THE DECLARATION OF SEO

6 FUNDAMENTAL SEO TRUTHS TO LIVE BY

BRUCE CLAY®

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A DECLARATION OF SEO

Friends and Colleagues,

What you are about to read is not an ebook. It is a document to live by. It includes the guiding principles that every website owner, website publisher and search engine professional should adhere to when creating or implementing a website and/or SEO program.

In the course of business, it becomes necessary for both brands and SEO professionals to take responsibility for the performance of the websites that they run and manage. Therefore, we have created a declaration of SEO.

We hold the following six SEO truths to be self-evident ...

1. SEO needs to be a strategic initiative across the company.
2. SEO should beat the competition not the algorithm.
3. SEO done right cares about content architecture.
4. It's not the job of SEO to make a pig fly.
5. Cheap SEO is a near-death experience.
6. SEO is done when Google stops changing things and all your competition dies.

In support of this declaration, we need to pledge as a community that we will uphold and follow these truths, so that our websites can compete and perform in the organic search results, thus impacting our businesses, our livelihoods and our lives.

Bruce Clay
President of Bruce Clay, Inc. and "Father of SEO"

1 | SEO NEEDS TO BE A STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ACROSS THE COMPANY

It was some years back when the team at Bruce Clay Inc. delivered a 100+ page SEO audit to one of the largest research and review sites in the automotive sector.

We proposed a number of improvements including radical siloing of their massive website content. We said that if they implemented every recommendation in our strategy, it would generate a significant increase in traffic. So much so that they'd need to upgrade their servers to handle the load.

It was quite a risk for the client to take, but they got behind it.

Every SEO recommendation, no matter how large or small, would be implemented. They knew in order to pull it off that everybody — from the executives to the marketing and IT teams — would need to be a part of it.

CMO directive: "Think SEO" or work somewhere else.

If we care about our business, our jobs and our family, then we care about SEO. But not just us ... our entire company must be involved. SEO needs to be a natural process throughout our business, not a seldom remembered nice-to-have. Our one voice is not enough. We cannot always be in the room, so we need others to think and act SEO. Every person that leads a meeting should ask this simple high-impact question: "How can SEO help?" United is how we win so other employees should get on — or get off.

The chairman of the board called a company meeting. He announced that search engine optimization was a key strategic initiative for the company. Everybody needed to be on board ... or, essentially, they could find another place to work.

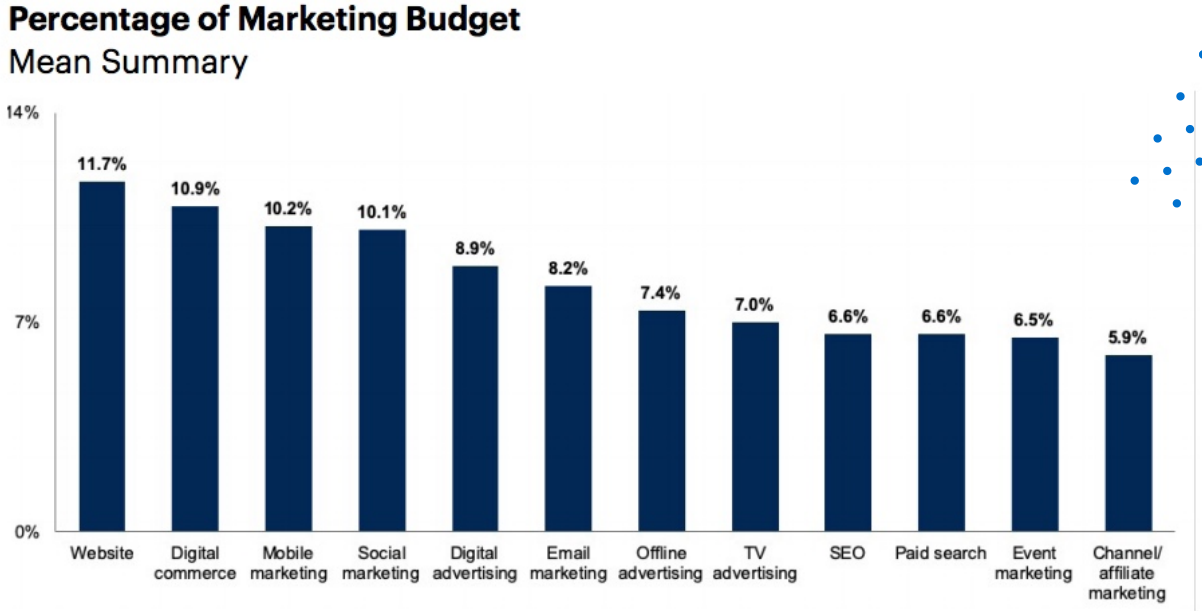
After implementing the SEO program, then came the results: a 900 percent increase in traffic within the first week. And the site's prominence continues to this day.

SEO TAKES COMMITMENT

Commitments cannot be half-hearted and succeed. With SEO, you're either all in or you're out. CMOs and other top decision makers must understand that SEO is a key strategic initiative for any company today.

Unfortunately, a 2019 Gartner study found that in North America and the UK, less than 7% of the marketing budget is allocated to SEO. Yet most of the budget goes to the website. Notice a gap in thinking?

Figure 7. North American and U.K. Investment Across Marketing Channels



Source: Gartner (September 2019)

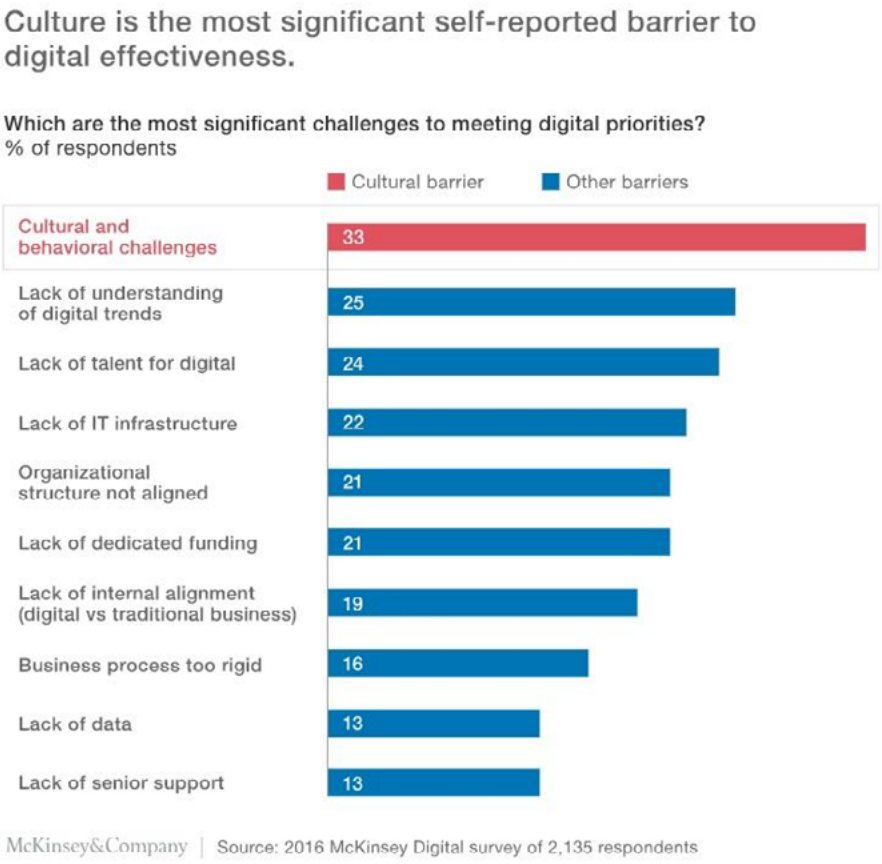
In fact, Gartner reports that “nearly half of brands lack a discernible search strategy; only 10% are maximizing the opportunity search offers.”

This is a problem when organic traffic drives more than half of the traffic to a website and up to 60% of the revenue versus other channels (per BrightEdge research in 2019).

OBSTACLES TO “THINKING” SEO AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

One issue that many forget is that SEO is a long-term strategy. So they invest in other channels that offer quicker gratification.

Balancing different marketing strategies is a CMO’s job. But it’s imperative to not sacrifice long-term sustained search traffic by focusing too much on alternatives.



Another issue: siloed thinking. McKinsey reported that cultural and behavioral challenges, which include functional or departmental silos, have the most impact on the ability to meet digital priorities.

So how do you overcome these challenges if you’re not getting buy-in or support from the top down just yet? Sometimes big change starts with small steps.

1. Educate, Educate, Educate.

And not just the immediate marketing teams, but other teams that need to be a part of getting SEO things done. This is the reason that we at Bruce Clay Inc. give new clients a seat in our in-person SEO training class. It's not uncommon for clients to bring folks in from teams like web design, for example.

2. Prioritize Recommendations

Work on the most impactful SEO tasks first — the ones with the most potential to move the needle. Make it clear which tasks are most important to tackle first and how to prioritize everything else from short-term to long-term tasks.

3. Support Recommendations with Google Guidance

Show examples (help files, tweets, videos, etc.) of Google recommending the thing you are trying to get done. This is a great example from Google on why site performance matters.

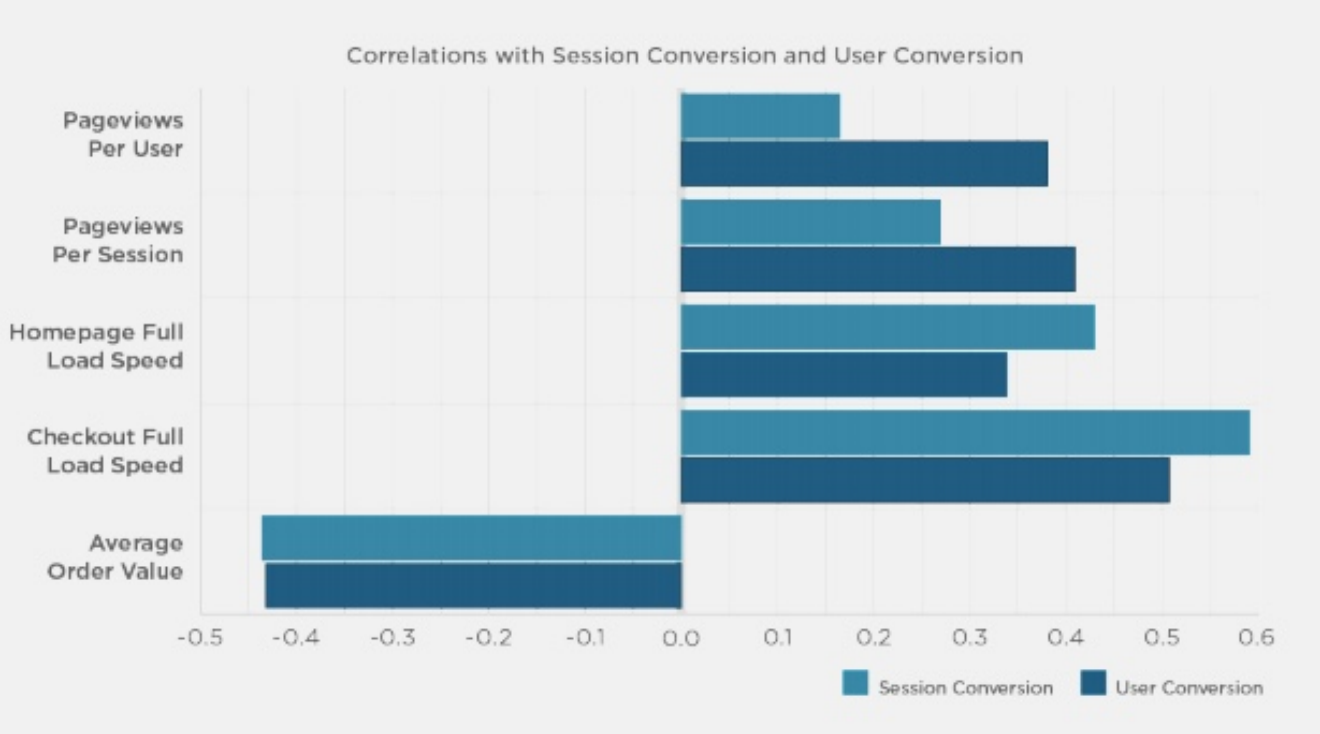
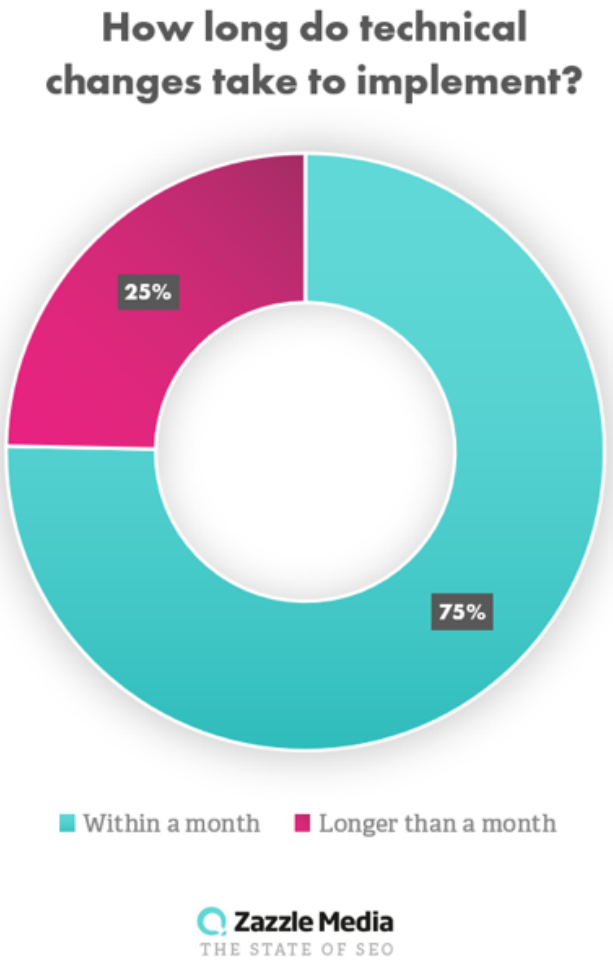


Image source: 2016 Q2 Mobile Insights Report, Mobify

Make sure to distill the “why” behind Google’s recommendation. Whether you’re talking to a client or your own internal team, you want to make it easy for your intended audience to understand and get on board. Also think about your audience when you talk about results.

For instance, if you’re recommending a change that will improve site performance, the UX department will respond to user experience improvements, while the C-Suite will respond more to revenue growth.



4. Get Creative to Move SEO Changes Forward

Technical fixes can be hard to implement. That’s because web developers and IT folks are often focused on other things.

UK-based Zazzle found that 25% of those surveyed waited more than a month to implement SEO technical fixes.

To help move technical SEO changes forward, speak the language of your audience. Instead of requesting enhancements to the site, put SEO technical fixes in as bug reports. Fixing bugs are typically KPIs developers care about and want to stay on top of.

(The key is not to put anything in the report you have to defend. A bug is a bug, it’s not “losing traffic to competitors” or anything else.)

5. Think Strategically

We must think and plan strategically to get things done. Ask these questions for buy-in on SEO initiatives so they get done:

- Why do you want to make the change?
- Know and show the reasons behind the SEO recommendation.
- Is your goal concrete and measurable? Support your recommendation with Google guidance and data, case studies for similar organizations, websites or initiatives, and the KPIs you will track.
- What is the actual plan? Detail the steps necessary to reach the goal.
- Who can support you in your plan? Identify which colleagues, teams or departments will need to be involved to get the recommendation done, and how.
- How will you show your victories? Make sure that the small and big wins are in front of everyone, all the time. This helps build trust and confidence in the SEO process.

McKinsey also has some great insights that are worth looking into on how to make a change within an organization, including how to motivate people.

At the end of the day, an SEO strategy is not really just about "doing SEO." It's about driving growth and remaining competitive. And above all, it's about putting the user first.

These are the ideas that need to be communicated and bought into for SEO to succeed.

If you're doing search engine optimization, with every decision you need to ponder: How will this decision impact SEO's ability to put the user first and drive results?

- Redesigning the website? Ask how SEO needs to be involved.
- Writing content? Consider how it can be optimized to fit the SEO strategy.
- Launching a new product? Involve SEO sooner in the planning.

SEO needs to be a natural process throughout our businesses, not a seldom-remembered "nice to have."

> An SEO strategy is not really just about doing SEO. It's about driving growth and remaining competitive. And above all, it's about putting the user first.

The CMO or the SEO cannot always be in the room, so in order to support SEO as the key strategic initiative that it is, we need others in the company to live and breathe SEO. One voice is not enough.

United is how we win, so others in the company should get on the bandwagon ... or get off.

2 | SEO SHOULD BEAT THE COMPETITION, NOT THE ALGORITHM

Sometimes in life, you only have to be the least imperfect to survive.

Take, for example, the story of two friends on a camping trip. They get to the campsite and set up their tents in the same manner. Then they both store their food safely away from wildlife in the same bin. Later on, they eat the same soup dinner, cooked the same way in the same pots.

Then suddenly an aggressive bear comes into camp. They start to run. This is where it matters that they do things differently. Neither of them is an Olympic runner, but only one of them has to outrun the other to survive.

This story is not unlike competing to survive online. You don't have to be an Olympic SEO contender, you just have to be least imperfect to compete in the search results.

SEO should beat the competition, not the algorithm.

The rules of the SEO game change every day for everyone. Our job is to figure out the changes and adapt and respond faster than the competition. We're not here to beat an infinitely broad and constantly changing algorithm, but we are here to outperform all of the other sites competing for our keywords. That really is "the SEO game."

Understand the rules, become an expert, think fast, keep your eye on the ball and play to win.

WHY "LEAST IMPERFECT"?

The goal of SEO should never be to beat an algorithm that is infinitely large. Not only do we have to contend with an algorithm that has hundreds of signals on its own, but we also have to deal with the fact that each searched keyword has a different intent, and that intent biases the algorithm.

Since every keyword has its own intent and thus its own algorithm, there are as many algorithms as there are keywords. Add to that the bias of RankBrain and an individual's web history on a query, and truly, multiple algorithms exist for each search.

It is virtually impossible for an SEO professional who doesn't know exactly what's in the algorithm to figure out the algorithm. So instead of beating the algorithm, we need to beat the competition.

> Have no fear of perfection—you'll never reach it.
>
> *— Famed surrealist artist Salvador Dalí*

And the way to do that is to be least imperfect compared to the competition.

Keep this in mind: Every website is imperfect against the Google algorithm. When Google evaluates which pages to serve in its search results, it chooses the least imperfect compared to others for that search.

It is easier and more manageable to focus not on the algorithm, but on the things your competition is doing. Then outdo them through quality SEO strategies.

SIZING UP THE COMPETITION

There are a great many ways to assess one webpage or website against another. Of course, the first thing we need to know is which webpages are ranking for our keyword terms. That's our competition.

And then we need to dissect them. Just some of the things we look at when it comes to dissecting the competition include:

- On-page factors
- Off-page factors
- Technical factors
- Quality factors

Essentially: What is it that's helping them to rank so well?

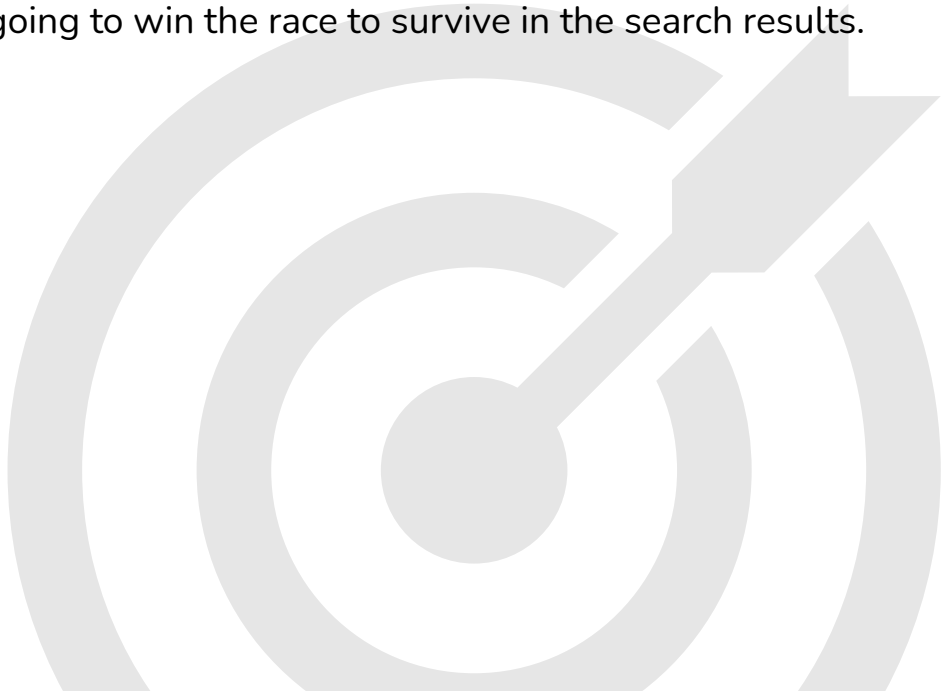
Now, a lot of this takes the right tools but it also takes the right expertise. When you're analyzing your competition by keyword, you're not always going to follow best practices prescribed by tools or industry research.

> Focus not on the algorithm, but on the things your competition is doing. And then outdo them.

A prescribed SEO recommendation based on research across millions of keywords may say, for example, the optimal meta title is eight words. But upon further analysis of the search results for your keyword set, you might find the top-ranked pages to be very different.

Tools and data can prescribe recommendations but they cannot replace expertise. This is key when examining the competition and outdoing them to be least imperfect.

At the end of the day, the webpage that is least imperfect compared to the competition is going to win the race to survive in the search results.



3 | SEO DONE RIGHT CARES ABOUT CONTENT ARCHITECTURE

Parents of picky eaters all over the world have long fought the battle of food presentation, going to great lengths to make mealtime fun and enticing.

For some, this means making sure each food on the plate is separate and not touching. For worried parents, recent research sheds some light on this. No, your kids don't have some strange obsession. They are simply trying to get a better understanding of what food is actually on their plates.

Annemarie Olsen, one of the researchers in a study by the University of Copenhagen, says it can be as simple as they "prefer to eat the different elements in a certain order or that the clear delineation just provides a better overview."

This is not unlike how website users like to consume content and how Google likes to crawl and index it.

SEO done right cares about content architecture.

It is no longer about having content that is slightly related linking together. Our content needs to be a clear and deliberate hierarchy when there is depth on a subject. Content needs to fit with parent and children pages in the hierarchy, going deeper, not just making weight. Our content needs to be a part of the whole, a part of the answer, not just another random piece layered into a website. To SEO, organic siloed content is king.

THE BEST WAY TO ARCHITECT A SITE

SEO siloing is an age-old technique that we have been implementing at Bruce Clay Inc. for over 18 years (we invented it in 2002). It implements the advice that cutting-edge SEOs give on content today. It supports relevancy, quality, hierarchy and much more.

And did you also know that this technique supports what Google has been recommending from the start?

Siloing structures website content by grouping related webpages together in categories. These categories support both desired keywords/search terms and the expertise of a website.

- It's siloing that creates proper content architecture that helps both users and search engines.
- It's siloing that creates relevant content for people to find in the search results and to spend more time on a site.
- It's siloing that demonstrates authority when it comes to being a subject matter expert on a topic.

Content architecture in SEO is as important as ever. As search engine algorithms refine their view of quality results, websites must work harder to be relevant.

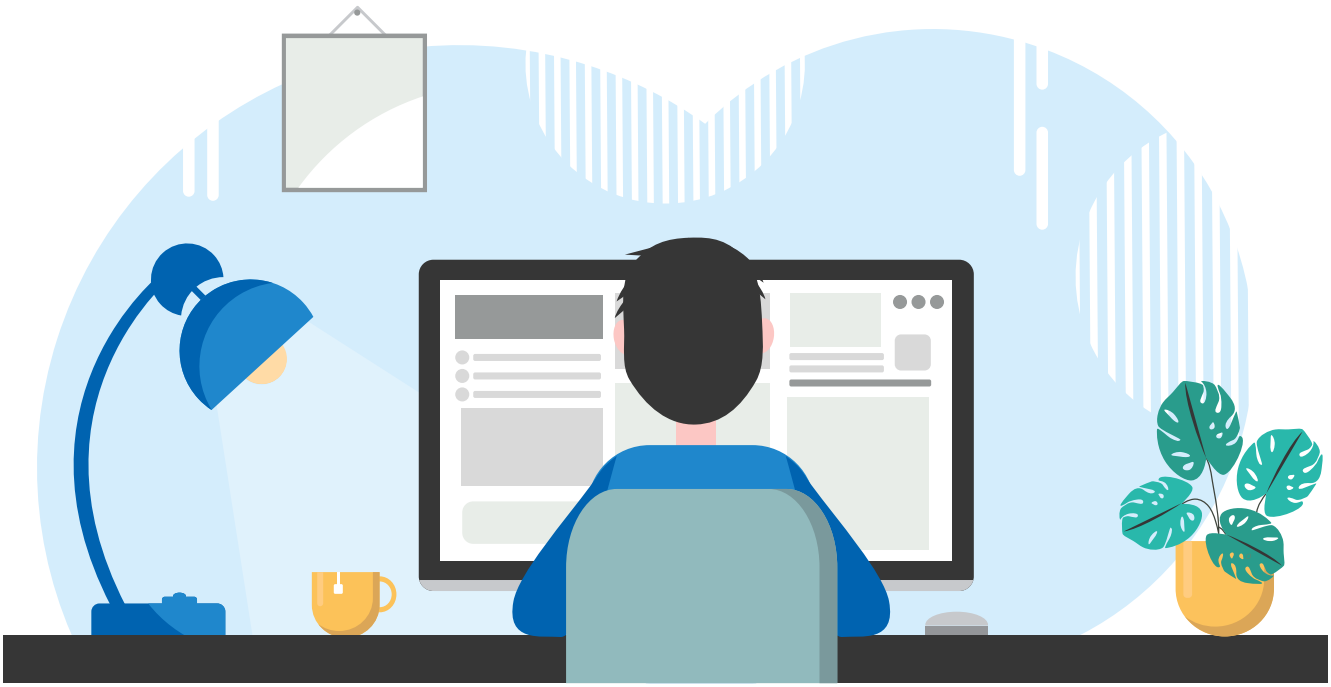
Siloing is the foundation for creating an expert website that drives more visibility in the search results and more traffic to your site.

Plus, your content needs to be a part of the whole answer for searchers. Remember: Google looks at the whole of the website to determine if it's relevant.

Your goal with content architecture? Ensure that your users don't have to go anywhere else for more information on the topic. Plain and simple.

Providing the whole answer is especially key when you consider how RankBrain can take into account user engagement with the search results.

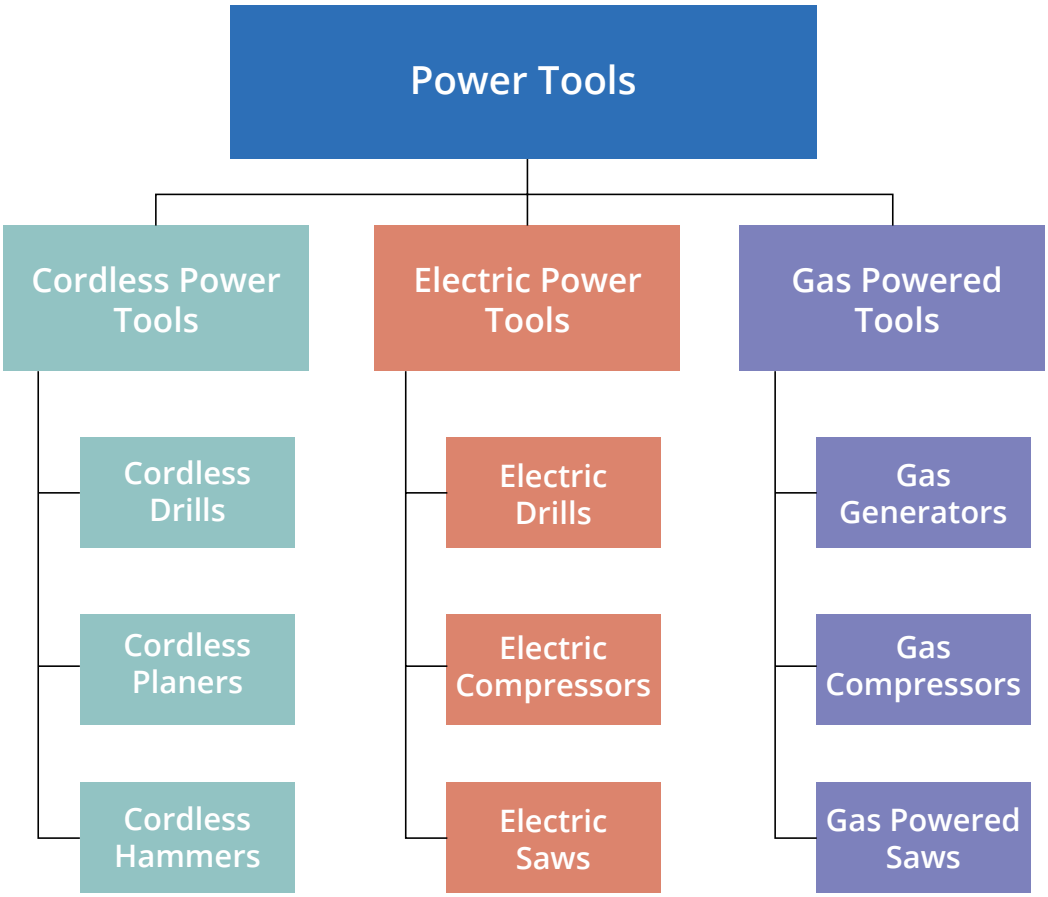
> The navigation of a website is important in helping visitors quickly find the content they want. It can also help search engines understand what content the webmaster thinks is important. Although Google's search results are provided at a page level, Google also likes to have a sense of what role a page plays in the bigger picture of the site.
>
> — *Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Starter Guide, Google*



CREATE AN ORGANIZED WEBSITE

Moving about a website has to be easy for both users and search engine bots. So organize your content in a clear and deliberate hierarchy based on how people search.

For example, a power tools website might organize its content into silos as follows:



Content should be interlinked in a way that shows users how they can get around to find more of what they are looking for and communicates to search engines what the topical theme is.

This hierarchy creates depth on a subject, and, naturally, relevance to search engines and users.

> Make it as easy as possible for users to go from general content to the more specific content they want on your site. Add navigation pages when it makes sense and effectively work these into your internal link structure. Make sure all of the pages on your site are reachable through links, and that they don't require an internal 'search' functionality to be found. Link to related pages, where appropriate, to allow users to discover similar content.
>
> *— Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, Google*

ELEVATE WEBSITE AUTHORITY

The content that populates your website silos also needs to provide tremendous value, not just weight.

Google uses things like its Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines as part of a feedback loop for how it constructs its algorithms. One of the ways Google assesses the quality of page content is to determine how authoritative it is.

Just some of its guidelines for expert content include:

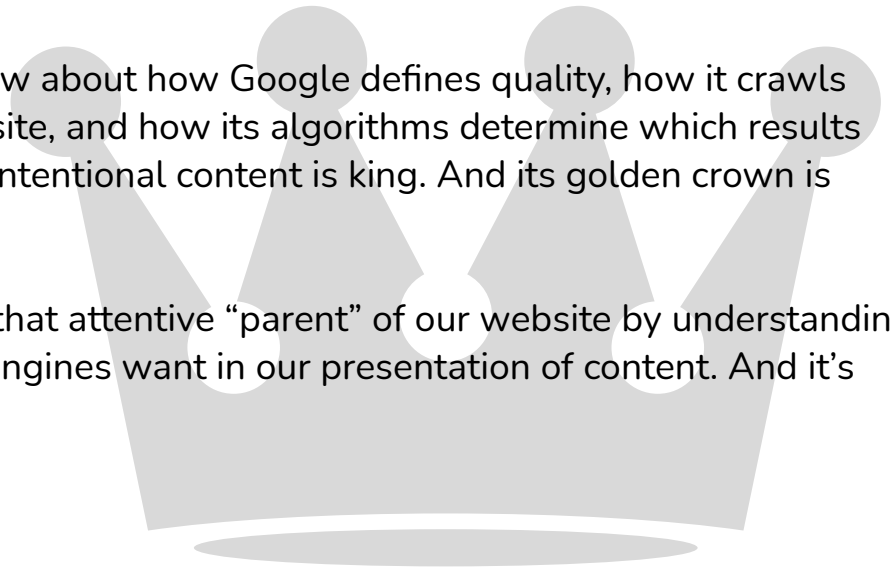
- "Written or produced in a professional style and should be edited, reviewed, and updated on a regular basis."
- "Contain factually accurate content presented in a way that helps users achieve a better understanding of events."
- "Represent well-established scientific consensus on issues where such consensus exists."
- "Come from 'expert' or experienced sources that users can trust."

When you have organized content that provides the whole answer to users, you are providing a good experience and elevating the website's authority.

MAKE YOUR WEBSITE ENTICING TO CONSUME

With everything we know about how Google defines quality, how it crawls and understands a website, and how its algorithms determine which results are best, we know that intentional content is king. And its golden crown is content architecture.

So we must work to be that attentive "parent" of our website by understanding what users and search engines want in our presentation of content. And it's not a one-pot meal.



4 | IT'S NOT THE JOB OF SEO TO MAKE A PIG FLY

The ugly truth is that SEO cannot do the impossible. If a site is not functioning well technically or has content that's irrelevant, optimizing it is merely putting lipstick on a pig. That pig will never fly in search results.

The fundamentals of SEO will always include a well-functioning website and relevant content. Both are required to create a good user experience. And as we know, one of Google's main goals is the user experience.

We have a responsibility to help the sites we manage not be pigs. That means maintaining them on a technical level and keeping content up to date. These are survival tactics in today's competitive landscape. Here's why.

It is not the job of SEO to make a pig fly.

No matter how much you dress up the pig, it still is a pig, and it will always be a pig. And with Google saying that maintenance is an important ranking factor, your slow, old pig just won't fly. As SEOs we need to take responsibility for our sites, to see them for what they are, and to maintain and especially to help them evolve. Old sites are simply not trusted to have current information, and they are certainly not going to be shareable go-to sites. All businesses need to maintain existing content, not just expand — or you eventually look like a pig and traffic loss is inevitable. Think of maintenance as a survival tactic. And I believe that SEO has the responsibility to call a pig a pig.

AN UNMAINTAINED SITE WILL NOT FLY FOR LONG

In its Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines, Google makes it clear that unmaintained sites are doomed sites.

To put this into perspective even more, a “lowest” rating is the lowest-of-the-low rating on Google’s quality scale. That “lowest” rating is given to sites and webpages, according to Google, that are “without some sort of beneficial purpose, including pages that are created with no attempt to help users, or pages that potentially spread hate, cause harm, or misinform or deceive users.”

In a world where Page 1 of the search engine results page requires survival of the fittest in an ecosystem that contains more than 6 billion indexed webpages, a “lowest” rating means Google will work to weed that site out of the search results as best it can.

> “Some websites are not maintained or cared for at all by their webmaster. These ‘abandoned’ websites will fail to achieve their purpose over time, as content becomes stale or website functionality ceases to work on new browser versions. Unmaintained websites should be rated Lowest if they fail to achieve their purpose due to the lack of maintenance.”
>
> — *Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines, Google*

Will some pigs fly under the radar? Yes, but they will eventually need to deal with site quality issues. Once rankings start to fall, traffic erodes. And traffic erosion is a slow death.

> We should always be looking at the technical aspects of the websites we manage.

When there's a gradual traffic decline, we always look at site maintenance issues first. Does the technology need an upgrade? Are there pages that once had high traffic but rankings have declined?

SO DON'T PUT LIPSTICK ON A PIG

The best course of action is to avoid ranking and traffic problems altogether. We should always be looking at the technical aspects of the websites we manage. Are they fast enough? And do they create a good user experience?

Also, creating more and more content but ignoring old content is a sure fire recipe for problems. Every business should delegate half of its content budget to maintain existing content, not just create new pages. That goes for core webpage strategies like siloing, too.

Today, we are focused on quality, not necessarily quantity.

5 | CHEAP SEO IS A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

There's a phenomenon that occurs with near-death experiences. Many people report having seen a bright light at the end of a tunnel or so-called angels. This is often accompanied by an overwhelming feeling of pure love.

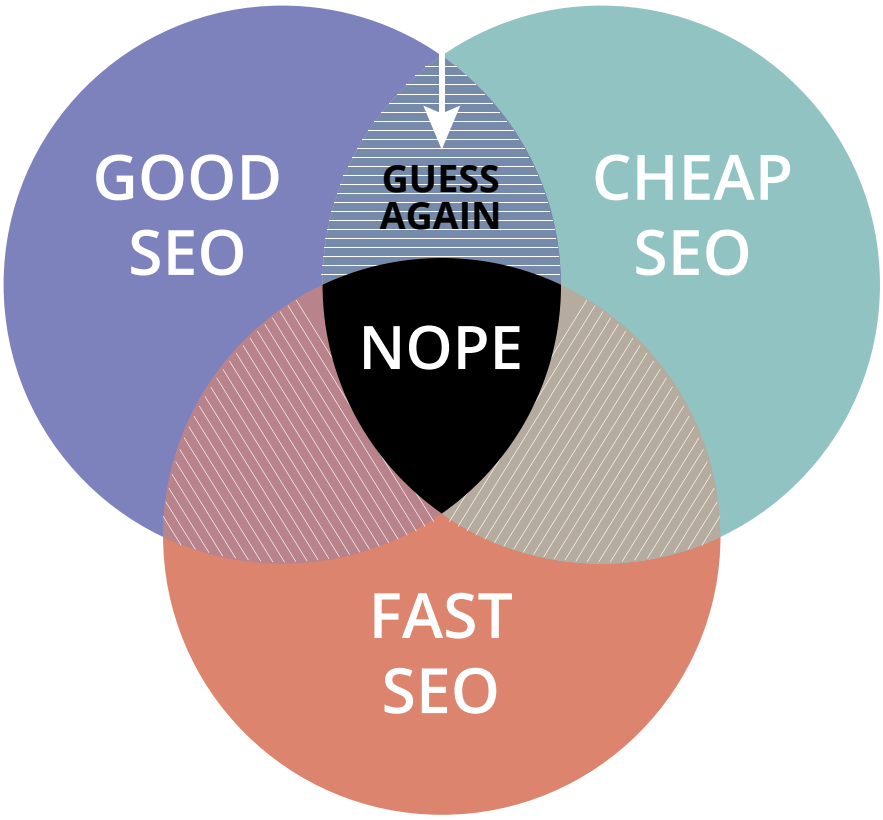
But that's not what happens when your business dies. It's often a slow, excruciating experience that involves a decrease in online visibility, traffic, leads and conversions. There is no bright light at the end of the tunnel but you may feel something: overwhelming desperation.

There's a saying in the project management world: good, fast, cheap — pick two. You can usually get something that's good and fast (like Chinese food delivered from UberEATS) or cheap and fast (a service on Fiverr).
But good and cheap is harder to find.

Cheap SEO is a near death experience.

There are only three things: quality, speed and price. NEVER sacrifice SEO quality ... always go with seriously seasoned experts. That leaves us with speed and price. It is a simple lever and the cornerstone of our pricing: pay more = go faster. We should always buy quality, not price. To us, the questions should be: How fast is fast enough, and is a cheap service of any value? We are hiring a brain surgeon to operate on our company's digital future ... do we hire the cheapest or the best? Do we pick success or a near death experience? Isn't the digital future of our company on the line? Choose wisely.

Want good SEO, fast? Double up on your budget for more resources. Want cheap SEO, fast? That's easy, but you get what you pay for. Want SEO that's both good quality and cheap? Sorry, but that's not an option.



We're living in a time where products and services are brought to market that give regular folks access to high quality for a small price. So it's no wonder that many businesses expect the same from SEO. But SEO is not one of those services.

Cheap SEO is a near-death experience. It's an impending death of your website and your business. The way to avoid death is superior quality, and that comes at a price.

But understand that you're not just throwing money into a black hole. Quality SEO pays dividends in more traffic, good user experience and conversions, which equals money.

The bottom line: Don't sacrifice quality SEO if you want to be in the top five results on Page 1 of the search results.

HOW TO KNOW QUALITY SEO

Henry Ford once said that "quality means doing it right when no one is looking." But how do you know if you're getting a quality SEO service?

The bottom line is that expert SEO advice will come from expert sources. But it's up to you to do your due diligence.

Just some of the things to consider when assessing SEO vendors:

- How long has the SEO vendor been in business?
- Does the internal team have sufficient skills and experience?
- Does the company demonstrate thought leadership through speaking engagements, expert content or training?
- Does the company have a good reputation among its peers in the industry?
- Has the company received any awards or accolades?
- How involved is the company in the industry's professional organizations and/or professional community?
- Does the company have SEO methods that are keeping within Google's quality guidelines (aka "white hat" practices)?

Remember: Two different SEO professionals could look at the same website and see totally different things. Analyzing a website, pinpointing issues and prescribing solutions comes from experience.

For more on hiring a quality SEO service, check out Google's advice for hiring an SEO agency.

ADDRESSING BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

Budget constraints are one of the top five reasons that SEO projects fail. As an example with the COVID-19 crisis and many recessions before that, companies face decreased budgets.

When looking at your long-term business and SEO goals, the question you have to ask yourself is: How long am I willing to wait until I beat my competition? This determines your budget.

There's no question these are uncertain times. But how we as businesses and leaders proactively prepare for the future will set us apart.

Consider this scenario: You're in a race. You have nine other competitors, and you're all running as fast as you can. But you are in last place. At this point, there's no way you can catch up.

Suddenly, up ahead, you see the front runner fall. And then each of your competitors, one by one, begins to stumble.

You're far enough behind that you can avoid the pileup. What do you do? Do you slow down, stop, or pick up speed and take the lead?

This is the scenario we're in right now.

Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic is a blow to many businesses. But for the companies that can weather the crisis, now is the time to focus on winning the race in the search results.

In this moment, you have a golden opportunity to completely change the course of your company's success online by investing in quality SEO strategies. Those who do will reap the rewards.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND ON SEO

The general recommendation is that businesses should allocate five to 10 percent of their revenue to SEO as a cost of marketing. But every industry is different and every economic disaster has its own rules.

But we think it is always wise to double down on marketing, especially SEO, if you can afford it.

Some industries invest a lot more in SEO because that is what it takes to compete. In other sectors, less money may go a longer way.

If your competition is getting most of their traffic from organic search and you're not there it's only going to get worse for you. By the way, organic search is the dominant marketing channel for most industries at 53% on average, according to BrightEdge.

> Sadly, COVID has been a blow to many businesses. But for the companies that can weather the crisis, now is the time to focus on winning the race in the search results.

And yes, you can hire a cheap service and get more hours. The question is: Will it be high value for your business? Is it enough to beat your competition?

Not only that but cheap SEO can cost more in the long run. Many businesses have paid for low-cost SEO only to have little results, or worse, have their near-death experience.

After the Great Recession, we at Bruce Clay Inc. saw too many clients come in who had paid for cheap SEO to save money, and were facing search engine penalties we had to fix.

The quality is going to be proportionate to your investment. So you have to ask: What is valuable to your business in the long term? Is it to remain competitive?

If so, you have to be prepared to compete, and sometimes it is to work smarter. And that means investing in quality SEO services.

6 | SEO IS DONE WHEN GOOGLE STOPS CHANGING THINGS AND ALL YOUR COMPETITION DIES

What a wonderful world it would be if succeeding on the web meant hitting publish on a website, sitting back, and watching the traffic and leads flow in.

Many spend countless hours perfecting the design of a website — the layout, the colors, the logo — but pay little attention to search engine optimization. Still a great many others check off items on an SEO checklist, then never make another SEO decision again.

SEO is only “done” when people stop searching, Google stops changing things, and all your competition dies.

SEO is done when Google stops changing things and all of your competition dies.

Until then, we must contend with the eight algorithm changes each day, a million competitors for every separate keyword, and technology upgrades that if not done show us as out of date and not worthy.

Until then, we must make continuous, strategic decisions about our websites. We must take into account things like multiple changes to search each day (and growing), a million competitors for every separate keyword, and technology and content upgrades that if not done make our website irrelevant.

That's why the secret to SEO success is longevity. Let's look next at why.

MULTIPLE CHANGES TO SEARCH PER DAY

In 2019 alone, Google "ran over 464,065 experiments, with trained external Search Raters and live tests resulting in more than 3620 improvements to Search." That could mean up to 10 changes per day on average.

It's a stark contrast to the mere "hundreds" of changes to search we were so used to hearing about for years.

The types of changes Google makes vary from the smallest tweaks to major infrastructure changes. Some start out as minor updates that happen from time to time, and others impact the core algorithm.

> It's not just position No. 1 we're after anymore — as if that wasn't hard enough.

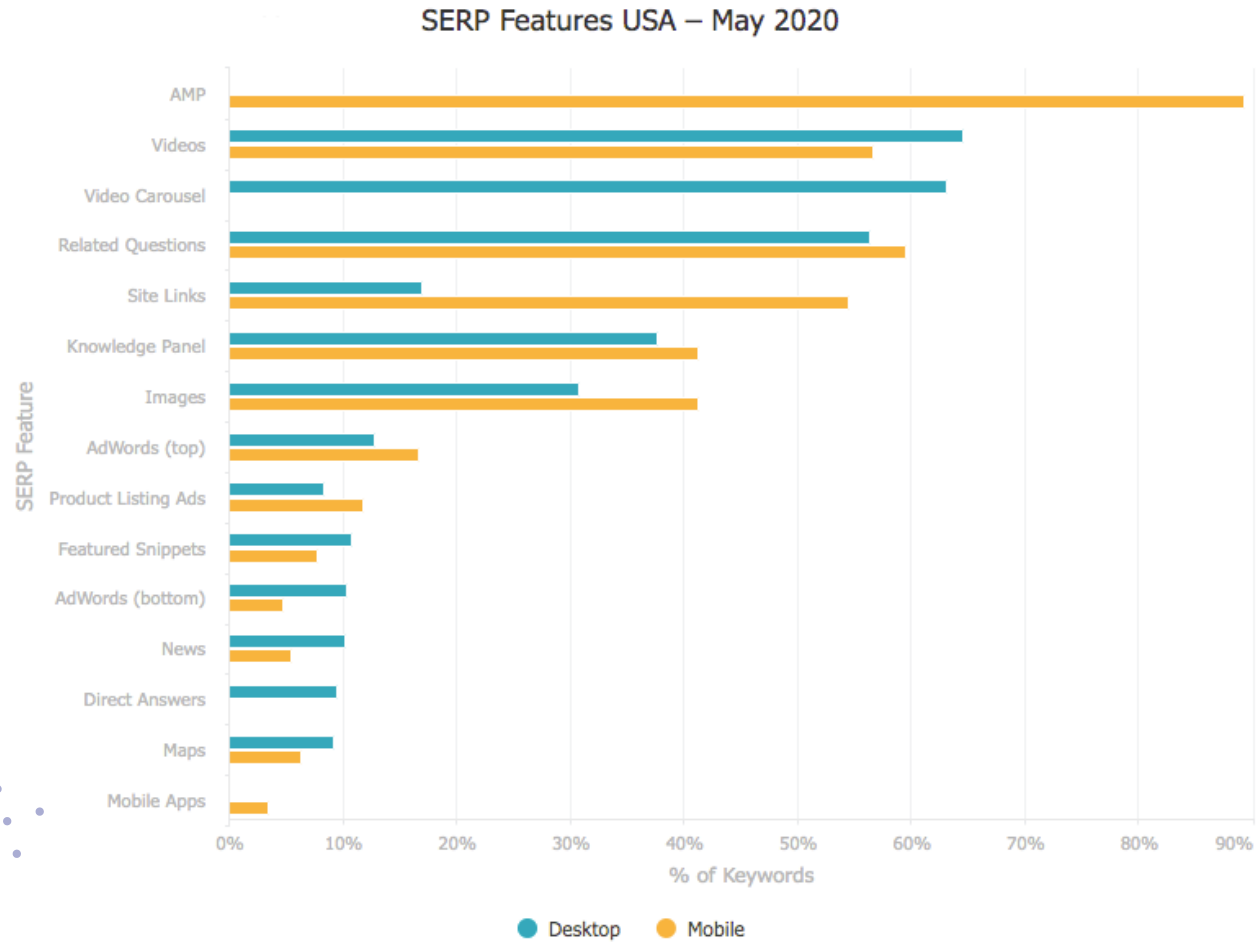
But as we know, every change can have an impact.

Here's an example of what we're up against. For years, we've had data that says Position No. 1 gets the most clicks. And that may still be true in many cases.

But now we're facing more challenges in getting those clicks. Notwithstanding the impact we are seeing with COVID-19 on traffic for some sectors, consider also that some results are now competing with Google itself for clicks.

On top of that, you have the AI-powered RankBrain, which people speculate looks at time spent engaging with a webpage (dwell time) in order to determine if the intent of the query was satisfied by the result. Then future search results will be biased towards satisfying that intent.

So you can begin to see that it's not just position No. 1 we're after anymore — as if that wasn't hard enough.



SERP Features Monitor, Searchmetrics

Millions of Competitors

You can't do a Google search these days without finding endless pages of results. Even "hamster sweaters" returns about 1.8 million. Needless to say, whatever you're doing, there is competition.

Now, look at a target keyword set. How many results are you competing with to get on Page 1 of the search results for each keyword?

Add to that the fact that for many, keywords will have a local component. And so you now have to be an expert in local SEO and everything that comes with that, too.

Not to mention all the other search verticals that show up as elements on the SERP for one keyword. And by the way, we now need to master or at least keenly understand each element and search vertical on Page 1 of the search results to be competitive.

Neverending Maintenance

As mentioned earlier, an unmaintained site is a doomed site. This is true in both the technology that's driving it and the content that's on it.

On the back end, the long list of considerations for SEO includes things that might impact the speed of a site.

Think about servers, content delivery networks and AMP (how about a 15% increase in SEO traffic when reducing user wait times by 40%?). Or common challenges with content management systems like duplicate content, pages that are hard to crawl, and general disorganization.

> Unmaintained sites will not find favor in Google's eyes.

Keeping up with the latest technology that impacts SEO is a full-time job in and of itself. Unmaintained sites will not find favor in Google's eyes. On the other hand, when we maintain both content and technology, we are well on our way to achieving expertise, authority and trust with Google.

SEO Is About Longevity

In our 24-plus years in SEO, we have only had to reinvent and recalibrate about 24 times. The only thing that is constant in search is change. If you are good at the game, you win. If you do not adapt, then you die, but SEO does not.

Some worry about having to recalibrate every year as changes accelerate more and more. That's fair. But the issue of recalibration is not as hard as some think. If you are good at what you do, think two years ahead, and anticipate the big changes now.

Remember, SEO is forever — there is no "end," and it takes a commitment to see results. This core concept can help us think beyond the title tags that need to be changed this month or site speed that needs to be tackled the next, so that we can accomplish more.

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About Bruce Clay. Inc.

Since January 1996, Bruce Clay Inc. has been helping websites rank in search engines. Founder and president Bruce Clay is known as the “father of SEO” and credited with coining the term search engine optimization.

Today, Bruce Clay Inc. (BCI) is a leading search marketing company providing SEO services and consulting, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising management, content development, and social media marketing services. The BruceClay.com website has become a trusted source for how-to information and insights about search marketing. More than 5,000 attendees worldwide have learned SEO from Bruce Clay’s acclaimed SEO Training courses, which are offered several times a year in Southern California as well as at search conferences and through the Bruce Clay international offices.

Headquartered in Southern California, Bruce Clay Inc. also has offices serving markets around the world.

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