of search intent and the creation of SEO-optimized content.

Since its start back in 2015, SEOZoom has been the first SEO tool in the world to offer a vision of the performance of a website no longer based on the placement of keywords like other trivial rank trackers do, but on the performance of every single webpage of the site.

This is visible in the Content Overview, a tool that catalogs all the webpages of the site and groups them according to their performance on search engines - indicating useless or duplicate pages wasting crawl budget, cannibalization cases, and so much more.



Thanks to our Search Intent Tool and URL Search Intent Tool, we can find out precisely the search intentions of users behind every single keyword, useful both to create a new page already oriented to what you need to rank on Google and to improve the performance of an already published content.

SEOZoom algorithms help us choose the key topic to develop (the main keyword) while its related topics indicate which correlated keywords we can use to enrich the content without ending “out of focus”, when we can merge keywords and themes into a single article and when users (and Google) expect individual and different articles.



THE KEYWORD RESEARCH PROCESS

In light of all this, modern keyword research must start from three assumptions:

- Content must answer to search intent.
- The search intent also indicates a need.
- A pertinent answer may satisfy similar words but not different intentions.

Our strategic work must therefore begin by identifying the search intent, the user's need, which we will have to consider not in an abstract and absolute sense but as an entity, an element that presents a series of relationships.



We then have to ask ourselves how our webpage can provide a useful answer to this need, considering the beneficial purpose we can offer with our website.

THE CONTEXTS OF THE WEB

And so, our keyword research has to follow a different *modus operandi*, as we do not just have to focus on searching for high-volume keywords for a string but to detect the best context.

To achieve this, we need to analyze the search process of users, from the birth of the need to the choice of the solution.

We need to look at what Google has considered relevant as shown in the SERPs and find out which are the answers that the search engine already considers the most useful in order to make our content effective and competitive.



Once we have all this information – and with SEOZoom it only takes a few minutes – we must then develop the content of the article keeping the focus central, remaining in the trace of what the search engine currently appreciates.

This is the only way we can achieve quality content that tries to meet the specific needs of users and to do so in the way Google finds the most pleasing.

THIS IS WHY THERE IS NO KEYWORD!

This is why, in a provocative way, we reiterate that “there is no keyword.”

We cannot still work on a single keyword extrapolated from a context, chosen only on the basis of the evaluation of the number of average searches

We cannot still optimize content based on a single keyword excluding all the rest.



We cannot just focus on a term and ignore all related words and those which share the same search intent to use inside the text without making it off-topic.

THE EVOLUTION OF KEYWORD RESEARCH

These concepts can also be applied to future scenarios, as it is predictable that in the coming years, the contexts will increase, but not the pillars of this activity.

The development of technological systems – such as home automation objects, radar in smartphones, voice assistants, and voice search – will multiply the factors that can influence the choices of users and the channels through which people can get in touch with both Google and a site – but not the “need” that drives them to search.



And so, the search intent will still be fundamental, and even keywords will still be important, again thinking in clusters around what at that time means useful to people and Google.

In short, the real challenge that awaits us will be adapting the old keywords to new technological and most of all environmental contexts, trying to make our tactics and strategies evolve at the same time.



RACHEL COSTELLO

Technical SEO Consultant, Builtvisible

One of the biggest trends in the SEO industry in 2021 will undoubtedly be page experience

With Google's upcoming update to its algorithm to use page experience as a ranking factor in 2021, SEO pros should be investing more of their time in analyzing and improving the experiences of users on their websites, rather than solely focusing on the more technical and structural side of SEO.

We should be looking at how a page makes a user feel, not just whether the page is accessible and comprehensible to a search engine crawler.



This will involve us taking a user-centric approach with our optimization efforts, including a keen focus on:

- How quickly and smoothly pages load.
- How soon pages become responsive to user interactions.
- How easy a website is to use and navigate on mobile devices.
- The safety and security of a site's connection as users are browsing through it.

Incorporating page experience into your SEO workflow will not only help to future-proof your website's performance and rankings ahead of the upcoming algorithm update, but it can also help to improve UX and conversions now.

This is why page experience optimization will definitely have positive short term and long term impacts.



DAVE DAVIES

Duke of URL, Beanstalk Internet Marketing

IMO, we don't really have to guess, Google just laid it all out there in their Search On event in mid-October. The focus of the event was AI, and that's what we'll see.

But more is what that means. We'll see a greater shift to user-centric signals and user-centric layout. With passages, we'll be seeing the entire way content is viewed and laid out on websites change.

Why have a page on a general topic, and sub-pages on specifics, when you can have one long page for it all and know that Google will drive the user where they need to go? Isn't that the best of both worlds? And they're doing similar in video.

So in 2021, the big trend I'll personally be following is SERP layout and functionality changes, and what they mean for content strategy and formatting.



ANDREW DENNIS

Content Marketing Specialist,
Page One Power

In my opinion, the biggest trend that smart SEO professionals should be focused on in 2021 is searcher intent and how rapidly and unexpectedly it can change.

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that searcher behavior can shift quickly and if your SEO strategy is slow to react, your brand and website can get left behind.

While a global pandemic is (hopefully) a rare occurrence, there are many other potential reasons searcher behavior can shift dramatically (new technology, changing laws, geopolitical events, etc.) and you need to be able to adapt and capture new opportunities as they arise.

But how do you predict changes in searcher behavior?

Well, you can't in most instances... but, you can (and should) monitor the SERPs that are most important to your brand and track any signs of potential shifts in searcher intent.

Google is already showing you which results it thinks serve users' intent, use this data for your own strategy.

For example, if you see more and more comparison posts cropping up in the SERP where your definitional page ranks, it's probably a good idea to build your own comparison page.

For me, SERP analysis will be an important practice not just in 2021, but moving forward as search intents change and Google continues to become more sophisticated to keep up.

5 PREDICTIONS FOR SEO TRENDS IN 2021

BY PAT REINHART VP, DIGITAL STRATEGIES, CONDUCTOR
(SEJ PARTNER)

As 2020 comes to a close, the SEO landscape – and the marketing industry as a whole – is in a disruptive period of change.

As budgets are cut, priorities are adjusted and marketing teams are expected to do more with less.

Amid the turbulence, the spotlight has swiftly shifted onto SEO professionals.

 conductor



With a growing emphasis on SEO in 2021, next year is set to accelerate this wave of change.

Here are the top five predictions for the SEO and content marketing industry in 2021:

- Google continues to become the destination.
- SERP changes broaden the scope of content strategy.
- SEO pros leverage content velocity to determine budget investment.
- Greater executive investment in SEO and more accountability.
- Point solutions consolidate into enterprise-level SEO solutions.

2020 has been a year of major fluctuation. Although we continue to face many unknowns, if SEO pros can anticipate and prepare for these upcoming trends, they will be better positioned to succeed.

Let's take a look.

5 PREDICTIONS FOR SEO TRENDS IN 2021

1. Google Continues to Become the Destination

In 2021, Google will continue to solidify its position as a destination.

Thanks to advanced SERP features, Google is progressively becoming the place to do things. Expect a greater push towards continuous journey building or a virtual chain of search.

As Google shifts into more verticalization, search increasingly emphasizes:

- User journey
- Connected experiences
- Search suggestions

For example, consider Google's implementation of multiple types of carousels. When a user clicks on an image in the carousel, they're taken to another SERP - not the website that hosts the image.

As Google becomes the destination, you'll have to consider implementing different strategies to ensure your business is appearing for the searches you want to appear for.

Pay attention to what appears on SERPS, where and how your content is showing up. You'll have to think differently about:

- What your intent is.
- How and where you serve ads.
- How and where you place content.

This is an ongoing trend that will likely accelerate in 2021.

2. SERP Changes Broaden the Scope of Content Strategy

As Google continues to aggregate SERP features to become the destination, the scope of content strategy will expand.

Your new content strategy needs to address more than your website, blog, PDPs or category pages. It must optimize your entire digital presence.

From owned properties to all the properties that speak about your brand, it's up to you to take control of the conversation and create a compelling narrative.

This includes:

- Q&A Content: How is your company discussed on Reddit or Quora? Are searchers finding your blog first?
- Video Content: How high-quality are videos on your YouTube channel? Are searchers finding your videos first?
- Informational Content: How up-to-date is your Wikipedia page?

Companies will have to increasingly manage their online presence to ensure these aggregated SERP entities tell a good story around their brand. No-click search results are here to stay.

From the answer box to video carousel, these SERP components should depict your brand as:

- Expert-level
- Authoritative
- Trustworthy

Similarly, this means redoubling your efforts to combat misinformation, through old blog or social posts, or old Wikipedia information.

In 2021, marketers will revamp content strategy to account for this branding opportunity as data aggregates together in the SERP.

3. SEO Pros Leverage Content Velocity to Determine Budget Investment

Expect SEO pros to leverage content velocity to justify budget increases by calculating costs.

Content velocity is how much content you are creating compared to your competitors. The content marketing industry has largely – and correctly – prioritized quality over quantity.

But even if you are creating great content and your top competitors are creating 2X or 5X high-quality content, they will still outpace you.

By analyzing your competitors' content velocity, you can calculate the budget you'll need to rank over them.



Even if you're creating great content, your Competitor #1 is creating 2X high-quality content, and Competitor #2 is creating 5X. Who is gonna win? The guy creating 5X because it's just at a bigger scale. Using that information, you can justify creating more content by calculating the cost. And that's a very data-driven way to use content velocity to your advantage.

– Pat Reinhart, VP of **Digital Strategies**

For a selected time-frame, you can analyze:

- Average number of pieces created
- Average word count

Using this information, companies can calculate the cost of competitors' budget and use this as a business case to justify headcount or budget increases to outrank competitors.

4. Greater Executive Investment in SEO & More Accountability

COVID-19 has placed the spotlight squarely on SEO, a trend that will continue to grow in 2021.

According to a recent Conductor survey, [63% of executives](#) said that SEO will be more important this coming year.

63%

Of executives said that **SEO will be more important this coming year.**

Conductor survey

At Conductor, we work primarily with enterprise customers. In these fluctuating times, we have seen much more interaction with C-level executives, CMOS, CEOs, and CDOs.

Until now, many executives understood the importance of SEO, but full buy-in has proved challenging compared to other channels like paid search.

However, as COVID has forced devastating budget cuts, the calculus has changed.

Moving forward, executives will be more likely to invest in SEO as a channel. This means more accountability for SEO pros.

This is a significant step for SEO professionals and SEO in the industry as a whole, who have long sought accountability for growth and investment.

With greater investment comes greater scrutiny, which necessitates more robust reporting.

Conductor's enterprise reporting solution, for instance, gives companies seamless, flexibility when it comes to reports. [FlexHub reports](#) are custom built by Conductor's in-house business intelligence experts to demonstrate your ROI to executives.

Content Performance allows you to connect your marketing activities to business metrics with real-time performance reporting across all of your paid, owned and earned channels. Digital Presence.

You'll want to report on all your data in a flexible way that's consumable for all your stakeholders.

5. Point Solutions Consolidate into Enterprise-Level SEO Solutions

The martech divide is real. As tech stacks becoming increasingly sophisticated and complex, we're starting to see a tech fatigue.

It's time-consuming to select, understand and learn new tools. According to Gartner research, [29% of marketing leaders](#) say that training their existing martech talent is a major impediment to their effectiveness.

In the next year, expect the start of an industry-wide marketing technology consolidation event.

The current landscape contains many point solutions and a few enterprise-level software. However, point solutions often lack the integration or communication abilities needed for enterprise companies, who need to easily cross-reference data.

56%

Of marketers indicate
fragmented and siloed technology
is a top barrier to success

In the next 12 to 18 months, companies will consolidate to bring these solutions together. Larger marketing cloud companies will join forces with an enterprise-level platform and integrate several point solutions. This strategic combination functions as an overall, modularized solution.

An enterprise platform does the job of consolidating your current tech stack into one source of truth. This helps your team become more agile and helps with reporting.

An enterprise-level platform connects:

- **Teams:** All the folks who touch your website. This includes content creators, marketers, SEO pros, and web developers.
- **Systems:** All the tools those teams use. From your analytics to your CMS to your task manager like JIRA - all systems are connected and working together.
- **Process:** The workflows and activities that are needed to scale.

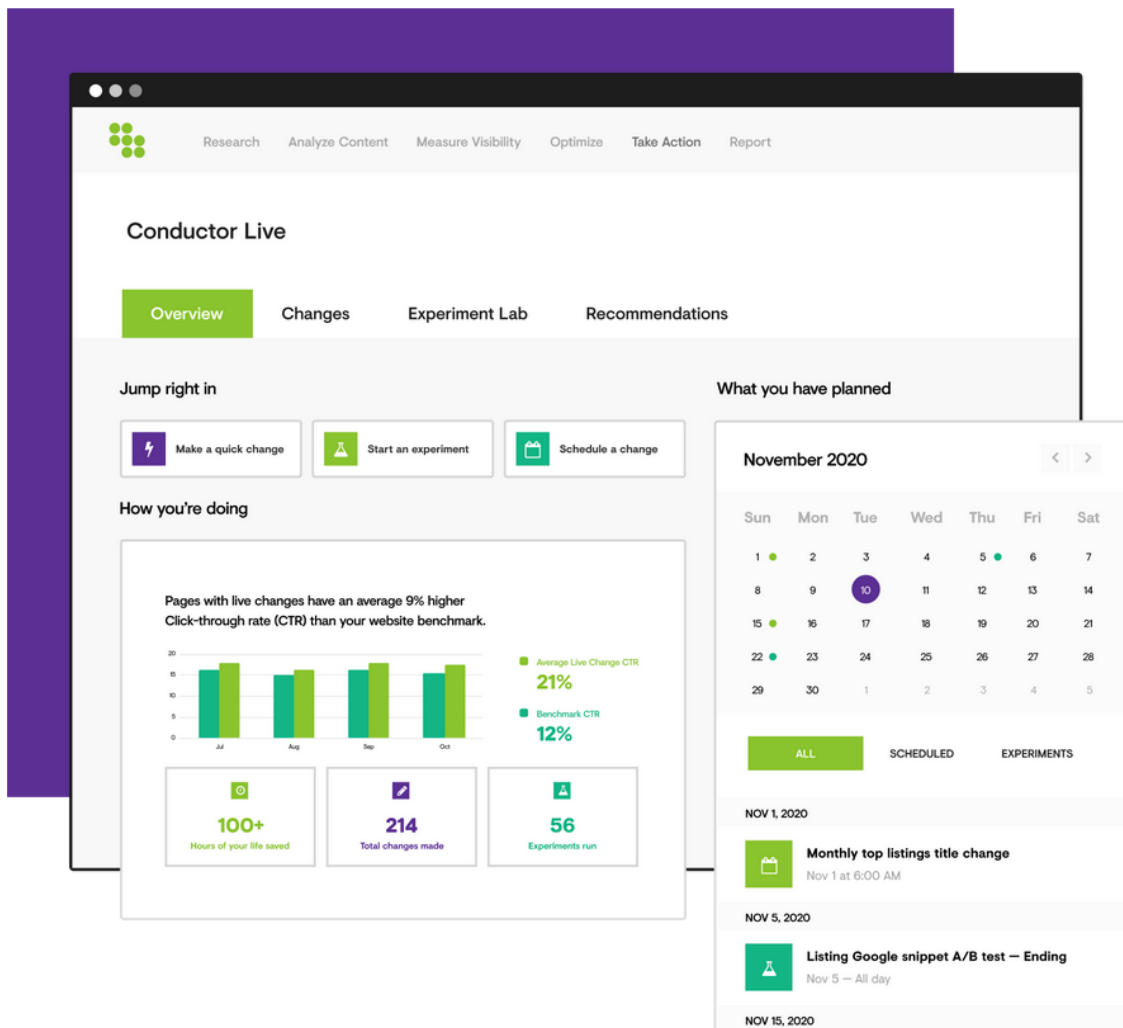
Our platform, [Conductor](#), is designed with seamless integration as a top priority. It plugs into your existing software tools to enhance and improve what you're already doing.

According to Forrester's Total Economic Impact Report, compared to small tools, an enterprise platform is capable of results like:

- 54% increase in traffic from SEO and site health improvements.
- 30% improved productivity for the head of digital marketing practice.
- 25% increase in content published with the same workforce.
- 15% reduction in paid media spend thanks to site improvements.

And with Conductor's [Live Editor](#), your team becomes more agile by enabling them to make changes to live content in real-time with instant optimizations and advanced SEO on-page testing.

Live Editor allows you to push technical and content updates to your site directly from Conductor. You can also experiment with website optimizations and automate testing, so you know that every optimization drives impact.



Enterprise solutions get everyone on your team on the same page and remove silos that show your team's ability to execute.

That's why 2021 will see a major push towards consolidation.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In 2021, we can expect major change to continue and for several pivotal trends to accelerate.

Although the current landscape is shifting, there is cause for optimism as we head into a new year.

To recap, here are five key takeaways we foresee in 2021:

- Google verticalizes to become the destination.
- SERP changes increase scope of content strategy.
- Content velocity demonstrates budget investment.
- Greater executive investment in and accountability for SEO.
- Consolidation into enterprise-level SEO solutions.

If companies and teams can demonstrate SEO value and show ROI, even in the face of budget cuts and reduction in paid, they will be better positioned to continue this year's SEO momentum.

SHELLY FAGIN

SEO Director and Founder, Highly Searched, Inc.

I believe that 2021 will be the year of mobile refinement.

We've all been focusing on meeting the bare minimum requirements to be considered mobile-first.

Now, it's time we shift our focus to improving that experience for our users.

Don't just settle with getting passing scores and consider it a job well done.



It's time to closely review your pages and make sure they are intuitive for your users, are easy to navigate, and you aren't hiding valuable content and images on mobile devices.

It's OK to have a different experience between desktop and mobile, but It's important to know that Google will no longer be ranking your desktop and mobile experiences differently.

Google will essentially be ignoring your desktop site. Your mobile site will determine your rankings.

If you still have a separate mobile site, now might be the time to reconsider migrating to a mobile responsive site instead.

If you choose not to make this change, you need to make sure you have covered all your bases, and do not forget that schema markup.

Speaking of Schema, just like in 2020, it is critical to stay current and on top of changes and improvements to schema types and make sure your current schema stays valid.

Well-utilized schema is your chance to gain an edge over your competitors.

There are a lot of industries that still haven't embraced structured data. It's a missed opportunity for sure. Step up and seize them.

Make sure you pay close attention to the rich snippets that appear on your queries and adapt your strategies to optimize for those SERP features.

If you consistently see video snippets on your queries, you should be investing in video.

If you're seeing a lot of FAQs or People Also Ask, you need to make sure you are utilizing FAQ schema, and you have included the most popular questions, and of course, the answers, which appear for those searches. Lastly, in 2021 you need to be focusing on making headways towards improving your authority all across the internet.

Focus on building up your entity in Google's eyes. Become a topical expert in your niche by focusing on your output of quality content that meets the searcher's intent. Stop publishing just to publish.

Your content needs to have a purpose, and ideally, it should be written by or at least heavily vetted by your company's leading experts.

Build out engaging bio pages, and don't leave anything out, it's okay to brag here. Make sure these pages utilize the proper schema that matches up with that expert.



UPASNA GAUTAM

Product Manager, Ecommerce, CNN

Both personally and professionally, I am not one to follow trends, as I prefer to optimize and strengthen foundational building blocks.

Times and trends may change, but the goals of a successful website will and do remain the same: help users find information and complete tasks in the most efficient way possible.

Building sustainable digital experiences happens through having a sound information architecture (IA) – it's the critical foundation that must be built in order to achieve that goal, and is done by classifying and structuring content in a cohesive and logical way.

In the ocean of web content, IA should serve as your constant beacon.

MARIE HAYNES

CEO, Marie Haynes Consulting Inc.

The biggest change in SEO for 2021 will likely be learning how to optimize for intent.

A year ago Google was using BERT in one out of ten English searches. They said BERT was, “particularly useful for understanding the intent behind search queries.”

In the recent SearchOn event, they stated that BERT is now used to improve all English searches. In that same event, Google revealed they’ll be able to



identify which particular passages of a page are the best answer to a searcher's query.

At nearly exactly the same time, the Quality Raters' Guidelines were updated with very specific examples describing how the raters should determine whether a searcher's needs were met.

When we put all of this information together, it seems clear to me that the winners in terms of SEO next year will be websites that do a stellar job of providing users with information.

We predict that Google will get even better at recognizing when a searcher is looking for expert advice and will rank those posts above articles written by content writers who are lacking E-A-T.

Because machine learning is being used there will likely be other ranking factors that will be impossible to measure as Google's algorithms figure out what it is that is actually valuable to searchers.

If this is true, then the SEO pros who will be successful in 2021 will be those who can truly understand how to meet a searchers' needs.



ADAM HEITZMAN

Co-founder and Managing Partner, HigherVisibility

Further Emphasis on User Experience

While providing a positive user experience when a visitor lands on your website has always been important, 2021 is where it will take center stage.

In May 2020, Google announced that they will soon start making Page Experience a ranking signal utilizing a set of metrics called Core Web Vitals.

The biggest thing you can do as an SEO professional is to try to understand the mindset of your website visitors and to walk a mile in their shoes.

What problem are they trying to solve and how can you give them the information needed to show you are the solution?

Luckily you can leverage the Core Web Vitals Report in Google Search Console to help. In addition, some of the key areas to consider are:

- Website load time.
- No pop-ups or annoying ads.
- Cross-device responsiveness.
- Using behavior software like Hotjar to identify cogs.
- Leveraging video to further engage.
- Implement user testing.

Zero-Click Searches Will Increase Further

Google is doing as much as they can to try to keep users on Google properties. That is, after all, how they make money.

This isn't going away. In fact, it is likely to increase.

Google just announced in October that they will now be able to identify individual passages on a webpage to surface relevant content in the search results. Thus increasing the likelihood that these passages will result in instant answer type boxes in the SERPs.

As an SEO pro and marketer, it is vital to leverage schema markup as much as possible to allow you to gain greater visibility with SERP features. In addition, some other key areas to consider are:

- Structuring your content to allow for you to appear in featured snippets.
- Focusing your efforts on improving your organic CTA.
- Answering users' questions.

At the core of these trends is the experience a user has during their search.

The more you can evolve your approach to maximize the experience on your website, the more you will be rewarded.



MOTOKO HUNT

President & International Search Marketing
Consultant, AJPR

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues worldwide, people's daily lives have changed considerably, and their behavior is changing rather rapidly.

Our target audience's needs, interests, decision-making process, and how they consume the information are changing.

And we, the digital marketers, need to understand the changes in order to stay connected with them.

Children are spending more time in front of the computer, and adults are spending more time in front of the TV screen again.

The long lead time of some B2B businesses is becoming even longer.

People and companies are adopting all things digital, and that conversion points are shifting from offline to online, which opens up more opportunities for digital marketing.

While the basic skills and knowledge are still important, your brain needs to be flexible to adapt to the rapid changes.

Thinking outside the box will be more important than ever. The business opportunities are still out there.

If it's not where you normally look, you just need to find where they went. Your popular content may get outdated quicker than they used to.

But it doesn't mean that people are not engaging with the digital content at all. In 2021, prepared to work harder than ever before to "assess, adopt, and execute".



MIRACLE INAMETI- ARCHIBONG

Head of SEO, Erudite

As the digital landscape gets even smaller and Google takes more control of how and what we can display in the SERPs.

Data on behavioral analytics will become the hottest commodity.

We will be pushed more and more to make the traffic we have to work harder in order to close the gaps in revenue and demonstrate ROI.

This did not used to be our job, but it is now. In the past, SEO professionals have been very concerned about getting you that visit. Data insights were focused on highlighting performance.

But with Google evolving faster and faster to give instant satisfaction, taking responsibility beyond visits, as well as marrying up UX, conversion and revenue have become even more important.

Keyword volume will take a back seat and it will be more behavioral analytics – what your customer is doing, how they are doing it, and how we can get them to do more of it quicker – and reverse engineering that to the content you produce.

This trend is already starting to show in SEO job ads, I have started to see several job ads requiring knowledge of python, Google Big Query, Microsoft Power BI.

That is why Microsoft Clarity, a new website analytics tool, is exciting because it offers more of those useful insights for free.

Although I'm not sure if there will be enough uptake to cause Google Analytics to offer a similar service, one can only hope.

Finally, 2020 has seen the championing of equality and inclusivity across the world and yet we still see a lot of websites not adhering to basic accessibility standards.

According to Erudite's accessibility benchmark, there are on average 25 accessibility errors on any webpage. What truly makes for grim reading is that most of these issues are easily fixed.

Thankfully, I have begun to see some chatter and more focused studies on accessibility, and whilst it became compulsory for government websites to adhere to basic WCAG2.0 there is no regulatory standard in the UK.

I see a push in (or at least I hope for) accessibility as a standard website optimization strategy in 2021 – not just because it is trendy but because it is the right thing to do.



ALEXANDER KESLER

CEO, INFUSEmedia

SEO Meets ABM

Search and account-based marketing may not seem like natural partners but effective marketers need to connect them both to revenue generation.

Focus your SEO reporting and analysis on understanding the search intent of your ideal buyer and drive meaningful revenue for your organization.

Analyze the search data and on-site journey of any organically acquired leads - not just the search terms that they used to find your content, but also on-site search and highlighted keywords for all pages that they visited.

Aggregate that data and map it to a content journey.

The keywords within that journey are valuable intelligence for ABM initiatives.

Each query or keyword highlights pain points for your ideal consumer and can inform the type and timing of content that drive target account stakeholders further down the purchase path with every engagement.

JEREMY KNAUFF

Founder, Spartan Media

I think the biggest trend SEO professionals and brands should focus on in 2021 is artificial intelligence.

It already has its tentacles in almost every facet of this industry, from the search algorithms, to the tools we use to analyze the websites, to creating content.

We're currently just scratching the surface in terms of its capabilities today, but if we've learned anything



from Moore's Law, it's that technology will far outpace our expectations, and often far more quickly than we might expect.

To put this all in perspective, it was only about 20 years ago when the internet really started being used commercially, and today, we carry smartphones with faster internet and more powerful processors than anything we had in our desktop computers back then. So imagine the potential impact of AI on SEO.

SEO professionals will have to adapt to find ways to remain relevant as AI-powered tools take over some of the jobs that humans currently perform.

At the same time, brands will have to figure out how to leverage AI or employ SEO professionals who do in order to remain competitive, especially as we drift further from the old "ten blue links" model due to AI-based assistants like Google Home, Alexa, and Siri.

This is the way business has always been -the only difference is that it will move faster and more abruptly.

CINDY KRUM

CEO & Founder, MobileMoxie



I think the biggest new trend will be Fraggles optimization - a.k.a., doing things to help Google identify and rank what they call 'passages' on your site.

SEO pros jumped on this trend quickly, likely because they were already well primed on the concept before it was officially announced.

Fraggles (or passages) are important because they really improve Google's ability to find and lift exactly the information that users are looking for.

But there will likely also be increased controversy because their inclusion in more and more search results will also likely increase the number and impact of zero-click searches.

Passages will also likely drive an expanded ability for Google to re-design certain SERPS - like they did for the COVID search results, results related to the U.S. elections, and other important aspects of the Topic Layer.

At MobileMoxie, we call these “rich SERPS” which, of course, are different from “rich results” - but the idea is similar.

They do a better job of combining and lifting the most important and compelling information, and arranging it together in the search result.

Strong page and schema structure help with Fraggle/passage optimization, but it will likely also be important to have text that is easy for natural language processing to evaluate and has a high readability score.



RON LIEBACK

CEO/Founder, ContentMender

Consistent Long-Form Content in Form of Blogs That Appeal to Google's E-A-T and Emotion

Google has placed more and more emphasis on long-form content since the Hummingbird algorithm hit in late 2013 (Google needed a way to better understand and return the most relevant results to more complex queries as a result of the growth of conversational search (i.e., voice search)).

According to SEMrush's The State of Content Marketing 2019, a report released in 2020 that analyzed over 700,000 blogs, the average long-form content of 3,000+ words get 3X the traffic, 4X the shares, and 3.5X the backlinks than articles with an average length of 900-1200 words.

From experience with clients, 3,000+ may be a bit excessive, though, throughout 2020, I consistently witnessed blogs over 2,000 words dramatically outperform blogs of 1,000 words or less.

Expect this long-form content trend to continue in 2021, and as more and more websites follow this trend, the length will get larger - maybe even toward that 2,500-3,000 mark for a blog to rank well over others.

Websites that also post blogs more consistently will continue to outrank their competitors.

The more value your website can consistently provide, the more search engines - and your readers - will view you or your business as an expert.

Now, especially since you can't request indexing through Google Search Console when you update or

add fresh content, the more fresh content you add to your website, the sooner Google will recognize it. And Google will surely put more emphasis on blogs that appeal to their E-A-T: Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness.

This means not only attributing more respectable sources but also becoming an expert within your respective field by offering consistent educational content and building a personal/company brand authority across many channels that will send strong signals and drive more traffic to your website.

One way to do this is to create blogs that don't just spew out facts and figures and a unique perspective on the subjects but also appeal to emotions.

This brings the human element into the world of blogging, and because Google's main goal is to feed searchers only relevant and quality information, the more human emotion appeal in your content, the stronger your overall rankings.



JENN MATHEWS

SEO Manager, GitHub

SEO professionals need to step back and look at the high-level view of what encompasses SEO.

From E-A-T to neural matching and all of the ranking factors in between, when a site can determine a strategy that includes SEO (or even starts with SEO) and understands why users search and how Google views their site, they will truly benefit.

Understanding That Users Use Search Engines for Research

At the core, Google (and other search engines), is a place to go when people want to answer a question or to learn more about something.

If they are in need of a product and don't know where to find it, they search for it.

If they need someone to clean their gutters and don't have a contact, then search for the closest gutter cleaning company.

If they are traveling somewhere, they search that location for where to stay, things to do, and places to eat.

When we understand the nature of why people search and help them with content that provides the answers they are looking for then our business benefits from it.

Understanding How Google Views Your Website

When optimizing for Google, helping the bot understand what sort of content you provide will help with your optimization strategy.

Consider these few questions:

- What type of site?
- What is the story the site is trying to tell?
- Is the site spammy?
- Does the site put in the extra effort to provide helpful information?

Once you have answers to the questions above, you can organize your site structure and content accordingly.

- Is your site a travel site that provides information on things to do in a specific location?
- Does it include user-generated content?
- Is your site considered a trusted authority on the content you provide?
- Does your team spend the time to provide structured data for additional information?
- Do the meta tags represent what the user is searching?
- Are there no links that redirect or 404?

- Is the content updated frequently or is it timeless and concise in the messaging so it doesn't need to be updated?
- Are you optimizing images, CSS, and JavaScript for faster loading?

All of these factor into how Google views your site and decides on your placement among all of the sites that may, or may not, answer these questions.



JOHN MCALPIN

SEO Director, Cardinal Digital Marketing

SEO Professionals Will Move From Keyword Optimization to Topic Optimization

SEO pros are already adopting a topic-focused approach to content optimization.

In 2021, we'll continue to see smart SEO pros adopt this concept while their competitors focus on over-optimizing keywords.

Semantic Schema Markup Will Become More Popular

Tools like InLinks and Schema App are already deploying semantic schema markup for SEO, but the majority of SEO pros have not adopted this yet.

In 2021, we may see more SEO pros discover this powerful signal-sending tactic and deploy it across their content-rich pages. As more and more information is spread to the SEO community, we'll see other entity research tools pop up to help users generate semantic schema markup.

SEO Pros Will Move From Keyword Research to User Research

The pandemic has shown us that keyword research isn't always helpful when the world is in constant flux.

In order to differentiate ourselves, we'll see SEO pros dialing back keyword research and elevate 1st party user research.

This research unlocks hidden opportunities with service offerings and content ideas that keyword research may not tell us.



JULIA MCCOY

CEO, Express Writers / Educator, Content Hacker

Businesses and marketers looking to grow through SEO should make **value** a heavy focus in 2021.

Unfortunately, as all these new tools, trends, and flashy new platforms emerge, it's easier than ever to lose grasp on the real reason we retain the trust and attention of our audience: by giving them value.

We retain interest and build trust with our readers when our content is the most comprehensive, practical, and useful piece they've interacted with when searching Google.

That kind of content requires focus, time, commitment, investment, to create.

The day we stop investing in giving value is the day we lose the investment of our audience. They'll wonder why they even bothered to click on our blog and give us their time.

So, give them real value. It's a forgotten foundation that only the top marketers in 2021 will stay committed to in order to see continued, massive results from their SEO efforts.



JESSE MCDONALD

Global SEO Strategist | Optimization Lead, IBM

I believe one of the biggest trends in SEO for 2021, especially within in-house roles, is the continued focus on creating more scalable solutions for optimization utilizing automation.

Over the last couple of years, more and more of the industry-leading tools that many SEO practitioners use in their day-to-day work have been releasing automated functionalities to roll out site changes. It's

almost like adding another member of the execution portion of the team.

While automation has been a part of the SEO conversation for several years, I'm seeing it further move up into the forefront which leads me to believe it is going to be a common topic over the next few years.

The implications of this are particularly interesting for in-house roles because it can help implement low-hanging fruit elements without having to justify the importance of the change to move to the top of the sprint schedule. Thus, freeing up the SEO to focus on additional strategic elements for improving site performance.

COREY MORRIS

Chief Strategy Officer, Voltage

The biggest trend I'm seeing across clients, prospects, and those I'm hearing from in the SEO community for 2021 is the need to be proactive.

Maybe this is more of a theme or mindset than a trend - but seeing it as a recognized need and something many are arriving at makes it a trend for me.

This trend means having a roadmap. Having a solid SEO plan and process are definitely not new. However, the days of coasting along or tackling things as they come are gone.



With regular core algorithm updates coming out, the known bigger initiatives from the search engines (site speed, HTTPS, etc.), what we learn from others in the industry, and machine language taking over, we can't wait and react.

If we don't have a plan for schema now, what are we going to do when the new version comes out next year?

The updates and optimizations on the wish list not getting done, constantly playing catch up or "whack a mole", and only reacting will put us behind over time.

Now is the time to get organized, build a plan, develop a process, and get ahead.

I know some of the best SEO teams and firms are falling behind. In some cases, they haven't adapted into collaborative models with UX, dev, IT, and content teams and started getting out of the silo too late.

The trend is showing that getting behind and trying to catch up is hard to do. It is time to get ahead and stay there.



BRITNEY MULLER

SEO Consultant & Data Science Student,
Britney Muller LLC

Data Science + Automation

Google continues to invest heavily in deep learning (machine learning) to make search results better every day.

This means SEO pros will need to transition away from traditional best practices that will hold less

value as the algorithms get stronger (like trying to write meta descriptions for every single page) and focus more on better understanding what's happening within the SERPs/searcher intent.

Google houses the world's information and they know what the majority of people searching 'x' seek.

Paying closer attention to search results will give SEO pros a leg up in creating competitive content in the way that searchers desire to consume it.

Applying statistical data science fundamentals to better understand a website's data will also help SEO pros make more strategic decisions and rely less on fuzzy logic.

BROCK MURRAY

Co-founder, seoplus+



The biggest trend that smart SEO professionals should focus on in 2021 for greater SEO success is mobile device user experience (UX).

The best thing you can do when it comes to mobile UX is to think about the user first. Simplicity in your design is the key. Also, be sure to personalize the website content and elements based on your user.

Making your content more relevant and customized to the user will help increase engagement and lead to higher conversion rates.

As always, don't forget about the basics. Be sure to optimize overall site performance (think speed, accessibility, usability, and security.)

Every SEO professional should also have a strong knowledge of Core Web Vitals including LCP, FID, and CLS.

Google has announced in 2021 they will start integrating these metrics into their user experience rating signals.

Google has some amazing resources available including PageSpeed Insights and Core Web Vitals report in Google Search Console.

JESS PECK

Senior Analytics Consultant, CVS

Accessibility will be something smart SEO professionals can focus on in 2021 for better SEO success.

Not just accessibility in the “a11y” sense, but making sure your UX is the most accessible for all types of machines and people – from screenreaders to mobile devices, on slow networks, or even offline with Progressive Web Apps.

Make sure that Google can access the best content on your site from everywhere – and make sure your



site has a measurably better user interface than your competitors.

Measure, test, and use machine learning to look at your content – this will give you a huge leg up.

Google's focus on Core Web Vitals shows that they're starting to measure how annoying sites can be, so give your users a pleasant experience and Google will do the same for you.

Images are a part of accessibility as well. Use images as a part of your website experience, and make sure they enhance your content-- for both sighted and blind users.

CHUCK PRICE

Founder, Measurable SEO



At the risk of sounding boring, quality content and backlinks will still drive SERPs in 2021.

Google will continue to tweak its algorithms to surface content that best matches searcher intent and conforms to E-A-T.

By releasing its quality rater guidelines back in 2013, the question of what constituted “quality” was no longer a mystery. This guide is big – but worth the read.

Ever-evolving AI like RankBrain and BERT will continue to play a larger role in deciding what appears at the top of search results. Google's ability to pick out "passages" for ranking is just the latest example.

On the link front, I expect further discounting by Google of low-quality and spammy links. I'm still amazed at how well PBNs are performing – especially those that are easy to pick out with public tools.

If my fate was tied to guest posts and PBNs, I would be very nervous. "Real" links from high trust / high authority websites will be more valuable than ever.

NIK RANGER

SEO Specialist



Thinking about what could be the potential hallmarks for 2021, I find myself leaning on the advice Cindy Krum once said to me, “If you want to know what’s ahead, pay attention to what’s happened in the past, the clues lie in the patterns.”

Major Disruptions in the Market

If 2020 was the earthquake, 2021 will be the aftershock.

Never before in search history have we seen search intent change from week to week with consumer behavior fundamentally disrupted.

Businesses that have bared the brunt will find themselves in a different market, with a shift of competitors dropping out with new opportunists ready to take their place.

SEO will become even more of an important industry as more business owners realize.

With customers emptying the streets and into online shopping carts, site migrations will dominate early 2021 (as it already has tailing 2020) and new disruptors will enter the market to take advantage of gaps.

As such, I think that businesses will take advantage of organic shopping listings, with retailers pushing more of their products onto the SERPs.

While this, like all SERP features, offers the allure of greater SERP real estate, it could go similar to that of news carousels and publishers and I anticipate that many will come to wonder whether it's worth sacrificing organic traffic for sales conducted on the SERP.

Evolution of Indexation

Indexation occurs when search engines visit, analyze, and add pages to their database.

You can request pages to be indexed or through the discovery of search engine bots through links to those pages.

So it's interesting that in 2020, Google has had considerable issues with indexing pages, which could suggest they're testing a new method.

This theory comes in the wake of new research and features done to potentially scale PageRank to the top 100 billion pages (rather than consider the top 4 billion).

Now I know Google officially removed support for Toolbar PageRank in 2016, but I tend to agree with Tim Soulo, it's not dead and it still matters.

The research indicates potentially how they could be executing PageRank at scale, which requires more efficient graph processing systems.

The way it's explained to work is that at each iteration, it collects all local values from its sources from the page and its relative pages, aggregates

those values, and distributes the sum to its peers and itself. (It doesn't explain what the values, sources, or peers pertain to, so this is subject to interpretation.)

I am no search engineer, but I do think we're going to have an interesting 2021 whereby we may see this fully realized with a change in indexing and how links and clickthrough data may be considered.

The Rise in Personalized Knowledge Graphs & E-A-T

Most commonly in 2019-2020, the presence in knowledge graphs has significantly increased from organizing structured information about entities - usually taken to be anyone or anything considered to be globally important:

- Brands.
- Places.
- People (i.e., politicians, celebrities, athletes, and others of note).

Google has access to so much information about you, your search history, emails, social media, and other types of user information that they have the ability and means to scale personalized knowledge graphs.

From the research, and from following Bill Slawski on this topic, it seems that it is well within reason that in 2021 we may start to see personalized knowledge graphs from users that aren't globally important - everyone else.

Hence, qualifying the relationships between the legitimacy of author credentials to content, in addition to the way Google perceives value from content, will be ever more important.

This I interpret to have greater influence in the way Google is able to determine E-A-T.

LILY RAY

SEO Director, Path Interactive



In 2021, a smart SEO strategy will require a combination of focusing on technical SEO, usability (especially on mobile), content quality, and E-A-T.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to see solid, sustained SEO growth by using hacks or other short-term growth strategies that could land you in trouble with Google.

Google is evaluating websites and pages based on how much they (and users) can trust those pages, the extent to which the pages demonstrate authoritativeness and expertise, and the quality and relevance of the content to the user.

Given Google's recent innovations in the AI space, these things can't be faked or manipulated.

Google is also doubling down on mobile usability and interactivity with the launch of Core Web Vitals and "mobile-only indexing."

It will also be important to focus on some of Google's new products like Discover and Web Stories, which have the potential to send huge amounts of traffic if properly executed and optimized for.

Above all, a great SEO strategy should start by putting yourself in the user's shoes and asking yourself if the content is truly valuable, the brand is trustworthy, and the website is easy to use (especially on mobile).



PATRICK REINHART

VP for Digital Strategies, Conductor

It's Going to Be About Your Entire Digital Presence, Not Just Your Organic Presence

Google wants to be the destination, so how do you create content that brings the same amount of value when Google displays in the SERP as if a user comes to your site?

Content folks have to think this way now as Google continues to appropriate more of their data and

displays it to the world in a snippet.

The other part of this is that it's not just about your website it's about your entire presence and how Google features them.

Do you take care of your YouTube channel regularly?

Do you take care of your images properly?

These days it's not just about your website, it's about all of your owned properties and how they interact with one another on the SERP.

If they all come together through various snippets, does it tell a good story about your brand?

SEO & Content Will Get More Spotlight & Scrutiny From the Executive Level

One thing COVID-19 did was place a spotlight right onto SEO professionals from the C-suite.

- More and more executives are interested in organic now and want to know;

- What's going on with it.
- Who is handling it.
- How they are handling it.
- Most importantly, how much it's contributing to the bottom line.

Up until this point, SEO has been a nice-to-have but not a necessity.

Moving forward we are going to see this switch big time as more eyeballs will be directed at in-house SEO pros, leading to a massive spike in accountability in companies that traditionally have largely ignored the channel.

Time to Consolidate

The SEO / Content tech world is ripe for consolidation and I think you are going to start to see that within the next 12-18 months.

Point solutions aren't enough because they don't allow teams to collaborate.

Enterprise software is too much for smaller operations and even sometimes too much for large

organizations because their programs aren't mature enough to utilize them properly.

Companies need options at both ends of the spectrum and everything in between so they can start where their maturity allows them to and grow from there.

Everyone starts with point solutions and graduates to enterprise platforms so I wouldn't be surprised to see private equity firms come in and consolidate a large player with several small players to meet the needs of the masses.



JEFF RIDDALL

VP Product and Customer Success, Mintent

Focus on creating engaging, high-quality, topically-oriented content that comprehensively answers all of the questions their target audience is asking about their products or services.

With BERT being used to analyze an ever-increasing percentage of search queries on Google and Microsoft Bing, the search engines are becoming even better at determining the context/intent of those queries in order to deliver optimal results.

In the past, SEO pros may have tried to actively optimize for both people and the search engines separately. Now, the line between the two has drastically narrowed. That said, making sure your site is properly structured for the crawlers is still important.

The sophistication of AI, machine learning, and natural language processing have the engines consuming and analyzing content the same way people do.

With this in mind, ensuring your content/website performs well from a mobile perspective should also continue to be a focal point as this is where the majority of searches are being conducted.

What type of experience do your users have when accessing your content and trying to find answers on their mobile devices?

If your answer to this question is obvious, you'll certainly know where to begin.



ADAM RIEMER

President at Adam Riemer Marketing

User Experience

With cumulative layout shift (CLS) becoming an official ranking factor, and people being spend-conscious because of the 2020 depression, brands are going to need to forget about themselves and cater to their visitors.

This includes:

- Copy that addresses the visitor's needs and concerns and not copy that talks about your products, your company, or why your product is good.
- A quick website that renders and stabilizes fast.
- Not making people work to find your content or to spend money with you. No forced pop-ups, registrations, etc...

Schema, Structure & Code Will Be Big

If you haven't seen it already in your own results, or from listening to the Google webmaster team talk, schema is not going anywhere and the library is growing.

Learn to use it correctly and fix it when it's broken or you'll watch as your competitors outgrow you.

Develop Useful Content & Go Back to the Basics

Quit the link schemes like private blogger networks and scholarships. They are a churn-and-burn method.

I think this year, we're going to see more sites that use these cheap tricks get wiped.

Instead, create content that explains hard concepts and is topically relevant for your audience.

Then do PR work to build exposure and backlinks through natural sourcing and coverage. The added benefit here is you get traffic that can also become a new customer funnel.



ALEXIS SANDERS

SEO Associate Director, Merkle

2020 promised to be a whirlwind year and (boy oh boy) did it deliver.

Coronavirus, the reminder of racial injustice with the murder of George Floyd, and the U.S. elections have affected everyone.

Digital and search, in particular, have been pivoting with our new reality.

There are three overarching shifts, which have come as a result:

Forced Acceleration of Digital Purchasing (& the Potential to Change Our Behavior)

As we've all been stuck at home, avoiding humans, we've been all forced to shift behaviors online.

Combatting Inaccurate Information (Specifically Related to Coronavirus)

A prime issue with search engines is their vulnerability to unintentionally guiding individuals to factually inaccurate information online.

This presents serious issues when users believe search engines to be a point of truth.

The SERP updates to enforce accurate information and warnings related to coronavirus were strikingly exciting.

The step to provide official information directly to a searcher from an authoritative source adds a layer of human intervention in the SERP.

Pressure Due to Uncertainty

Many industries were disproportionately affected by Coronavirus.

This has caused lay-offs, furloughs, and the demand for more stringent business practices.

Pressure on the business channels down to pressure on its employees and vendors. This provides the duality of opportunity and burnout.

Here are some changes that promise to be prevalent in the coming year.

Google

Impending Updates Planned for 2021

Google has mentioned a series of updates that are aimed for 2021. These changes include:

- Full transfer to a mobile-first index.
- Web core vitals being incorporated into ranking factors.
- The deprecation of support for data-vocabulary.org.

These updates are not altogether shocking. They are in line with Google's commitments to:

- Align with user behaviors (which is predominately mobile).
- Reward excellence in site speed.
- Support the Schema.org initiative.

Machine Learning Is the Hammer of Silicon Valley (and Every Problem Is a Nail)

With its prevalence, we can continue to expect more precision with answers across search results.

Variety of Sources per Answer in the Featured Snippets

This is speculative, but it makes sense to include the best sources of information, which come from unique sources. Through indexing passages, it presents Google with the unique opportunity to include a variety of sources and information within featured snippets and rich results.

SEO Industry

Increased Pressure to Provide ROI Models & Forecasting

As pressures on clients increase to either rebound or “catch the wave”, this pressure will be translated towards the industry.

This should lead to more conversations about ROI in SEO, case study sharing, and forecasting techniques to support analysis.

Prioritization of Tools That Support Unit Testing & Automation (Particularly Within Development Environments)

With tighter budgets and strapped teams, automated testing solutions have a unique opportunity to ensure nothing falls through the cracks.

Increased Usage of Machine Learning Models to Support Writers via Content Generation

GPT-3 offered strikingly strong syntactically correct English.

Despite its shortcomings with semantics, it offers high potential to support copywriters with early drafts and help push past writer's block.

Client-Side

As SEO Initiatives Cross Into Customer Experience, Cross-Functional Teams Will Become More Normalized

As a need arises for cross-functional integration with UX, copywriters, and development, we should see an increase in smaller, more agile teams focused on a common goal.

As Team Members Shift in & Out of an Organization, Training New Members Is Going to Be Vital to Overarching Success

Training offers to change behaviors in small ways that have the potential for a large impact.

To compensate for turnovers and shifting staff, behavior-oriented training is going to become critical.

Opportunity to Reflect and Dive Into Data

2020 was an unconventional year. This presents a unique opportunity to dive in and research shifts in behavior.

It provides us with an opportunity to reflect on how we responded, how our competitors responded, and how to create an infrastructure to improve during a future unprecedented event or time.

Analytics Are Going to Be Messy

For most brands, year over year comparisons and seasonality are not going to provide meaningful insights.

Companies are going to have to become innovative in their approach to analyzing their site's behavior and establish what constitutes the new normal.

FAQs & FAQ Optimizations Will Continue to Be in Favor

With FAQPage Schema.org markup offering potential to expand listing size, while also providing meaningful answers to users in the prioritized fashion.

Agency-Side

In-House Agency Staffing Augmentation Models

The common criticism of agencies is that they lack the ability to execute and coordinate projects internally.

An appealing solution is to have agency members function as on-site team members in the client organization.

This provides additional team members, the ability to execute within an organization, and the ability to size up and down quickly for clients.

Demand for ROI Metrics, Case Studies & Proof of Efficacy

With increased pressure on the business, data follows as a natural result.

Shorter-Term, Goal-Oriented Contracts

A test-run model will be appealing to clients who are functioning in an increasingly risky business environment.

JES SCHOLZ

International Digital Director, Ringier



For years, the SEO community has been talking about the shift from strings to things.

Yet, for many, it hasn't changed their tactical focus from ranking webpages in universal search.

But Google has been making significant changes in their pursuit of providing journeys rather than answers. The most influential application of this ethos is Google Discover.

Discover:

- Occupies the mobile homepage of Google on Android devices.
- Featured in the Google App.
- Is there whenever you open a new tab on mobile in Chrome.
- Is accessible when you swipe right on a Pixel phone.

This personalized feed aims to proactively match content to a user based on their interests and allows you to reach and influence people **before** they search.

This platform is likely already contributing significant sessions, but as it's tracked by default under *google / organic* along with universal search, it doesn't get the recognition it deserves.

Google Search Console gives an idea of its potential, but from testing across multiple brands and markets, I've consistently seen GSC underreport the impact of Google Discover.

So to understand the true contribution, you'll need to analyze the referrer details of your Google organic traffic.

Since there are no keywords at play, the only way to optimize for Google Discover visibility is by establishing your entity in the knowledge graph and honing how it is connected within the topic layer.

The first step every SEO pro should take is to track their brand's result score in the knowledge graph API.

Then, work on activities outside of having great content to drive their presence in the knowledge graph such as:

- Ensuring a complete and correct organization markup.
- Establishing a presence in relevant knowledge bases such as Wikidata.
- Claiming your knowledge panel to use the posts by Google feature.
- For physical businesses, setting up your Google My Business profile.

JOHN SHEHATA



VP, Global Audience Development Strategy,
Condé Nast / Founder, NewzDash.com

There are many important trends for 2021.

NLP, Entities & Topics

Last year Google added a Topic Layer to its knowledge graph, which is built by analyzing all the content that exists on the web for a given topic and developing thousands of subtopics.

For these subtopics, we can identify the most

relevant articles and videos – the ones that have shown themselves to be evergreen and continually useful, as well as fresh content on the topic.

Google can now tailor its SERPs to match intent profiles for users searching for specific topics.

A few months prior, Google made the biggest change to its search algorithm which is a neural network-based technique for natural language processing (NLP) pre-training BERT.

NLP is composed of entities, categories, sentiment, etc.

Entities are words or phrases that can be classified and categorized (i.e., a person, event, organization, book, etc.)

BERT, NLP, and topics impact SEO significantly, they change the way Google understands queries as a whole.

SEO pros must understand the complex concepts behind topics (entities, subtopics) and NLP and how entities play a role in Google Rankings.

This is not new, many savvy SEO pros have been already taking this approach for a few years now.

Forget about TF*IDF, keyword frequency, and start focusing on entities, topics and start utilizing Google Natural Language (and/or other similar SEO tools that provide NLP analysis).

Search engines are getting smarter by the day and they have a good understanding of queries to an extent beyond keywords used in such queries.

Don't get me wrong, good keyword research is still needed but it comes secondary to understanding the topics/entities related to the query and the intent behind the query.

SEO Stands for 'Search Everything Optimization'

As rumors boil up with regard to Apple coming up with their own search engine and the increased importance of amazon optimization, SEO pros have a great opportunity to expand beyond Google into other search engines.

Many years ago, SEO pros had multiple organic

search traffic sources (Google, AOL, Explorer, etc.). Now Google generates over 96% of organic search traffic which leaves sites vulnerable to algorithm changes.

We have seen many businesses and brands go under following core updates or changes to SERPs.

If Apple comes up with their own search engine, it would be good news for all SEO pros as we will finally have a semi-diverse portfolio of organic search traffic where Google SEO will not be the only means to get organic traffic.

The ability to understand new platforms and how to optimize for them will give SEO pros a clear advantage and create a new breed of SEO pros who are specialized in such optimization.

Google Discover

Google Discover is becoming a major traffic driver for many publishers.

Some publishers in Europe have 80% of their clicks reported in Google Search Console coming from Google Discover.

While optimizing and using large high-resolution

images is the main recommendation from Google, E-A-T, and entities/topics play a major role in understanding and optimizing for Google Discover.

AMP No Longer a Prerequisite for Top Stories (News Box)

So far 90% of Top Stories are AMP stories. Google plans to remove AMP as a prerequisite to be eligible to rank in Top Stories in 2021.

This will open the door to publishers who don't have AMP on their sites or want to get rid of AMP altogether.

Many publishers can't wait to get rid of AMP as it doesn't convert as well as mobile and it has its own development challenges.

My advice is to wait until the change is in and test disabling AMP for a small set of pages or a section and see if non-AMP traffic rise to the level of AMP traffic.

Remember, Core Web Vitals will play a role in comparing AMP to non-AMP content.

Not sure how strong of a ranking factor it will be in Top Stories compared to freshness, publisher authority, and other Google News and Top Stories Ranking Factors.

Some other topics worth mentioning (not news to anyone, but just a friendly reminder):

- Structured data.
- Core Web Vitals.
- E-A-T.

CYRUS SHEPARD

SEO Strategist, Moz

More Competition for Small Businesses

Google's initiatives around Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-A-T) over the past couple of years have made it dramatically more challenging for smaller and less-established sites/businesses to rank for entire categories of competitive queries.

Results have become dominated by large, established brands.



As Google continues to fight disinformation and invest in trust, we may see more initiatives like this in 2021 that reward larger players.

Then again, if smaller players want visibility, they can always invest in Google Ads.

SEO Opportunities Spurred by Pandemic Exist - If You Look for Them

The pandemic has had a profound impact on SEO budgets, at least in some sectors.

Agencies that worked with travel and hospitality clients have seen the biggest impact, while other verticals have seen no downturn at all, or even growing business. (Hello, Amazon merchants!)

The work-from-home movement has opened up incredible opportunities in niche markets, i.e. exercise equipment, gardening, and streaming services.

And in general, people are spending more time online. So opportunities exist - if you look for them.

Newer SEO Pros to Focus on SERP Optimization

One area newer SEO pros should focus on is SERP optimization.

That is, optimizing the way your results “look” in search engine results pages (SERPs.)

This includes elements such as title tags, meta descriptions, breadcrumbs, and featured snippets. These are relatively easy elements to manipulate, and they help bridge the gap between traditional marketing and technical SEO.



IZZI SMITH

Technical SEO Analyst, Ryte

Earning (Back) the Trust of Your Customers

Something I really encourage companies to improve in 2021 is providing stronger customer and self-support services online.

Help centers that are optimized for actual humans and their needs will not only reduce business costs, but can also improve the trust of your customers and reduce any friction.

And with the year we've had, this is more important than ever.

Whereas some issues can only be handled with real conversation, there are many ways SEO pros and content creators can assist with digital customer service topics.

First of all, establish a process with sales and support staff to ensure that you are aware of important and incoming questions or requests that can be resolved with help articles.

Dig into your Google Search Console keyword data with common question modifiers to find relevant, existing topics that should be catered to.

Make sure these are answered concisely and factually and published to a related FAQ topic page.

Help centers and FAQ sections should be created with UX at the very forefront, and should not be a single, unmaneuverable page of questions.

If there is the possibility to provide background information on this specific question, build an optimized resource that gives them all the answers

they need, necessary functionality, and relevant additional information.

When it comes to understanding how your pages are performing, start by tracking user engagement metrics and qualitative feedback surveys that will help you discover any missing details and keep improving.

This maybe isn't as glamorous as a juicy content marketing campaign, but it's incredibly necessary to keep proving to searchers and search engines that you're a brand that can be trusted.



ALEYDA SOLIS

International SEO Consultant & Founder, Orinti

Search Intent Analysis and Understanding

In the last few years, we've seen how Google has become more dynamic and sophisticated in the way the show and blend results to better connect with users intent.

Integrating intent analysis in keyword research has become a must now to identify:

- The type, structure, and format of the content we should create and optimize.
- The search features to leverage.
- Which are the queries that are directly satisfied directly in the SERPs and which we should push forward to target to bring visits from.

Search Features Optimization

With more and more search features being included in search results, search features optimization should become now a key area to help us:

Establish our content optimization efforts (e.g., if we should also leverage video or images).

Utilize structured data (e.g., for carousels or snippets inclusions).

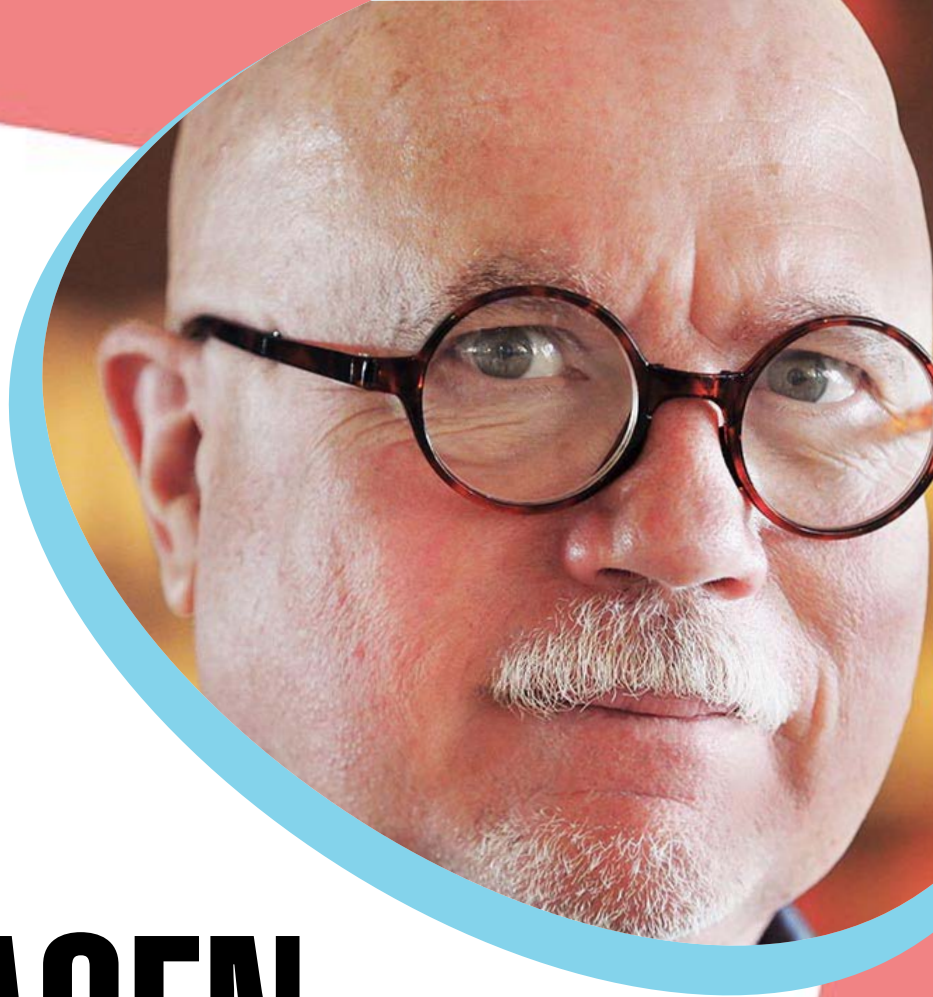
Leverage further Google integrations (e.g., Merchant Center for ecommerce sites or Jobs feeds).

Video Search

Video carousels are included more and more and beyond purely informational queries of certain sectors.

Most of these are being pulled from YouTube, the second most used search engine.

I expect more SEO pros and marketers will become more aware of this and better leverage video content as part of its content optimization efforts.



MARK TRAPHAGEN

Vice President of Product Marketing and Training,
seoClarity

2021 should be your year to build scalability into your SEO.

Sites today are many magnitudes larger and more complex than they were when most of us started.

Building scalable processes and workflows is not only smart, it's now essential if you're going to get ahead of your competition.

There are several ways to build SEO scalability.

First, list all the tasks, processes, and workflows you do on a regular basis. Determine which steps in those could be automated or better handled by use of a tool.

Second, set up an alert system that monitors significant changes to things like rankings of your important keywords, flip-flopping URLs ranking for the same keyword (URL cannibalization), page content changes, URL changes, etc.

Third, establish SoPs (Standard Operating Procedures) for any regular tasks you can't automate so your team isn't wasting time reinventing how to do them each time they need to be performed.



STEVEN VAN VESSUM

VP of Community, ContentKing

In 2021, we're going to see Google focusing more than ever on satisfying user intent.

Their late-October announcement that they would start ranking passages points strongly in this direction, as does the fact that BERT is now used in nearly all queries.

Google will get a lot better at understanding what content its users are after, which is going to lead to quite a shift in the SERPs.

Hopefully, this will lead to lower-authority sites with high-quality content being able to compete with higher-authority sites that easily outrank that high-quality content despite publishing run-of-the-mill content.

So, how does this change the way we do SEO?

It makes it even more important to focus on learning what a user is looking for. In terms of the actual answer – but also their preferred content type (e.g., video, podcasts, or PDF).

Because figuring out queries' user intent by hand is very time-consuming, keyword research tools that let us quickly do this at scale will overtake those that do not.



MINDY WEINSTEIN

Founder & CEO, Market MindShift

When I look ahead to 2021, there are two big trends I anticipate:

- A greater emphasis on search intent.
- More targeted content that answers searchers' questions.

Search intent is nothing new and is something the search engines have tried to understand for a long time.

For example, when someone uses a certain query, do they want to know something, do something, buy something or go somewhere?

From an SEO perspective, when we are trying to rank for a keyword, we have to ask ourselves if the content we are optimizing matches the intent of that query.

From what I see, this has been gaining in importance in SEO and will continue into 2021.

Optimized content that answers searchers' questions is another growing trend, especially with the prevalence of mobile and voice search.

People are getting answers directly from SERPs and are using long-tail keywords often in the form of questions.

We have to know what people are asking, so we can not only optimize for that question, but also give a thorough answer.

Not only does that give us an opportunity to show up in zero-click searches, but it also provides a sense of credibility in the eyes of the searchers.