

CONTENT FOR SEO



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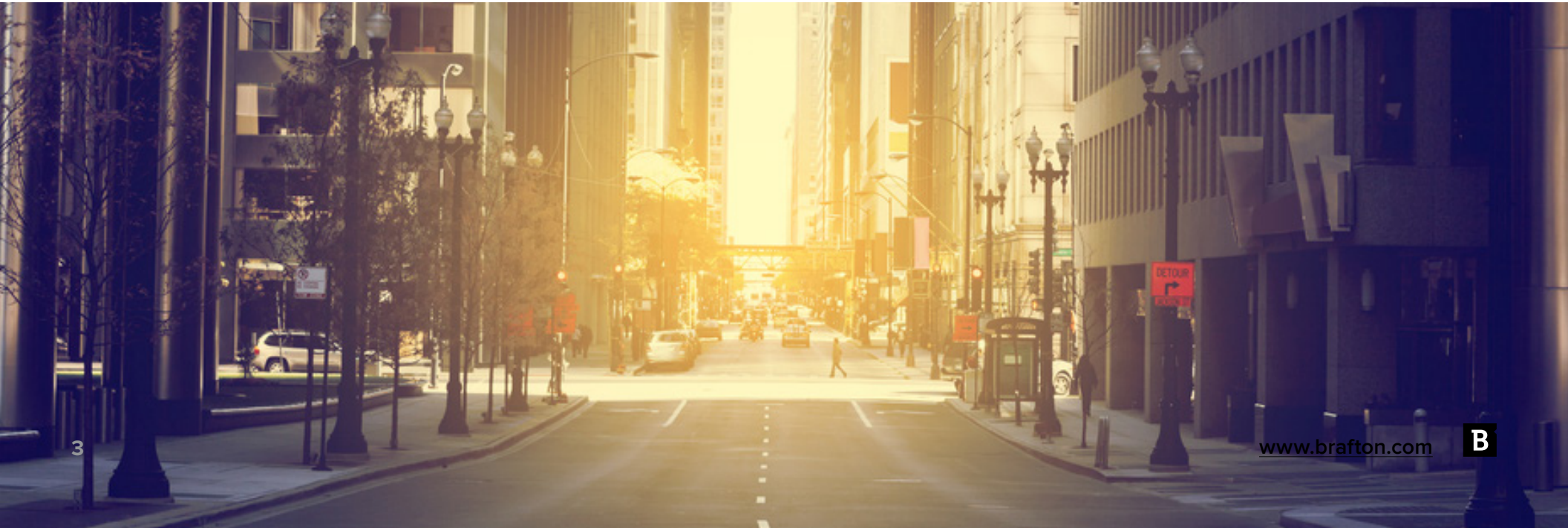
Introduction

WE'VE PUT TOGETHER A CITY MAP TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH THIS LANDSCAPE:

- > What content for SEO looks like and how it works
- > How to measure SEO results from content marketing
- > Which types of content work best to achieve SEO objectives
- > What's new in the ever-changing SEO landscape

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION USED TO BE ABOUT GETTING FROM POINT A TO POINT B. The idea was that prospects would search using keywords, click brands' optimized articles containing those same terms and eventually convert. Now, every search is a personalized journey that considers more than keyword matches.

Even though the web has changed dramatically, content for SEO still casts a net that pulls prospects into the sales funnel. The more interesting and relevant the content is in the first place, the better chance brands have at converting leads and driving revenue.



CHAPTER ONE:

What is content for SEO and how will I know when I see it?



How do I assess existing content to see if I'm angling for a good spot in search?

KEYWORDS: They aren't the driving force of SEO anymore, but keywords still help readers and search engines understand what content is about - particularly when they're included in headlines and anchor text.

INBOUND LINKS: The more links a web page has coming from other websites and social media, the better it does in search results because Google perceives it has more value and relevance.

BOUNCE RATE: The lower the bounce rate the better, because it suggests the searchers who landed on the page found a relevant answer and were enticed to read more content. (Conversely, a high bounce rate means they didn't find the right answer, or did and left without learning more.)

DWELL TIME: The longer searchers stay on a page, the stronger an indicator that the site is publishing content that visitors want to stick around and read.

CLICK THROUGH RATE: A site's click-through rate indicates how likely people are to click on links and consume other content, meaning the strategy attracted the right kind of crowd that wants the information.

In **SEARCH CITY**, content never stops



Your content has to reach two audiences, people and web crawlers. Because these two are constantly moving, so are the factors that affect how content should be optimized.

A successful search strategy looks different for every business, depending on its goals and unique audience, but there are some basic points any content marketing campaign should include.



This chapter highlights some core characteristics of the content that performs well in search across our 700+ clients' sites.





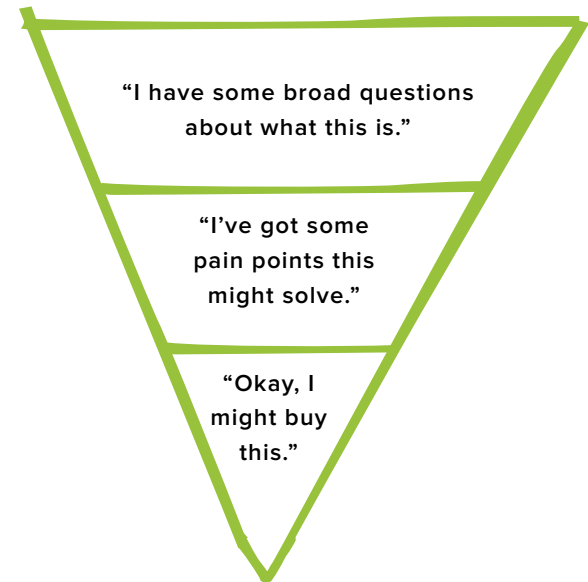
It answers **B R O A D** questions

Customers in your sales funnel, searching the web

The internet is a vast store of information, and **users want fast answers** to their questions - often before they know exactly what they need to find out. This is the stage where they're searching for "Home improvement ideas," or "Cloud solutions for small businesses." The information they learn at this stage will inform their future searches, once they've narrowed down the field and become more precise with their queries.

However, that doesn't mean regurgitating the same tired points that can be found elsewhere on the web.

Anyone can go on Wikipedia or a million news sites to find the status quo opinion on a topic. Be original by tailoring content for your audience.





It addresses specific PAIN POINTS

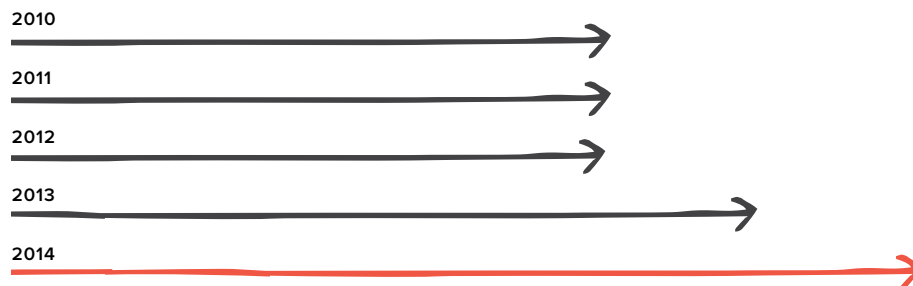
Besides users who are looking for broad information, some searchers have particular questions. Content that plainly answers specific questions will gain tremendous visibility for question-based searches.

People don't have time for extra steps. There's always somewhere to be - online and offline.



One way to capture visitors who are looking for specific, in-depth content is to make resources more sophisticated and actionable.

How-to queries increased 37% from 2012-2014



SUCCESS STORY:

- INDUSTRY:** Software
- GOAL:** Increase the complexity of the blog
- STRATEGY:** Write more how-to guides
- RESULTS:** Traffic to the site became more valuable, as the average visitor viewed four more images and spend half a minute longer to read additional content.



Having a distinct opinion or viewpoint is great, but if it's about a computer that came out in 2009 - or even 2013 - it doesn't give readers anything useful. Depending on the industry, information from as little as six days ago might be considered out of date. The more recent and relevant the content is, the better.



Source: Hubspot

Google scores pages based on freshness, including the following factors:

- When a page was first crawled
- How long ago a page's content was updated
- The frequency of page updates
- The number of inbound links pointing at recent updates
- Whether the sites linking to a page were recently updated

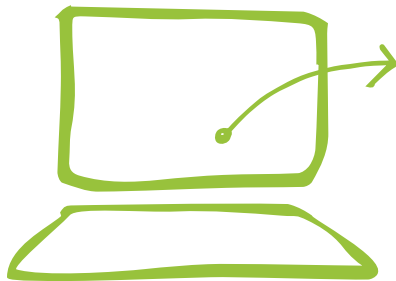
 **SUCCESS STORY:**

- **INDUSTRY:** Engineering
- **GOAL:** Drive more traffic to the site by positioning the company as a relevant resource in the field.
- **STRATEGY:** Publish daily blog content
- **RESULTS:** Gained attention from top industry members, which provided the company with huge traffic numbers and links - a big SEO win.

Google doesn't explicitly say how much a freshness score impacts search visibility, but it is one of many components in its algorithms.



Content should include keywords without revolving around them.



It should take **KEYWORDS** into account

Traditional SEO meant optimizing for keywords to dominate top spots in results pages. That's no longer the best way drive SEO traffic, but it doesn't mean keywords are irrelevant. Include keywords, but understand that Google searches don't revolve around rigid search terms - they're about relevance and context.

Keywords are the digital signposts that help people navigate - but they aren't the destinations.

Some good guidelines for keyword usage include:

- One keyword in the headline and metadescription, each
- One keyword in the first sentence of an article
- One keyword every 100-200 words
- Only use keywords when it's natural (Keyword stuffing is a clear signal of spam)

SUCCESS STORY:

- **INDUSTRY:** Fitness
- **GOAL:** Better targeted content for more engaged search traffic
- **STRATEGY:** Analyze top web pages to optimize keyword strategy
- **RESULTS:** Increased the number of visitors who actually read content and the average reader stayed on the page for 4.5 minutes.



It should be **OPTIMIZED** to stop search traffic

Content that contains the right subject, information and keywords will show up in search results - but will users actually click on it? The entries themselves have to be optimized with attention-grabbing (and relevant) headlines that users actually want to click.

It takes a lot to get people to slow down online. It's even harder to convince them to click.

Content should also include brief but information-rich meta descriptions that tell users - and Google's web crawlers - exactly what they'll find on a page.



Optimize content to make users pay attention and click.



Content for SEO in 2014

Semantic search: In order to give users the best search results, Google has developed sophisticated algorithms that don't just match keywords in queries with content. Instead, the search engine looks at concepts and entities to provide richer results - like maps, videos and images - for more relevant searches. The semantic web is already here, but it increases in complexity every day. **Check out our eBook for more details.**

Schema markup: Google's semantic search algorithms find relevant answers to specific questions faster when sites use Schema markup. While 36 percent of all search results draw from this code, only 0.3 percent of sites use it.

No more Authorship, and AuthorRank: It's official. Google is no longer rewarding Authorship - an optimization strategy that gave writers more visibility. However, AuthorRank could still be at play. It's a technology that could rank content based on authors' credibility and popularity.



What route will help you get marketing wins?

BROAD questions

POLL YOUR CUSTOMERS:

Knowing what prospects read is as easy as asking existing clients. Their insights can help build better content strategies immediately.

PAIN POINTS

SOURCE INTERNALLY:

Staff members who work closely with clients will have a better understanding of the questions they ask and the pain points they face.



SCHEDULE CONTENT:

Regular content requires discipline and planning, and a content calendar can help you produce relevant posts weeks and months in advance. The more frequently a site posts fresh content, the more likely it is to see traffic increases.

KEYWORDS

KEYWORD RESEARCH:

Google doesn't give out keyword search data anymore, but some test queries will show what kinds of content ranks for targeted search terms. See what kind of content you need to be competitive and create focused pieces around these core terms.

CHAPTER TWO:

What does quality content look like?

THERE ARE AS MANY KINDS OF CONTENT AS THERE ARE PEOPLE CRUISING THE WEB. Web content used to mean text with images peppered in. Brands can still reach prospects with written words optimized for search, but the chances of finding the right audience and getting content in front of them increases exponentially with diverse media.



WRITING.

Blog Posts: WordPress estimates 409 million people read 14.4 billion blog pages each month - just on that platform alone, and 45 percent read blogs when they're researching purchases. Blog content can range from updates about a business' inner workings, commentary on recent industry developments or in-depth think pieces about trends affecting a brand.

News Content: According to the Pew Research Center, at least half of Americans get news from websites and other digital sources. Today's content for SEO should use news as substantive explorations of current issues when they're relevant to brands' audiences.

Website Copy: Pew also explored specific research topics and found that, for example, 93 million Americans used search engines to research health issues and 51 percent turned to information on retail sites before buying. Website copy is what users see when they arrive on pages, but it might also take the form of user resources, in-depth guides or information directories that answer detailed questions.



SUCCESS STORY:

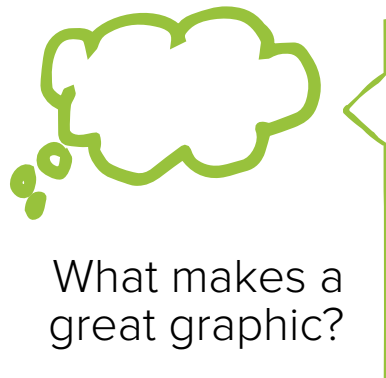
- **INDUSTRY:** Software distribution
- **GOAL:** Reach new audiences
- **STRATEGY:** Write and publish daily blog posts
- **RESULTS:** 101 percent increase in traffic compared to the previous year, and 45 percent of the organic traffic from Google was composed of new users who hadn't ever visited before.

GRAPHICS

Images convey information quickly and easily, and they're immensely shareable. A picture or infographic is a great way to show up in Google Image search results, which are increasingly prominent in rich results pages. Graphic content for SEO includes:

Infographics: These detailed and highly shareable resources can communicate complex ideas quickly and in a visually appealing manner. Studies show that 65 percent of people are visual learners and prefer to consume information graphically.

Info Images: A single statistic or value proposition can be easily illustrated to give it visual flair, making it stand out in search. This kind of media is also extremely shareable and acts as link bait for a big SEO boost.



DATA VISUALIZATION: Some of the information that businesses want to share and audiences want to read is complicated - particularly in B2B industries. Sometimes, infographics are the perfect blend of visual diagrams and written content.

ENTERTAINING: Infographics don't just teach - they encourage readers (who are 80 percent more willing to read when they see visuals) to dig deeper into other formats. Use characters and visual themes to engage viewers.

EASY TO SHARE: Infographics are particularly shareable on social media. And social shares will actually boost SEO performance.

STAND OUT IN SEARCH: Visual media leaps out at users and can increase click-through rates substantially. Give the graphic a search-friendly title.



VIDEO

Relevant videos now show up prominently in Google SERPs. If a video’s headline and description answer a query, there’s a strong chance it will show up, and how-to videos are taking top spots.

Video marketing doesn’t just capture traffic from search - it generates visits from YouTube, which is also a high-volume search engine and social network. Video viewers are extremely active and engaged, so traffic from those users can provide better ROI than regular web visitors.



What video format best supports your goals?

STUDIO BLOGS:

Industry updates, breaking news and recent developments for fast appeal to fresh searches.

HOW-TO GUIDES:

Videos answer questions and show viewers how to complete processes better than plain text. According to an internal Google study, the number of “how-to” searches on YouTube increased 232 percent between 2011 and 2014.

PRODUCT DEMONSTRATIONS:

It doesn’t matter if a business sells complicated services or simple products: Video demonstrations are what many customers want. According to an Animoto study, 58 percent of people look for products from trustworthy companies that produce videos.



SUCCESS STORY:

- **INDUSTRY:** Business Software
- **GOAL:** Increase visibility in search results
- **STRATEGY:** Produce studio video blogs and animations describing the industry
- **RESULTS:** Increased overall pageviews by 309%, increased total time on site by 93%

Hold on to this content while you navigate the SEO world.



	WRITING	GRAPHICS	VIDEO
FREQUENCY	Daily	Monthly	Varies
KEYWORDS	Throughout	In headlines, on landing pages, in meta-descriptions	In headlines, transcripts, in meta-descriptions
SHELF-LIFE	Varies ¹	Long	Moderate ²
SEO APPEARANCE	Throughout search results	In Google images and standard SERPS	In YouTube results, and standard SERP ³
PRODUCTION TIME	Generally short	Moderate	Long

¹Shorter for news pieces, longer for static information

²Shorter for trend-driven studio pieces, longer for product demos or testimonials

³With thumbnails

CHAPTER THREE:

Measuring the results of Content for SEO



HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE TRAVELING IN THE DIRECTION OF RESULTS? Writing engaging content, producing interesting videos and publishing actionable resources are prerequisites for good SEO - but brands have to be able to measure the results. So what should marketers be measuring?



There isn't a single number for victory - Signs of SEO Success



What metrics can measure
my content for SEO?

ORGANIC TRAFFIC:

Is the site getting more organic traffic than it did in previous reporting periods? This is an excellent indicator that more people are finding the site in search.

INBOUND LINKS:

Is the site getting more inbound links? The more that other sites reference content on a page, the more that page is considered a valuable resource by Google.

DOMAIN AUTHORITY:

Is the site building authority? Use Moz's Domain Authority Calculator to see whether the site is improving its standing in the web ranks.

NEW VISITORS:

Is the site getting more new visitors? If you're getting more visibility in search and reaching new audiences, you should see more new visits.

ENGAGEMENT METRICS:

Are engagement metrics improving? Likes, shares, comments and social activity demonstrate that the SEO strategy is bringing in the RIGHT visitors.



There isn't a single number for victory - Signs of SEO Success



After considering each of these numbers for the entire site, it's important to drill down to narrower views to see which sections or content types are responsible for larger portions of overall traffic.

Landing Pages: Are certain landing pages getting more traffic, indicating that prospects are most interested in correlating topics?

Content Categories: Do some content categories get more traffic and engagement than others? This ties back to user interest, and could provide insights about where to build out information.

Content Types: Are videos and infographics better at driving traffic than written pieces? These results build a case that brands should produce even more of their most successful assets.



SUCCESS STORY:

- **INDUSTRY:** Telecommunications
- **GOAL:** Increase traffic, gain qualified leads
- **STRATEGY:** Analyze and replicate top linked blogs to create similar or companion pieces
- **RESULTS:** Saw nearly 30,000 unique page views in one month



TIPS to replicate your success

Before you head back into the SEO world, run through this checklist.



Identify successful posts:

Look at your top blog posts or news articles. How much traffic are they driving compared to the site as a whole and compared with other pieces - Winning content should be higher than the average. Some other signs of success include a higher proportion of new visitors and referral traffic.



Conduct keyword and category audits:

Look broadly at the types of posts, articles and resources that generate the best traffic. What categories bring in the most visitors? What keywords get the most impressions? How about clicks? Content that's good for SEO will get a lot of visibility in search results and have a high click-through rate because it's RELEVANT to the query.



Analyze headline structure, content tone and formats: Look for stylistic variables that correlate with positive results. Do headlines with questions get more traffic than content that leads with a statement? Are formal pieces generating more visits than conversational content? How do graphics compare to text-only assets?



Don't get LOST in the numbers

Metrics are essential for content marketing strategies to provide ROI - but they're ultimately just a way to scientifically quantify subjective user behavior and should be used to **answer the following questions:**

DO PEOPLE READ CONTENT AND COME BACK FOR MORE?
Find pages that draw **repeat traffic**. Beyond the homepage, is the blog hub page there? A video series?

DO PEOPLE INTERACT WITH THE BRAND ON SOCIAL?
(particularly when web content is shared)
Analyze **landing pages** for social traffic. How do these **compare to organic search landing pages**?

ARE SEARCH VISITORS STICKING AROUND TO LEARN MORE?
Look at **bounce rate, dwell time, pages per visit** for organic traffic. Use **entrace path** to see next clicks.

IS YOUR CONTENT MARKED AS CREDIBLE? TRUSTWORTHY?
Analyze the **links to your site** to find **top linked pages**. These are most trusted.

Which tool is best for SEO metrics?

GOOGLE ANALYTICS:

A free platform that helps you measure how content does in organic search. Many of the metrics mentioned above can be analyzed in Analytics, including data for the entire site and individual pages.

GOOGLE WEBMASTER TOOLS:

Another free SEO platform from Google. It's helpful for checking inbound and outbound links, and provides important keyword data that isn't being reported in GA anymore.

MOZ'S DOMAIN

AUTHORITY CALCULATOR:

Helps webmasters determine how well their sites are perceived by search engines.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Current trends driving SEO innovation



THE SEARCH LANDSCAPE
DOESN'T SIT STILL FOR LONG
Marketers need to keep up
with the changes constantly
taking place. Here are some of
the biggest trends influencing
SEO content this year.



TREND #1



Google's Hummingbird

Google's latest algorithm, Hummingbird was launched August 2013. It uses machine learning and semantics to give users better search results via Knowledge Graph and contextual information. There are four defining elements to semantic search:

Sentiment: Google wants to know what people think about businesses, ideas and people to rank content.

Engagement: Sites that have more social interactions and bigger followings will theoretically get higher rankings.

Citation: Links are still important to semantic search results, but they have to be from credible sources that also have high value according to Google's semantic algorithms.

Interaction: If other people are exhibiting activity around pages, like sharing content from a website on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or other social platforms, it improves a site's performance.

Check out our Semantic Search eBook for more insights [here](#).





TREND #2



User experience matters more

Content can be engaging, informative and relevant, but if it doesn't load quickly or look good, users will bounce away to other options. Sites that take more than four seconds to load have higher bounce rates and Google's Matt Cutts has said that load speeds can affect rankings. And once pages appear on the screen, their overall design plays a huge factor in user retention.



Even simple visual changes are helping sites drive up traffic and get more search visibility. To adequately address UX issues, brands need to be mindful of:

- > **Visual Design:** The overall appearance of a website, including the colors, typefaces, layouts and pictures that users see.
- > **Information architecture:** The way content is organized on a website. It dictates how users navigate from page to page, but it also encompasses the types of media used for different kinds of content.
- > **Usability:** The site's overall user-facing functionality, from making purchases, signing in with passwords or other higher level functions.

Check out our Marketer's Guide to UX for a full checklist [here](#).



SUCCESS STORY:

- **INDUSTRY:** Building technologies
- **GOAL:** Improve interaction metrics for more engagement, better SEO
- **STRATEGY:** Add custom images to blog posts
- **RESULTS:** Traffic increased 31%, unique visitors jumped 29%, total pageviews rose 36%



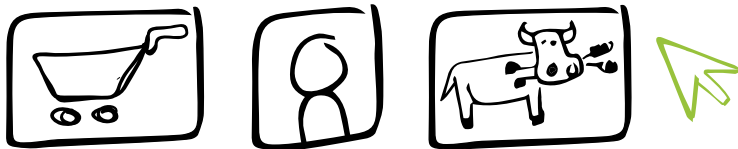
TREND #3



Knowledge Graphs, an information high rise

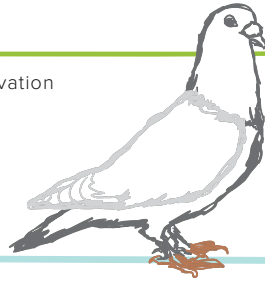
It may seem trivial, but organization can have a profound impact on how users interact with websites. Something as subtle as a clickable image or prominent call-to-action can spell the difference between a visit and a missed opportunity.

Google has been overhauling search results pages to make them cleaner and mobile-friendly. It no longer displays Author rich snippets, and many video thumbnails have disappeared. There's evidence that some pictures remain in Google News and in mobile results, but all in all the number of clickable pictures in SERPs has plummeted.





TREND #4



‘Pigeon’ algorithm and mobile browsing soar

Mobile users are no longer the fringe of a site’s organic traffic, and they’re staged to become the majority. This year, 46 percent of searches for specific products were made on mobile devices, and total mobile search traffic is expected to pass desktop at some point during 2014. Here’s how brands can grapple with this phenomena:

- **Anticipate mobile within the buyer’s journey:** One study of marketers found that 54 percent of businesses don’t understand how mobile devices fit within searchers’ journeys, and there is no single point at which people put down the phone and open their laptops.
- **Location, location, location:** A new update to Google’s local search algorithm (dubbed ‘Pigeon’) uses mobile-generated distance and location data to rank content. It’s showing fewer results, making local SEO more competitive, and relying on many of the same ranking signals it uses for standard results.





TREND #5

Panda comes back to

BITE WEBSITES

After maintaining that there wouldn't be any major adjustments to the Panda algorithm, Google announced a big overhaul to it - at the same time as it launched an update to the Payday Loan algorithm. (The former targets news aggregators and other sites that don't produce unique, original content. The latter goes after spammy search results that don't actually provide the information they claim to.)

The bottom line: Content is being closely scrutinized. Headlines, meta descriptions and overall copy needs to be original and relevant or it could plummet in search rankings and lose traffic, negating any good content that's already been published.





Next Stop: Your SEO Success

Online customers' behavior is radically different than in the past because they have so many choices. Marketers have to make a strong first impression in search to stay top-of-mind throughout decisions by:

- Creating the kinds of content target audiences want
- Offering it in forms that customers want to consume
- Measuring it properly to continue doing what works
- Staying up-to-date in the turbulent SEO landscape

Creating content for SEO is the single best way to accomplish all four in one fell swoop. However, the buyer's journey doesn't end once they've discovered an engaging and informative website.

Contact us at Brafton.com to learn about how we can help your business create content for SEO and your marketing goals.



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