

SEO TRENDS 2017

44 EXPERTS ON THE
FUTURE OF SEO

WRITTEN BY
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SEO Trends 2017: 44 Experts on the Future of SEO

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Danny Goodwin is a News Writer for Search Engine Journal, covering social media, content, and search marketing news. He is also Content Strategist for L&T Co., a brand publishing company. Danny has been a professional editor, writer, and ghostwriter in the marketing industry for 10 years, creating content for SMBs to global brands, spanning all things search and digital. He formerly was managing editor for Momentology and editor for Search Engine Watch.

It's the most wonderful time of the year. It's time to talk SEO trends for 2017.

Ask 44 SEO experts what the big trends will be in 2017, and well, you get 44 different answers!

What's great about our industry is that there are so many known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns, to paraphrase a former U.S. defense secretary.

Will this be the year we get the SEO basics right? Will this be the year of voice search? Will this be the year machine learning and AI forever changes SEO as we've known it?

Will this be the year your digital strategies always put the audience/customer first? Will this be the year companies really diversify their traffic sources as part of a holistic digital strategy? And how will technologies such as assistants and the Internet of Things change SEO?

So what SEO trends do you need to know in 2017 if you want to generate more traffic and leads while staying ahead of your competition?

Grab a coffee and check out what 44 of the top SEO experts say will be the biggest trends in organic search in 2017 – and beyond.

We've gathered insights from these SEO pros:

- [Barry Adams](#), SEO Consultant, Polemic Digital
- [Jonathan Allen](#), President, L&T Co.
- [Adam Audette](#), Senior Vice President, Organic Search, Merkle
- [Seth Besmertnik](#), CEO, Conductor
- [Daniel Bianchini](#), Freelance SEO & Digital Marketing Consultant
- [Chris Boggs](#), Founder, Web Traffic Advisors

- **Michael Bonfils**, CEO & President, International Media Management
- **Joshua Daniels**, Founder & Managing Director, Go Amplify
- **Dave Davies**, CEO, Beanstalk Internet Marketing
- **Darrell Davis**, SEO Manager, The Penny Hoarder
- **Stoney deGeyter**, CEO, Pole Position Marketing
- **Eric Enge**, CEO, Stone Temple Consulting
- **Erin Everhart**, Senior Manager, Media Strategy & Mobile, The Home Depot
- **Duane Forrester**, Vice President, Organic Search Operations, Bruce Clay Inc.
- **Casie Gillette**, Director of Online Marketing, KoMarketing Associates
- **Mike Grehan**, CMO & Managing Director, Acronym
- **Jenny Halasz**, President & Founder, JLH Marketing
- **Christopher Hart**, Head of Client Development, U.S., Linkdex
- **Bill Hartzler**, SEO Consultant
- **Kristjan Hauksson**, COO & Partner, SMFB Engine
- **Jim Hedger**, Creative Partner, Digital Always Media
- **Jon Henshaw**, Co-founder & President, Raven Tools
- **Bill Hunt**, Global Strategy Consultant, Back Azimuth Consulting
- **Mark Jackson**, President & CEO, Vizion Interactive
- **Dixon Jones**, Marketing Director, Majestic
- **Ryan Jones**, Manager Search Strategy & Analytics, SapientNitro
- **Julie Joyce**, Owner, Str0ud LLC and Link Fish Media
- **Michael King**, Managing Director, iPullRank
- **Cindy Krum**, Founder & CEO, MobileMoxie

- [Casey Markee](#), Founder, Media Wyse
- [Jesse McDonald](#), Director of SEO, Geek Powered Studios
- [Roger Montti](#), Owner, martinibuster.com
- [Brock Murray](#), Co-founder & COO, seoplus+
- [Seth Nickerson](#), Senior SEO Strategist, Vertical Measures
- [Lee Odden](#), CEO, TopRank Marketing
- [Chuck Price](#), Founder, Measurable SEO
- [Kristine Schachinger](#), Founder & CEO, Vettors Agency
- [Grant Simmons](#), VP of Search Marketing, Homes.com
- [Aleyda Solis](#), Founder & International SEO Consultant, Orainti
- [Kaspar Szymanski](#), SEO Consultant, SearchBrothers
- [Marcus Tober](#), Founder & CTO, Searchmetrics
- [Anne Ahola Ward](#), CEO, CircleClick
- [Mindy Weinstein](#), Founder & President, Marketmind MindShift
- [Rob Woods](#), SEO Consultant, Riseform Digital Marketing



Barry Adams

SEO Consultant, Polemic Digital

Google was very smart to launch AMP and prevent a huge switch away from mobile web browsing towards native apps. AMP keeps users engaged with Google search on mobile devices.

I expect Google will keep throwing a lot of weight behind AMP, and 2017 is the year that decides if AMP has a long shelf-life or if it'll end up as another one of Google's doomed projects.

The adoption of AMP beyond static news stories will be key to this; both in terms of the functionality AMP offers for interactive experiences, and the ease with which websites can implement these features.

Keep a sharp eye on AMP for ecommerce and the way AMP results will be highlighted in SERPs. Already we see Google **highlighting** the advantages of AMP to its users – if this takes a stronger hold, AMP could well become the new de facto standard for mobile web pages.



Jonathan Allen

President, L&T Co.

I think the SEO community is going to learn a lot more interesting stuff from the emergent behavior of RankBrain in 2017.

AI powered rankings are going to lead to a highly customized set of ranking signals at a query level, that might seem to massively complicate the workload for the general SEO practitioner. But, I think we're going to be pleasantly surprised to find that the generalized list of factors that make an impact are actually going to be easier to understand than they have been for the last 10 years. Put another way, I think we're going to see a much more malleable algorithm that is simultaneously more punishing and more rewarding.

So, my money is on really basic tactics like natural/organic link building working better than ever in 2017. I think that will prove to be because RankBrain can actually test ranking your site against way more user queries than was previously possible, computationally.

Artificial intelligence solutions tend towards aggregation of concepts, performing entity recognition calculations at hitherto unknown scale, so I agree with people who say that topical relevance is still more important than individual keyword relevance. Nonetheless, fundamentally RankBrain still runs the same math as the core algorithm always did, and links have always been the strongest signal, so I think they will remain so.

However, under RankBrain, the reward of an earned organic link could cause a break out moment of visibility across a clutch of broadly matching yet different terms which will yield a goldmine of relevant keyword data in Google Search Console. The similar yet different terms that RankBrain will have tried to rank you for, even in completely unseen positions at the back of the index will be useful enough to plan the next phase in your strategy to compete for topical relevance. Due to the sociological theory of **'weak ties'** (which has made it's way into search engines), I believe that you won't need to earn that many organic links to see movements in the right direction.

Thats the "good" news for "white hats." And the "bad" news, is that I think in 2017 we'll see the re-emergence of really sophisticated "black hat" strategies.

Basically, if it's not already invented, I'll bet my bottom dollar that we'll see competing AIs developed by the black hat community to compete with RankBrain. But hey, the funnest part of SEO has always been **debating the different shades of gray** anyway.



Adam Audette

Senior Vice President, Organic Search, Merkle

In my outlook, 2017 trends will fall into the following categories:

Mobile

The connection between device types will continue, resulting in richer and faster mobile experiences for users, with advances in PWAs and article formats like AMP. Apps will continue to have a place in the user experience, too, and indexing them for improved discovery will continue to be important. And dynamic sites and content will keep evolving.

Technical & Structural Work

Structured data will get plenty of attention, too, as its application extends into virtually every field and device.

Speed will rule, and we'll hear a lot about http/2 in 2017.

Link building for SEO purposes will continue its slow, welcome death, as marketers from social and content arenas rightly focus on marketing promotion and amplification rather than links for rankings.

Content Experience

The SEO industry's approach to the content experience will evolve. Search is one of the most powerful intent signals, and with data modeling allowing us to finally realize the promise of people-based marketing at scale, the user journey will be more personalized than ever in 2017. We'll wait to see if that's a good thing for users (we know it's a good thing for marketers).



Seth Besmertnik

CEO, Conductor

Focus on creating value for the customer in 2017 and good things will happen. Here are three key SEO trends to watch.

1. Future Algorithms

For a long time, the SEO industry has been trying to optimize in a more technical way – in other words, thinking of the search engine crawler rather than the person viewing the content. Google is trying to make its algorithms a mirror image of the heart, mind, soul, and needs of a customer.

The big trend in 2017, then, is a shift in mentality where your entire digital strategy (not just SEO) will be focused on understanding who your customer is, what they want, and using the data from search engines to better understand customer intent. By making something your customer needs – something that solves their problem – you will win the algorithm of the future.

2. Unified Teams

Companies should create a unified team focused on a customer-first strategy. Bring your SEO and content teams together!

Great content that can't be found isn't great content. On the flip side, the ROI is minimal when you're creating content that ranks but is completely off-message or off-brand.

If you're still creating content just for SEO, you're doing it wrong. You need content that is artistic, creative, brand-driven, and optimized for the long-term. Unifying your teams will help your company create content that inspires and meets the needs of your audience.

3. Content Optimization

Don't optimize for keywords. Optimize your content.

Think about the different content groups, types, and maps and optimize around that. Keywords must be subordinate to content that aligns with your customers. Embrace customer-first marketing in 2017!



Daniel Bianchini

Freelance SEO & Digital Marketing Consultant

Heading into 2017, there are a number of trends that I am seeing from both the client perspective and those SEO purists.

Clients/Brands

Continued focus on the user to increase ROI: This is going to be a trend for the next few years as both search engines and businesses alike want to provide the best possible experience for their customers. Business are putting more emphasis on attracting the right traffic, rather than any traffic. This may lead to less customers, but they are seen as more qualified and therefore more attractive to businesses.

This will come from a more strategic approach to their marketing campaigns as a whole, of which SEO will be a single part in a much bigger vision. Being visible throughout the buying cycle across a number of different marketing channels will be a focus, and attributing sales accordingly. While SEO will continue to focus on head and more expensive terms/topics, it will also identify opportunities for content creation, paid and social media to interact at the right time providing a holistic approach.

SEOs

Machine learning and mobile will be the focus: The two biggest changes to the algorithm in recent years has been the introduction of RankBrain and more focus on mobile. With further changes to the way search engines and Google in particular deal with **mobile starting from January**, it will be an area of focus for most SEOs, specifically those in the technical arena. With a mobile-first index, it is no longer adequate to just have a mobile website, as this is what you are going to be judged on.

The introduction of RankBrain into the algorithm has led to large-scale critics across the industry both in a public and private forum. With RankBrain still in its infancy and learning, there will be small alterations made to improve the SERPs that are being provided for each query. As SEOs, we need to adapt to RankBrain and have a better understanding of machine learning, and how it affects the work that we conduct to enable us to provide the best results for our clients.



Chris Boggs

Founder, Web Traffic Advisors

No doubt a key theme will be how we will collectively manage and execute against the increasing efficiency and intelligence of the Google “rewards systems.” Google has carefully contracted and focused its rewards system – used to grant higher organic rankings – to granting better-performing content the spoils of victory, all in a near “real time” manner.

Marketers that monitor improved rankings exposure and increase the charisma of creatives such as Page Titles and Meta Descriptions to improve click interaction (and then keep them on the site), will benefit from the “real time” nature of the 2016-2017 Google algorithm.

Gone are the days when “SEO took months.” Of course, non-nimble organizations or industries that take weeks or months to develop content will also suffer since they could be late to the “real time” boat.

One technology contraction has come with Google deciding to focus on sites that can satisfy users across all devices by shifting increasingly to a mobile-first algorithm versus having separate rankings on desktop, mobile, and tablet devices. This contraction to one system granting the best rankings to sites that can both meet likely user intent (sometimes geo-based, sometimes not) as well as the speed performance of the content is now paramount to success and will force the hand for many large web sites to finally get it right. The Google Search Console may be the tool of 2017, finally having reached importance at the CTO level.

One other 2016 change that will continue to loom large in 2017 is the real time “Penguin” algorithm. Many SEOs will continue to test the limits of “greasing the rails” in order to get link authority still undeniably required to rank well in competitive niches, even with only local services competition for example. Since Penguin will reportedly not count “bad” links against web sites, manual actions likely will rise as more SEOs will come across links being reported. The Disavow file is still recommended, but more time in 2017 will likely be spent by SEOs performing reconsideration requests and backpedaling out of ill-advised sloppy link relationships.



Michael Bonfils

CEO & President, International Media Management

Michael Bonfils When it comes to international SEO, the focus for us in 2017 is on creating cultural content that focuses on specific segments of a customer journey but also focuses on the psychographic behavior and motives behind that behavior to tailor more targeted content.

For example, Joe is a powerful German executive. Based on his persona and the psychographic “category” he fits in, we are developing content that is tailored to not only Joe, but also to the entire category of similar Joes. This means, changing content to be shorter, but more proactive.

So far our tests have shown extremely favorable results by creating content that’s specific to motive and behavior on a global level. Basically 99 percent of content is just generic and not tailored to a persona category.



Joshua Daniels

Founder & Managing Director, Go Amplify

Producing long-form content that provides incredible value for your readership should be a top priority in 2017. But not just any old “long-form” content, I’m talking about surpassing the quality of any other content that’s out there on the same topic.

If I had a dollar for each time I heard the phrase “content is king” in 2016, I’d be incredibly wealthy.

Yes, content is important to any SEO strategy. But lots of marketers have become trapped in the idea that producing high volumes of topically relevant, “good” quality, short content, will bolster their SEO visibility. Sorry to disappoint, but producing “good” quality content on a regular basis is no longer going to move the needle.

More than **65 million articles** are published each month just on WordPress. So how can you stand out from the noise?

Creating long-form content (i.e., content that is 2,000-4,000+ words), combined with a good promotional strategy, will yield greater online visibility,

as it will lead to more social shares and links, which will feed the organic growth.

In 2017, put the time and effort into creating exceptional content that spreads like wildfire. Raise that content bar in 2017!



Dave Davies

CEO, Beanstalk Internet Marketing

Dave Davies Two areas are going to significantly change organic search starting in 2017: machine learning and voice search.

Machine Learning

Setting aside the fact that machine learning is an interesting area unto itself, its potential in search is virtually unparalleled in any other application. RankBrain went rapidly from influencing ~15 percent of queries to 100 percent. We can see a big push to get machine learning into the algorithm since Google replaced Amit Singhal with John Giannandrea as the head of search.

The reasons for this are obvious and range from:

- There are far too many permutations of queries and their meanings for engineers to program in each one

To

- Machines can adjust faster to new data and begin making changes to their calculations almost instantly

Now, this alone isn't a particular game-changer. All it essentially means is that the algorithms will change faster and can adjust specific to scenarios, queries, individuals, device, etc.

Fundamentally, this just amplifies Google's statements over the past decade to write content for the user and consider where they are, what they want, and the device they're using. Interesting, but not revolutionary.

What requires the most attention – and could produce the largest change in our industry – is the fact that with machine learning at this level no one will ever truly know why a specific piece of content ranks where it does. Even the engineers who built the system will not be able to reverse-engineer the formula and adjustments used.

This is the area that poses the most challenges for marketers. Traditionally we've been able to at least quasi-understand what ranking signals are at play at any given time. But as machine learning influences more of the algorithm even the folks at Google won't understand.

Add to that the announcements that Google's machine learning is being taught to build its own encryption and develop its own ranking factors and it becomes clear that from an algorithmic standpoint it will be virtually impossible to predict what will impact a site's rankings.

This change in search and how data is sorted and ranked is one of the areas – if not the area – to watch in 2017.

Voice Search

Voice search has been around for years but it's in 2016 we really started to see its power. In 2017 I predict we'll start seeing the impact of voice search and the true direction it's going.

When I right now say “voice search” most of us will think of our phones and a 10 p.m. request, “OK Google – where’s pizza near me?” but what I’m referring to is more than simply these types of queries but what they represent.

With the introduction of technologies like Google Home and Amazon Echo we’re seeing the elimination of a Top 10, top 5 or even paid ads in any traditional sense. Of course, the desktop is still there, I’m not saying we’ll see that eliminated

However, let’s consider what Google Home really represents. It’s a vehicle to the other outlets in your house, to information about your habits, a tie-in to other devices and a convenience in access to information first imagined on “Star Trek.”

I don’t see a Google Home sitting on a desk answering mundane questions. What I see coming is an Android OS in your fridge, attached to the thermostat on your wall, to your TV, etc. and that little Home speaker giving you information from them and sending your commands to them.

A refrigerator that knows when I’m almost out of eggs and asks me if I want to order more. A car that knows I’m running low on gas and that I’m about to pass by a gas station (conveniently one that bids in the AdWords system I’m sure), and more.

And all of that without giving marketers access to the eyeballs of the searcher – and a searcher who may not even recognize that’s what they’re doing.

It’s this area I look to as the major disruptor (a word I generally detest due to its broad overuse, but in this case it’s fitting) in 2017.



Darrell Davis

SEO Manager, The Penny Hoarder

Optimize for topics rather than keywords. This idea gained popularity after the Hummingbird update, but implementing the strategy in 2017 will have bonus benefits, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI).

While the concept of RankBrain and AI are difficult for most mortals to completely grasp, we can understand that a core function of RankBrain is the ability to learn and categorize information to accurately match search queries to web pages. Giving RankBrain the most relevant information to categorize is a logical first step. Adequately covering topics well rather than trying to rank for a couple of targeted keywords naturally accomplishes this.

SEO's can also expect that Google will continue to improve on implementing user experience as a ranking factor. Again, topic optimization fits the bill here.

Giving users what they want is an obvious yet often-overlooked strategy to align with Google's goals. It's important to remember the ultimate goal of artificial intelligence is to become less artificial and more human, so smart future-proof strategy should continue to focus on the user.



Stoney deGeyter

CEO, Pole Position Marketing

In short, social media will become required to expand organic SEO reach.

As search results get more targeted toward personalization, this will create a sort of confirmation bias in search results. Google will tend to show searchers what they have already become familiar with or sites that are a close match.

This will force many small businesses to invest deeper into social media marketing in order to build brand recognition and traffic just to be part of the “confirmed sites” that Google and other search engines will show to searchers, based on their known preferences.



Eric Enge

CEO, Stone Temple Consulting

If you follow search closely, you have probably seen many articles on the increasing use of machine learning by the search engines. For example, Google let the world know about its RankBrain algorithm in October 2015. This algorithm was heavily focused on better understanding language, and this remains one of the biggest areas of focus for machine learning by the search engines.

The reason for this is that it helps search engines want to better understand the actual user intent from a search query, and do a better job of matching up those queries with the web pages that best meet that intent.

One result of this is that the way you think about keyword research, and how that impacts your site pages has to change. Historically, keyword research was about finding out what the most popular search phrases were related to your page, and then using that phrase a lot on that page, and maybe also some related synonyms.

In today's world, you should still care a great deal about keyword research – yes, it still matters. But, how you apply the information you learn from it must change. Keyword research still provides us with critical knowledge, and that is information on what language your prospective customer uses when referring to products or services like yours, or when they're referring to the needs they address.

In this way of thinking you use keyword research to better understand how to communicate with your prospects. In other words, keyword research still impacts how you write title tags, your meta description, and body copy. It's just that your addressing the audience not the search engines.

Great, you're thinking, you're telling me to write content for users, and I am, but let's now explore a bit why that's good for you're search engine presence as well.

Google is in a massive struggle for market share with companies like Facebook, Microsoft, Apple, and Amazon. All of them are investing heavily in machine learning, and all of them are striving to provide the best possible experience to users of their sites.

It's a titanic fight for long-term market share. And in case you think Google is dominant here, consider the fact that Amazon is already the **number one place where people perform product searches** according to some data.

The point is, that offering users a superior experience in finding what they are looking for is a strategic imperative for Google. That translates into continuing major investments in matching up search queries and user intent with the best possible search results.

What does this mean for you? It means you need to do a better job of satisfying the users who come to your pages, and better matching your content to the intent they had when they got there. This puts you in a battle with others trying to satisfy the same users who come in from the same channels. New winners and losers will emerge from this fight, and my advice is to put yourself in a position to win.



Erin Everhart

Senior Manager, Media Strategy & Mobile,
The Home Depot

Two words: Voice search.

Google told us back in May that 20 percent of mobile queries are voice searches. Considering that mobile makes up more than 50 percent of all 1.2 trillion queries Google sees in a year, we're talking about 144 billion searches happening through voice commands, and that number is only going to grow as more consumers begin adapting voice search over text – a staggering 50 percent of teens and 21 percent of adults already use it daily.

This will have a tremendous impact on our keyword optimization because people don't talk like they write.

When they "write" to Google, it's largely in the same format of keywords that we all know and love (e.g., "best pho near me"). But when they "talk"

to Google, it's framed more like a question they would ask their friend (e.g., "what's the best pho near me?").

Not only will our keyword strategy change, but this is furthering the shift to local, personalized content.



Duane Forrester

Vice President, Organic Search Operations, Bruce Clay Inc.

2017 is going to be an interesting year. I think we'll see some changes, many of which will impact those working in search or relying on search for traffic.

Answers

These are going to be an even bigger deal than ever. Major players (Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Google, maybe even Facebook) are investing in systems, software and hardware) to simply answer our questions.

Today we're thinking about voice search and how that's changing the face of search. As this matures, and consumers just expect direct answers, where does that leave an industry that relies on keyword data? In a crunch.

It's one thing to parse common words from a question to net the actual keywords. (Which can happen now.) It's quite another to understand intent and relationship (as in a series of follow-on statements or questions related to an original starting point).

This could lead to fundamental changes, foundational changes, in how keyword data is reported. And if that change happens, what's the incentive for an engine to invest in tools that share that data?

Today we see little meaningful growth in engine-based search engine marketing tools. On the paid side improvements continue to roll out, but that's tied to ad dollars. On the organic side, with free tools, it's tougher to justify ongoing investments in aging platforms.

On one hand, I'm not sure the investment will happen; the engines giving us tools that map to a voice-driven, answer-expectant version of things. On the other hand, we know consumers will adapt to speaking to their tech and expecting answers – not a list of websites. Not something to click on, but a read-out-loud answer or solution. This will extend into commerce, too, so don't be thinking you're safe if you have an ecomm store that this won't find you.

This is a logical extension of embedding AI into processes. You (the consumer) become attached to the ecosystem (the goal) because as it figures you out in detail, it answers your needs.

Looking for a new backpack? Tell the system your parameters, it does the looking, it shares the results of the research and because you've told it things like cost thresholds, company preferences, membership programs you and so on, it'll narrow things down to the top 2 or 3 likely backpacks at the best retails for you. Then you simply say which one you want.

From this point forward it's a bit more complicated to get the purchase complete. Do you need to log into your REI account to click purchase? Can the system do that for you? Will we be able to review an email of the results prior to making the buy decision? These are all things to be sorted. But we're on that path firmly now.

Mobile

2017 is going to be the year of "I told you so" in mobile. Basically, if you're not there and sorted, you'll start feeling the pinch in a real way. Traffic, ranking, commerce.

All those people who told you to get off m-dot, or go responsive, or to re-search PWAs (progressive web apps) and build to that new standard will be wandering around the halls mumbling, “I told you so”. And they’ll be right.

The shift has already happened and if you’re still “thinking about mobile”, consumers won’t be thinking about you. They’ll be guided to better mobile-friendly experiences with new brands that look whiz-bang, golly-gee impressive on their mobile devices.

That shuffling noise you’ve been hearing lately? That’s your market share leaving.

Before we move from mobile, let’s float the following idea: in 2017 we’ll hear the beginning of a shift. Mobile going secure – and it won’t be optional in the long run. This will become a louder conversation as the year moves forward.

Location

With mobile being so prominent, location naturally follows. This spans from “where is this business” to where am I and what’s around me”. It even includes “I want X and where do I need to be to take advantage of that?”

From couponing, to commerce, from coffee to clothes, consumers will expect better location data for everything they want. Would consumers care if a local business could deliver the same product as Amazon for the same price at the same time? Many would choose to support local, thus putting pressure on Amazon to raise the value of its programs like Prime.

This type of fulfillment is within reach of most small businesses. Businesses just waiting to carve off a small slice of market share from a behemoth.

Amazon wouldn’t notice 0.001 percent of a loss of market share. But to a local business, that could be hundreds of thousands a year in added revenue.

Oh, and that “local” business? They’re selling nationally. Wouldn’t take much for a coop of distribution to pop up enabling small businesses to fulfill orders locally to the same level as Amazon.

Heck, Amazon will probably be the distributor! Not a huge shift from where they are today, except you shop on the local business website, and it’s fulfilled via Amazon.

Amazon’s new pilot Go store in Seattle portends a coming trend as well. Sign in with an app, all items you interact with are tracked and those you walk out with are automatically billed to your account. No checkout lines, no cashiers, just take what you want and your credit card is hit.

If Amazon can prove this model in this pilot, and expand it, we could be looking at a new paradigm for local shopping experiences.



Casie Gillette

Director of Online Marketing, KoMarketing Associates

Last year I was recommending structured content and site speed and this year I’m recommending structured content and site speed. Turns out not much has changed in a year!

Site Speed

All joking aside, I can’t reiterate how important site speed is. In recent months, I’ve seen organic performance skyrocket after making site speed improvements and, on the other end, I’ve seen sites decline due to slow load times. And as we all know, with mobile growth, it’s even more important.

Going into 2017, focus on the small fixes you can make to speed up your site versus trying to change everything at once.

Structured Content & SERPs

It blows my mind how varied the search results are. Between local packs, knowledge graph panels, direct answers, images, etc., there are very few results that look the same and more importantly, there are very few SERPs that don't contain these features.

In an analysis I did recently for a client, 65 percent of the terms they were ranking for had answer boxes. The question, of course, becomes, "How do I become the answer?!?"

We've been doing quite a bit of experimenting this year with answer boxes and SERP results and much of it has to do with how you structure your content. Go back and look at what is already ranking, if there's an answer box, and if you can restructure your content.

A few good resources here include:

- [Appearing in the Google Answer Box: 5 Ways to Increase Your Odds](#)
- [How to Appear in Google's Answer Boxes](#)
- [Whitepaper: How to Get More Featured Snippets](#)

In my opinion, there is still a ton of room for improvement in the answers Google is providing. I think 2017 will be a big test for how they get better and how they integrate voice search queries into the mix.



Mike Grehan

CMO & Managing Director, Acronym

Mike Grehan Primarily, the SEO community has long been focused on tackling search problems, in particular indexing and ranking, at the query and

document level. Literally, spending huge amounts of time trying to match keywords in queries to documents that contain them.

But with modern search, combined with much more sophisticated computer-human-interaction (CHI), a wider range of factors are affecting the results we see at search engines such as Google and Bing.

Machine learning techniques uncover complex and previously hidden patterns of searcher (end user) behavior. And this leads to a much clearer understanding of intent and information needs.

Moving forward, being both relevant and “useful” in the moment will be key to search success and greater visibility. A good SEO should also be a good content experience analyst (CEA) developing content around intent at crucial “micro-moments” on the customer journey.



Jenny Halasz

President & Founder, JLH Marketing

Jenny Halasz: Is mobile the thing you need to be most concerned about in 2017? To a certain extent. There’s no doubt that if you don’t have a mobile-ready site by now, you’re already behind the 8-ball.

But I believe there’s something more important. You need to diversify your business away from Google... away from search. That might sound really weird for a search person to say, but here’s why.

Search engines (Google especially) continue to show preference for sites that people already know and love. If you want to become one of those sites, search is not the way you'll do it.

In certain industries, the search results are so saturated that they're near impossible to compete in. This doesn't mean you should quit search altogether; it's still vitally important for your business. But find other ways to bring in leads and revenue, whether through social, through apps, through Amazon or Ebay stores, or other channels.

The absolute best thing to have when competing on search is word-of-mouth. If people are talking about the great product you make, the wonderful customer service you have, or all the good you're doing in your industry or community, that's how you'll get Google's attention. A mobile-friendly site is simply a pre-requisite.



Christopher Hart

Head of Client Development, U.S., Linkdex

Before I drive a stake in the ground for 2017, let's take a quick look back on my [predictions from 2016](#), where I noted that User Experience, Mobilization & Apps, Big Data Normalization and Schema/Markup would be areas to invest in to tip the scales in your favor.

This year I am going to stay away from any tactical or strategic predictions and focus more on the operational side of the conversation with the rise of the CDO "Chief Digital Officer" – a largely transformational role.

Over the last year many companies and organizations have been talking "Omni Channel Optimization" and have spent heavily in bringing big data from across business silos into a normalized reporting/analysis view. The

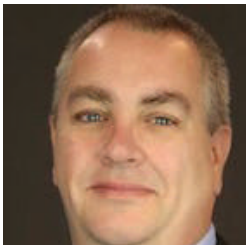
outcome of these activities, are that operational units are still largely siloed and territorial in their daily behaviors, mostly focused on what they can claim and get credit for.

The CDOs directives will be to transform the operational behaviors of the siloed organization into customer centric digital first operation.

To do this, the CDO will bring together a broad team whose day-to-day are still largely focused on their sets of expertise. But, whose results will be judged though their contributions to collective value of customer acquisitions, LTV and brand to user relationship.

The collective value of ones contribution will be judged (or amplified) via the mainstream use of marketing and automation technologies to enable the proper and personalized reply via the best marketing channel whose message can best capture and solve for the intent of the end user.

The end result will be a happier user to brand relationship, where the end user will feel heard and empowered. Interruption based marketing and advertising will fall to the side and a form of in-line conversation / engagement will develop where the user will get what they need, where they need it and how they want it. Over time these user focused values will accelerate their trust in a brands products or services.



Bill Hartzler

SEO Consultant

For 2017, smart brands and businesses need to continue to focus on building their brand and diversifying their overall online strategy. It's becoming increasingly important to focus on branding initiatives so that ultimately

consumers search for your brand so you don't have to rely strictly on ranking for particular keywords.

Focusing efforts on specific keywords or ranking for specific keywords tends to lead you down a different path – which, for SEO, leads you toward “chasing the algorithm.”

The search engines are continually getting better at identifying unnatural linking and unnatural SEO tactics, as well as keyword tactics. With customization and personalization, as well as “not provided” keywords truly not being provided to us website owners, it's increasingly difficult to track rankings in the search results.

Diversifying your efforts, such as including strategies other than SEO like social media and paid search is key in 2017. Focus on tracking every single visit to your website so you know where visitors are coming from.

While this might seem “too obvious” to some of you reading, I'm still surprised to see how many businesses don't know whether a sale came from paid search efforts, social media efforts, or organic search.



Kristjan Hauksson

COO & Partner, SMFB Engine

I am not seeing any major changes on the horizon for 2017, except when it comes to user intent. Everything else should be very gradual and predictable.

During the U.S. presidential election, it was interesting to see how topical “filter bubbles” impacted Google, YouTube, and particularly Facebook. Visibility has become more and more driven by intent.

Beside that it is the usual stuff that we need to be on the lookout for, and more importantly the basics (still going strong) such as technology, structured data, platforms, user experience, design and content.

I am not as optimistic on voice search as many of my SEO friends. It's not as advanced as needed (my native language is spoken by 320,000 people) and, more importantly, not as integrated in our daily life as it should be. Voice search will be a thing, but not in 2017.

Mobile is not a trend any more. It's mandatory. But mobile might break many companies that are not keeping up. I am not sure AMP is the thing, but it's definitely the first step toward what is to come.

Bottom line: we are still on a journey, we are more connected than ever, and things are likely to move fast.



Jim Hedger

Creative Partner, Digital Always Media

Jim Hedger British historian James Burke suggested there were certain events or culmination of events that took place at or about the same time that individually or collectively served to change our understanding of ourselves and the universe around us. Not only did he open the world of history for a generation of thinkers, Burke managed to script ten TV episodes and at least two coffee-table-sized companion books out of the concept.

Basically, since we only perceive what we know to perceive, our fundamental understanding of the universe is bound to the things we know. When we discover or prove something beyond what we knew we know, or when a conflux of things combine to create something wondrously new, our perception of the universe around us must be changed.

That's what 2016 was all about. And universe altering change is likely to only accelerate through 2017.

Does anyone remember exactly when IBM built a computer so powerful it was able to score an undisputable win against best chess player in the world? Many will think of Deep Blue vs. Garry Kasparov in February 1996 but it wasn't until December 2006 that Deep Blue's protégé, Deep Fritz soundly defeated world grand master Vladimir Kramnik a machine could be said to have fully defeated a human brain.

It took 10 years from the development of a machine that could access a database of every move ever made in every recorded game ever played, to the release of a machine that could actually learn from every mistake ever made in all of those recorded games. Today, Deep Fritz is a consumer product offered by Chessbase.

Now, does anyone remember the day Google fired up the artificial neural net known as RankBrain? Google confirmed the existence of RankBrain on October 26, 2015, just over one year ago.

Two days later, Google announced its artificial intelligence products would be opened for use by businesses or consumers. According to Google, RankBrain exists to help Google figure out the context or intent of words used by both searchers and webmasters.

Why would a person use that particular configuration of words to seek a person, place, or object? Is the intent aspirational or are they seeking to buy something? RankBrain and the use of artificial intelligence is arguably the greatest leap forward for Google since it discovered messing with the weight of links might be an antidote to link-spam back in 2003.

The advent of artificial intelligence in search comes at the same time that consumer based AI products such as Google Nest or Amazon Echo are starting to appear in homes across America. Digital assistants such as X.AI

(created by former SEO Dennis R. Mortensen) are taking charge of the daily scheduling and activities of businesspersons.

It might seem a stretch today, but AI is going to have a dramatic effect on search engine results sooner than later, especially in regards to local search. When a product or service is needed consumers will soon speak to their in-home AI which will then place an order for delivery from the nearest approved vendor. This is one of the reasons voice search is so important to Google.

Another is the continuing rise of mobile or handheld devices as primary access points to the Internet.

It's been almost three years since Google reported more mobile searches were conducted than desktop searches. That was a seminal moment in the history of the Internet and wholesale assumptions were changed based on the idea people were capable of searching on-the-go rather than researching before making trips. Google became dedicated to pushing mobile everything and in 2016 it began to favor mobile search results.

Local and mobile search results are heavily influenced by citations, which are often found everywhere search isn't. Social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn and even Yelp carry user review areas that provide citations. This means savvy marketers will use a myriad of tools to tell the stories of their brands and products.

Marketers need to remember that searchable content is no longer confined to search engines. Search can be found virtually everywhere a community forms around ideas, information, or products. SEOs and search marketers will increasingly have to work in multiple platforms to raise the attention of consumers and of search engines.

Video continues to kill every medium it competes with, including the text-based website. Digital users consumed more video in 2016 than all other

previous years put together. This is because it is easier to access video over a mobile device and also because it is far easier to create and share video experiences.

If it can be marketed in text, it should be marketed in video because that's what consumers want to see. That video should be housed on-site (likely embedded from YouTube) and uploaded to all social media applications relevant to the business or service being marketed.

As things stand today, it is only logical to recommend using Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) for all publishers. AMP is a stripped down page that dispenses with a lot of .css and java commands. While this makes pages lightning fast, they tend to be rather plain looking.

AMP is one of those cod-liver-oil things, something conventional wisdom says we need to take for our own health but it's also one of those initiatives that might or might not last beyond 2017. If you're working with publishers, learn AMP.

Accuracy is important and to help search engines and search users be accurate, it is helpful to provide as many descriptive points as possible. In a mobile focused world, Schema.org mark-up is likely to be more important than before. Schema is a series of micro mark-ups that not only help search engines figure out a number of things about any given page, they can also make items such as pricing, ratings, or other product information appear in search results.

Google futurist Ray Kurzweil has been obsessed with machine learning and machine emulation since the 1960s. In the world of AI, Kurzweil is best known for his ideas around what he calls the singularity.

Kurzweil predicts humans will cybernize themselves sooner than later. He is also one of the leading thinkers at Google.

One piece of advice that could be offered year after year is, always look to the future. What Google does today is often indicative of where it expects searchers to want to go tomorrow. Read anything Kurzweil writes or has already written, as he tends to be right about trends he perceives.

2017 is terra incognita. We have no precedents to apply to where machine learning and AI will take us. All we know for certain was originally phrased by Douglas Coupland in 1991 in the title of his first major novel, *Generation X, Tales for an Accelerated Culture*.

We live in a time of acceleration and nobody cares where the brake pedal, which has yet to be invented, will eventually be placed. Hold onto your seats, SERP watchers! The next 12 months are going to be absurdly interesting.



Jon Henshaw

Co-founder & President, Raven Tools

Google will continue to push for speed in 2017, but their core focus will be on reliability and making sites work and feel more like apps. They'll do this by encouraging SEOs and webmasters to convert their sites into Progressive Web Apps (PWAs).

PWAs are an amalgamation of web standards. Google describes them as web apps that provide the following user experience:

- Load instantly regardless of internet speed.
- Respond smoothly as you interact with elements on the page.
- Feels like an app that's properly designed for the device that's accessing it.

Google has provided a [PWA Checklist](#) that provides baseline functionality along with their ideal site configuration. SEOs and webmasters should recognize many of the items in the list, because they're probably already using some of them on their sites.

However, there are still several things on the checklist that most sites don't have. Most notably, PWAs are expected to work even if the user is offline!

The offline functionality is enabled by Cache-First Networking and Service Worker Libraries – technologies that are already supported by all major browsers except Safari. Google's expectation is that sites will work more like apps, and if the user has accessed the site before, they'll be able to access it in some capacity when they're offline or have an unreliable internet connection.

A simple but effective example of a PWA that supports offline viewing is [Progressive Beer](#). More examples of PWAs can be found at <https://pwa.rocks>.

I encourage all SEOs to not only become familiar with Google's PWA Checklist, but to also start implementing and testing any items that are missing from their sites. Based on Google's actions the past few years, I wouldn't be surprised if PWAs become a ranking factor in 2017.



Bill Hunt

Global Strategy Consultant, Back Azimuth Consulting

The biggest trends business should focus on are:

1. Increase the Click Yield of High-Performing Keywords

A lot of time is spent trying to create new content and increased rankings

where you can increase traffic by improving search result snippets. It is easy to do using just Google Search Console.

Download the most recent report and sort it by Average Rank greater than 5 and Click Rate less than 5 percent. This will find keywords where you are ranking well but getting less than you expected share of clicks.

Do a search for that phrase and look at the snippet – is it gibberish or will it make searchers feel like the page will answer their question? If not optimal update the page and/or meta description and fetch as Googlebot and see if your clicks increase.

2. Increase Searcher Intent Alignment

Take a set of your keywords and write them down and ask yourself why a person did that search and what they were looking for. Go to your best or ranking page for that phrase and make sure it answers their question. Often we are out of sync with what the searcher is actually looking for resulting in them clicking away from your page going to another.



Mark Jackson

President & CEO, Vizion Interactive

Mark JacksonIt's hard to discern “the” biggest trend for SEO for 2017. Do we really need to talk about mobile (again)?

The truth is SEO has gotten pretty big. With Google's RankBrain fully entrenched, it's more important than ever to have SEO baked into multiple areas of your digital marketing efforts.

I still find that the following are lacking from most prospects that I speak with:

- Information architecture/taxonomy.
- Technical aspects of SEO (crawlability/indexation/page speed, etc.).
- Content (core site content/blog/social).
- Outreach/PR (promotion of content).
- Usability/CRO (conversion rate optimization).
- Analytics which tie it all together (focused on measurement of goals/conversions/value of conversions).

SEO isn't about two or three big trends (uh-oh, I failed to mention mobile in my list!). Really, it's about what it always has been: indexation, content, and links.



Dixon Jones

Marketing Director, Majestic

Everyone else is going to shout “Mobile First” and I am sure they are right, but for me? Meh. I think that was all so last year. After “Mobilegeddon” I am not going to bend again just for AMP.

For me, I think the move toward understanding Entity Search will start to focus the minds of SEOs. Google stopped the Freebase engine with 1.8 Billion entities in it and I know Bing have more. This is NOT a database that is going away... but it is a database that is getting harder to see and therefore to affect.

In short: if your business is not seen as an “entity” that can be described with one word for being remarkable at something, then you will never be mentioned in a Siri search, or Cortana, or Alexa, or OK Google. You will

never get that little knowledge box that appears in the right side on certain searches.

This is important to start figuring out. It's not about "keywords." It is about being the stand out leader in the field for, at the very least, your business name.

What one thing do you really stand for? How can you provide structured data that supports that theory?

Figuring that out is hard enough. Figuring out how Google agrees with you to the point at which you are mentioned in an "OK Google" response is quite another.



Ryan Jones

Manager Search Strategy & Analytics, SapientNitro

I think the biggest trend will be SEO continuing to merge with UX, content strategy, and other forms of what we call "real marketing."

Search has moved on from relevant words on pages (don't worry, though, they're still important) and is more about helping users accomplish a task – so the experience matters too. Whether it's mobile-friendly, speed, overlays, or anything else, we're seeing Google focus on the search experience in addition to the words on the page and the links.

I think that "how we search" will continue to adapt with more technology like smart assistants and the internet of things, but "why we search" will still revolve around users wanting to solve problems. That's where our focus should be: helping users accomplish their tasks.



Julie Joyce

Owner, Str0ud LLC and Link Fish Media

For 2017, my primary area of focus for all clients will be addressing mobile accessibility and optimization.

I want to make sure sites can perform well in mobile search. Usually this is not something major that I focus on with link development, other than ensuring that the links we place can indeed be easily accessed on mobile devices.

Sometimes the mobile versions of a site are much smaller, which can hurt our potential for mobile traffic if the pages our links are on don't appear here. So I'm planning to implement more mobile search into our company's link efforts to make sure we don't lose those opportunities.

For my clients who don't do much link development with us, my goal is to make sure their sites are optimized well for mobile. I have one in particular that is so old, it will probably have to be completely redone as nothing renders properly on any mobile device. They're still doing well in mobile search, but the user experience, once you get to the site, is absolutely atrocious so I want to fix that so we aren't losing quality traffic that could convert.

My secondary goal will be focus more on building a web presence outside of just the actual sites themselves. Social platforms are important for many, if not most, clients right now, and the traffic we're seeing from those sites is pretty fantastic.

In some cases, traffic from social networking sites has overtaken search engines like Google. I want to continue that, but also diversify.

I'd love to see more clients that regularly contribute to other sites and get traffic from those sites. In my case personally, a large percentage of my agency's traffic comes from my monthly link column on an industry site. Having a diverse set of traffic sources is always important – but perhaps even more so in the coming year.



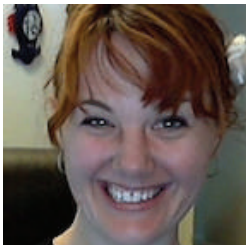
Michael King

Managing Director, iPullRank

Michael King Brands should focus on speed, structured data, and mobile-friendliness. All of the things that Google has been pushing for as of late, come down to those three things.

Whether it's AMP, Progressive Web Apps, App Indexing, App Streaming, the switch to mobile-first indexation or even Firebase, they have been preparing for the future of search which is the predictive assistant that we're seeing in Google Now, Assistant and Home.

What makes you positioned for visibility (or audibility) is that your pages are fast, understood by Google, and mobile-friendly.



Cindy Krum

Founder & CEO, MobileMoxie

I think the big new thing in the SEO world will be Progressive Web Apps (PWAs). Google is pretty bullish on this because they make websites behave more like apps – including having app icons on a phone desktop, and even

working offline. They tend to load faster, like an AMP web page too. It brings a lot of good things together.

If you have an existing responsive design website, it is not that hard to start making updates that will help it transition to being a PWA. You can add and link an app manifest, which is very easy, then add and register a 'service worker' which is a bit harder, but still not super hard. Once this is done, you have a basic PWA.

Malte Ubl, from Google announced a new way to use AMP code to make PWA's work in mobile Safari, which has historically been one of the biggest stumbling blocks for developer adoption of PWA set-ups.

Google has announced that they are going to let PWA's side-load their APK, which means they are treating them even more like apps. For example, this is the logical first step that Google would have to take before doing something like allowing PWA's to rank in app-packs or letting PWA's compete against for rankings and attention in the Google Play store. Likely, this is a significant part of the 'mobile-first' indexing and directional significant for the future if SEO.



Casey Markee

Founder, Media Wyse

Google's push to Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP), its recent war on mobile interstitials, its embracing of a mobile-first index, HTTPS, and page speed are all about one thing: increasing UX.

With mobile traffic surpassing desktop traffic worldwide in 2016 and a rising majority of all searches now having a local intent, I suspect you will continue to see a Google acceleration in 2017 to those site pages and results that load fast, promote a superior UX experience, and provide a quick answer to an identified query.

I believe you will see this most visibly in 2017 with AMP content. Google's Maile Ohye presented some great data on AMP at State of Search last November and commented that in one study Google recorded a 23% increase in mobile users in the seven days following an initial AMP visit. Google's tricked out their AMP site with [a lot of case study information](#) and it should be required reading for all SEOs as we head into the new year.

The biggest complaint about AMP in 2016 was that most site owners "didn't get it" and that the actual lightning bolt symbol for AMP mistakenly communicated a danger subtext that may have mistakenly caused people on mobile, especially older baby boomers, to associate AMP content as "risky."

As such, don't be surprised if in 2017 you see a much larger marketing push by Google to educate the general online audience about what AMP is – and that includes more visible SERP labeling.



Jesse McDonald

Director of SEO, Geek Powered Studios

Two major trends in 2017 will have the biggest impact on SEOs.

1. Google's Mobile-first Index

At the end of 2016, with the announcement of Google's switching to a mobile-first index by Gary Illyes at Pubcon, many SEOs began speculating how this would impact the industry and its best practices. Over the past two or three years Google has been putting a huge emphasis on mobile which has caused more SEOs to bring this to the forefront of their website building process.

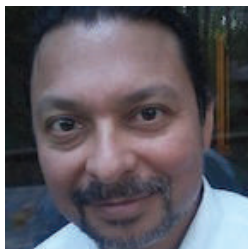
Now, with the index switch, SEOs will have to think about what content they are putting on a site based on what the mobile user will be seeing. One of the biggest implications of this will be SEOs thinking about pages with less content. SEOs are going to start really having to figure out what will best

answer users questions while simultaneously pleasing search algorithms. This is probably the first time in the history of SEO where the practitioners will actually be taking a “less is more” approach to page building.

2. Link Building in the Real-time Penguin Era

The last quarter of 2016 also brought an update to Google’s Penguin algorithm (finally!), along with the news that Penguin will now run in real-time. This meant two things: we’ll never have to wait for another update to the algorithm and that SEOs will be able to qualify links a little bit better.

Because the algorithm will adjust results immediately after a page and its links are crawled, SEOs will be more inclined to try new link building tactics to find new opportunities. Theoretically, if a link is built and ends up hurting the page it was built to, repairing that damage will be a little bit easier now that you don’t have to wait for the algorithm to update. Hopefully this will get more people within our community talking about innovative link building strategies –and a more informed community.



Roger Montti

Owner, martinibuster.com

The SEO industry has many old ways of doing things to leave aside in order to catch up with what the search engines are doing today. In 2017 we will see a more technical approach to SEO, one that is based less on speculation and more on science. I will list a few examples of outdated SEO practices that persist but must go away.

Keywords

In 2017 we will see a re-evaluation and overhaul of how SEO is practiced with regard to keywords.

In 2016, John Mueller revealed that keywords in the title and heading area were not critical to helping a site rank. This was not news to anyone who studied what is ranking in the search results.

But it was big news for the SEO community because it overturned a fundamental SEO practice related to how keywords are used. This rule dictated that a properly SEO'd web page contained its keywords in the title tag and in the heading elements (H1, H2, etc.).

The SEO industry likes neat recipes. But the manner in which Google and Bing are handling keywords do not fit into an easily reduced frameworks that prescribe liberal salting of web pages with synonyms in the heading and title elements. That's just the old style SEO.

Link Building & Domain Authority

This trend of letting go of old SEO practices and learning new ones will be a major one for 2017. Perhaps the biggest change will be in link building. Rote practices such as heavy linking to the home page will begin to go away as more people realize that Google is ranking web pages and that votes for web pages tend to count more.

Linking to the home page to build up a domain authority is a practice dating back to 2002. That's the "trickle down" theory of linking building that holds that if you link to the home page the ranking power will trickle down to your inner pages.

In fact, Gary Illyes has recently stated that **Google does not use any form of domain authority**. The concept of Domain Authority does not match up with how Google actually ranks web pages. That statement throws into question the concept of building up a website's authority in order to spread the PageRank to the inner pages and make them rank.

If you read how websites are ranked, one thing becomes clear, that every statement out of Google has always supported the idea of building web pages that people like and attracting relevant links to those pages.

This is important because it means that domains do not pass authority to inner pages. Individual pages stand or fall on their own. Google ranks web pages for their popularity and usefulness, not domains. So this idea that obtaining links to the home page in order to build up authority for the domain does not match up with the way Google ranks web pages.

Those are examples of rote SEO practices that will be re-evaluated as the industry begins to focus on becoming technically educated. The SEO industry must understand the state of the art of information retrieval in order to reconcile that to how SEO is practiced.



Brock Murray

Co-founder & COO, seoplus+

In 2017, think mobile first, always and often. Mobile optimization has swiftly transitioned from “nice to have” to the absolute core of SEO.

Thinking mobile-first means creating a mobile-friendly website that is lean, clean, and blazing fast while still containing all the core content you need to express your brand message to bots and users alike. Implement AMP and take advantage of Google’s prioritization of these pages.

Pay close attention to your user metrics. Don’t be afraid to reshape or axe pages that aren’t delivering an exceptional experience to mobile users.

Condensed content will be really important in 2017, so start thinking about an “elevator pitch” for your key content. Say what you need to say in digestible bites engineered for the mobile audience.

Make mobile the core of your SEO strategy in 2017, and it will pay large dividends – especially if your competition is stuck in the past.



Seth Nickerson

Senior SEO Strategist, Vertical Measures

In 2017, authenticity will be more important than ever. We live in an era when every piece of content that is published online is under intense scrutiny.

From phony news sources to bogus children's toys (Fisher Price pub set), there's reason for searches to be incredulous.

My concern is this: if the authenticity of content is frequently called into question, accuracy and quality of search results will be further undermined. Recently, Google's focus on authenticity (truthfulness) has centered on news content. In fact, they've been asked by industry news outlets several times about its plan to handle fake news, but they have not responded.

Here's the real issue: Google's traditional algorithm components can't vet whether something is real, accurate, or true. Last year, Google published a paper on Knowledge-Based Trust, that dealt with the trust element of its algorithm, but the paper admits that the algorithm does not penalize sites for a lack of facts!

This makes our job as marketers much more difficult. Trusted content earns backlinks, encourages shares, and most importantly, it generates leads and sales. If people are so skeptical that they will no longer share your content or link to it, chances are it will not perform well organically.

And, if your product is seen next to an obviously fake news item, how does that reflect on your brand? Not well. To some viewers, it may convey to the reader that your brand endorses something that **couldn't possibly be true.**

Remember all that talk years back about staying out of "bad neighborhoods"? That rule of thumb may extend to more than just backlinks.

I don't have any detailed answers to the authenticity challenge just yet, but I think it is going to be incredibly important to be as trusted and authoritative as possible in 2016.



Lee Odden

CEO, TopRank Marketing

What will be big in 2017? Greater search keyword/topic integration in overall marketing.

As a reflection of customer interest and demand, keyword data is valuable far beyond content optimization and should be used to inspire everything from social media monitoring and engagement to influencer research.

Marketers that align content topics, contributors/co-creators and distribution across channels will realize the “best answer” effect for both customers and bots.



Chuck Price

Founder, Measurable SEO

Expect to see a continuation of user experience as the primary driver of online marketing efforts in 2017. Always keep the user in mind – and never allow yourself to become distracted from the basics.

Google has invested heavily in **algorithms (Panda, Penguin, Hummingbird)**, as well as RankBrain in recent years to improve the quality of search results. In short, these algorithm updates have raised the bar for companies and websites looking to perform well in organic search.

We are much closer to a time when all the search results on page one deserve to be there. That’s a radical departure from the days when link volume and keywords alone determined winners and losers.

Despite the advancement in the core algorithm, one can still rely on the three-legged stool analogy to achieve online success in 2017.

Leg 1: Technical SEO / On-Page Optimization

It's important to start with a technically and architecturally sound website. This is the foundation for the rest of your online marketing efforts. There are several guides online to help you with this, including SEJ's [guide to performing a technical SEO audit](https://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-site-audit-technical/177235/). Failure to address website issues is akin to sailing with your anchor down.

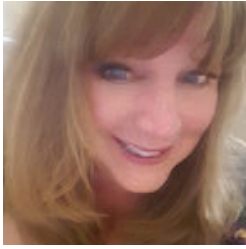
Leg 2: Content Marketing

Developing content has come a long way from writing spammy 300- to 500-word articles (one for every keyword you wanted to rank for). With the focus on user experience, the typical length of an article is often 10X the old standard.

Content marketing isn't about quick wins. It's about creating useful information on a regular basis that people need and are looking for. One caveat for 2017: keep in mind the growth of voice search when developing your strategy for next year.

Leg 3: Link Building

Despite what you may have heard or read, **link building** will be no less important in 2017 than in previous years. Google has publicly stated that links are among the top two ranking factors. They built an algorithm to fight link spam. Short of issuing a press release, it couldn't be any clearer. In fact, a strong argument could be made that editorial given links from thematically related websites are more important than ever before.



Kristine Schachinger

Founder & CEO, Veters Agency

The year 2017 is going to be the year of mobile. That is old news right? Well yes and no. I know we have heard that before, but in the past “mobile first” was primarily about making better versions of our sites for mobile devices.

This coming year it will no longer be just about mobile readiness, but about the intersection of mobile with SEO and ranking signals. Why? Google is setting its sights not only on mobile first, but mobile only.

With this expanded focus, mobile has now become a much broader and deeper playing field. This is especially true with regards to the technical aspects of a website’s development process and how your site is implemented.

For instance, starting Jan. 10 Google will “penalize” sites using intrusive mobile interstitials. This is not the first time this has happened, but from all indications this time is sure to be a much stricter application of the algorithm.

So if your site has these experience killing roadblocks next year, you can expect to see a devalued position in their rankings – that day or the next. Now there are some interstitials that are OK, but you have to know **which ones** and act before then to avoid the downturn in traffic if not.

So what’s next?

The next update to most likely follow will be Mobile First Indexing. This is not just an update, but a systematic change to how Google evaluates and positions websites.

Mobile-first Indexing is where Google will use mostly mobile signals to “rank” your site. The process is still in development at Google, so we don’t know all the changes yet.

However, the most significant part of this update is that the content they use to rank your site will only be what is found in your mobile version, even for desktop users. Not just content either, most SEO signals will also switch from desktop to mobile only.

This means whether the user is on desktop or mobile, the algorithms will primarily use these signals from your mobile version to position your site in the search results. Now, this is less of an issue for responsively designed sites and much more a problem for m., however everyone needs to evaluate their mobile site for potential performance and indexing issues. We don't currently have a date for launch, but we know that is the direction Google is moving and it needs to be addressed in the near future.

The next step in the year of mobile will be the optimization of sites for not only typed, but voice queries. Although desktop search has not depreciated greatly, mobile search has skyrocketed and with that voice search.

So are you optimizing for desktop, mobile, AND voice search? What about search where there is no desktop or mobile device, but just audio like Amazon Echo and Google Home?

Now these devices are not garnering large search share at this time, but it is important to keep the factors in mind when you are in a vertical (e.g., weather, movies, reviews) that will become highly relevant to these home devices.

So while 2013-2016 was the year of mobile sites, 2017 will be the year of mobile SEO with dramatic changes in how sites are accessed, found, and ranked. Best suggestion? Make sure business owners get a mobile site audit before the rollercoaster ride begins. It is going to be a big year of change.



Grant Simmons

VP of Search Marketing, Homes.com

Mobile is, was, and will be the major trend for 2017, with the mobile-first index influencing SEOs to look at the following as key considerations and focus:

Content

Is it easily consumable on a mobile device? Whether copy, video, image, audio or interactive, content must be ideated, designed and developed with a mobile-first mindset.

Usability

Does your content work on any sized screen, on any mobile device? And does your definition of “mobile” include anything that’s not desktop or laptop? Cars, appliances, smart screens, and smarter presentation mediums to come. Will your content, message and brand offerings present a usable interface whether touch, tone, gesture or voice? Search engines will judge ‘value’ of search visibility through a user satisfaction lens.

Utility

Does your brand offer an experience that provides a valuable service, valuable resource and/or a value-added component to people’s lives, so that you can build a tangible or virtual connection between the consumer and your brand? Search engines will judge “value” of search visibility through consumer behavior and interaction.

Speed

Is your delivery of content, usability, and utility with an underlying focus on speed, so that the consumption is not only easy but also exceeds user expectations and/or provides so much value that your user is willing to wait a reasonable time to be absolutely delighted. Search engines do (and will continue to) judge “value” of search visibility through reasonable speed of delivery/user signals of “reasonable.”

And lastly... 2017 will be the year of self-driving cars. So apply everything above to location-awareness, context-sensitivity, captured audiences, and connected commuters. Consider and plan how your brand, content and message will be valuable and contextually relevant enough to show up in search there.



Aleyda Solis

Founder & International SEO Consultant, Orainti

2017 will be the real, huge year of mobile-first search.

Companies should really prioritize mobile in case they haven't yet done it: with the mobile-first Google index, AMP, app indexing, and increasing importance in the future of Progressive Web Apps.

Besides mobile, and as a bit of a consequence, targeting voice and conversational search and implementing structured data will be fundamental.



Kaspar Szymanski

SEO Consultant, SearchBrothers

Kaspar SzymanskiThe foreseeable future of the SEO industry and the dominant trend in 2017 remain under the influence of what Google sees as critical factors from a user point of view: speed and security are on top of the list.

Moving to HTTPS in 2016 still optional, albeit hugely adapted by innovators, has become a business investment any website build to perform in Google organic search will have to follow through with.

Let's be clear: in 2017 HTTPS will be a standard and any website not embracing it will inevitably fall back in organic search.

Speed is the other decisive factor Google and other market leaders believe makes the difference between success and failure.

Whether AMP, the efficient yet very restrictive technology favored by Google will prevail remains to be seen. Having said that, making a website load faster already has a profound impact on its visibility in Google Search and there's no doubt that this factor will only grow more important.

Lastly, over prioritized website performance and security, off-page signals are not to be neglected. Google clearly stated that no more official Google Penguin updates are to be announced. Which also means more are forthcoming, although we will never know when they hit the market. Building links for converting traffic –under no circumstances for PageRank – remains an important cornerstone of any successful website competing in a challenging market.



Marcus Tober

Founder & CTO, Searchmetrics

Here are three SEO trends to watch in 2017:

1. SEO is Going to be More Diverse

I believe in 2017 the diversity of how SEO is seen and done is going to change even more. Search is and will be omnipresent and is baked in into new consumer products like Google Home or Google Assistant.

But what changes is how the search results will be computed based on the device and how it will be presented to the consumer. Where there was a high diversity and likelihood to get a “click” when I just appeared on first page, now as a business you should be relevant and straight on the point.

Of course more devices open new doors for more traffic. But the SEO strategy needs to be adopted to these new opportunities.

Without knowing what exactly is going to come, I see that Google is going to offer public APIs where companies can hook into and have for example structured data offered so that through one of these devices the user can order products and pay without even seeing the SERPs or even the page. Very exciting.

2. Mobile-first Will Have a Huge Impact

Focusing on mobile is a no-brainer. Google announced that they are going to change their crawling and computing to mobile-first, desktop second beginning next year (Q1). That will be a huge change, because even if you have responsive websites, not many companies are ready for mobile-first, some are not even ready for mobile.

So, we will see many SEOs around the mobile topic, which includes content and the structure of the mobile page. The reason is simple.

When many companies built their mobile page, they often build m.(DOT) domains and altered the content according to the mobile purpose. Lighter page, less content.

When Google now starts to switch to mobile first, Google doesn't get the full content to evaluate the desktop content without crawling it. That could create a lot of issues.

I don't believe that Google wants to crawl both mobile and desktop and build two completely separate indices, but with this very common example I'd like to see how Google is going to handle it. This will keep us busy beginning of next year.

Once the dust is settled we will push mobile more and focus on the mobile user journey and what that means for the content that we optimize for mobile. I think this is really the key, because it influences the first mentioned trend, too. When Google can crawl and understand the content and ties that

to many queries and many different devices, companies can win and grab much more traffic than before.

3. Desktop Isn't Dead!

Now everybody is excited about mobile. But the conversion rates on mobile are still much lower compared to desktop.

Companies that leverage the user journey through mobile and desktop – and optimize their content to be found not just on mobile – will win more customers in 2017. We SEOs often just think about the next trend, but really we shouldn't forget about desktop.



Anne Ahola Ward

CEO, CircleClick

Three SEO trends to watch in 2017:

1. Technical Performance

This will be the biggest driver for 2017 SEO success. With projects like Google's AMP and Facebook Instant Articles, we have to assume the users will get spoiled and expect better of us. Load fast or die.

2. All of the Screens!

While the Nth screen is not new to paid advertising, it's still new to SEO. Marketers who embrace the Nth screen will reap the SEO rewards.

The key to 2017 SEO dominance is to think multi-dimensionally, think beyond what is available today, and how you can take those new ideas and market them to the masses on all the screens.

3. Data Integrity is a Must

Stop co-mingling your SSL and non-SSL, people! You're only ever going to have bad data showing too many direct visitors.



Mindy Weinstein

Founder & President, Market MindShift

Search engines have continuously taken steps to better understand users, which is something we should also be doing. In fact, it is something we should have been doing from day one. Along the same line, below are two big trends for 2017:

More People Will Use Voice Search

Talking to our phones is nothing new, but now we are also talking to other devices too, such as the Amazon Echo or Google Home. We are even talking to our computers, with Apple's voice-activated virtual assistant Siri as a prime example.

The number of people using voice search is going to continue to increase. This growth in voice search means that it will be more important than ever to know your target audience.

For instance, you must determine how they describe their wants and needs and the terms they use. Make sure your website content captures these conversational queries and addresses them.

Content Focused on User Intent Will Win

We spend a lot of time researching keywords and determining the exact words and phrases we want to target. While keyword research is critical, there must be an extra step when optimizing the website for those keywords: determining user intent.

You need to identify what searchers expect to find when querying your keywords. Plus, you should know the type of content the search engines are ranking in the top positions. Do the pages address the “know” intent or

“buy” intent? This research gives you an indication of what is being rewarded in search results and what users expect.

Every year in search is exciting and 2017 will be no different!



Rob Woods

SEO Consultant, Riseform Digital Marketing

Rob WoodsI believe that 2017 will begin the “rise of the machines” in search marketing. Whether it be devices like Google Home and Amazon Echo, vehicles integrated with similar technologies, or personal assistants on mobile devices.

This will mean that it will become even more important to rank first or among the very top results to have any success. The responses returned by queries on such devices will not be a local three pack and 10 blue links but likely no more than one or two of the “best” matches for the user’s query.

Even for queries on search engine sites or apps on mobile devices, it will become more important to be among the top very few organic results. I believe Google’s move to a “mobile first” index is the first step in moving towards conversational (voice) search across a multitude of devices.

In my opinion, this will actually mean an increased emphasis on technical SEO. A multitude of sources claim that technical SEO is “dead” but it will become even more important in 2017 to focus on technical elements like page speed, mobile compatibility, AMP, and semantic markup.

With the increase of devices returning the “one correct answer” many more queries will be answered by a single knowledge graph result as opposed to a larger body of results. It will be more crucial to be the one “best” result for a query.

This will impact local SEO to an even greater extent. Ask your “assistant” where the best Chinese food is within 10 miles and it’s not going to return 3, 5, 10 options but likely choose one and give you directions.

While I believe for the present that links will continue to count as “votes” for the quality and authority of a site, for at least the near future, going forward an even more important factor for success will be for your content be the very best answer to the query implicit in the searcher’s intent.

As a result, I believe that keyword research, especially that research which uncovers the question behind a user’s intent, will continue to be very relevant. It will be less relevant to ensure that a particular keyword is placed on a particular page in order to get that page to rank for that keyword.

Of greater importance will be to ensure that your content is the very best, most thorough, most useful, most readable answer to what the searcher is truly looking for. The move toward quality over quantity will become more pronounced as there are less “results” served for a given query.

Truly understanding the potential consumers of your content will become more important, including conducting user surveys and creating searcher personas.

OK – the experts have spoken. Your turn! What do you think will be the SEO trends to watch in 2017?