
NEWSLETTER



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IN 2014

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Good content:

- Drives traffic through searches related to your industry
- Builds authority in the eyes of users and search engines
- Increases engagement with your brand on social media

So what can be termed as good content?

Content in 2014 will not be just limited to the pieces of text you will add to the website or blog. You will need to think outside of this and make sure to develop a range of different media like videos, presentations, whitepapers, infographics, how-to's etc. These become your assets and can be one of your best sources of links. Basically, you have to provide content which is useful to the end user.

Not to forget your site pages, you should be constantly improving your static assets (especially landing pages) to improve conversions and provide the best user experience. Engagement and conversion metrics are not just important to your bottom line, they're important to Google providing the best results.

Link Building

Link building is still the mainstay of how major search engines rank websites but the interpretation of link data has changed ever since the Penguin update was launched.

Bad link building is one of the easiest ways to get penalized, but good link building can be the hardest part of your job (even more so in certain niches).

So, what can be considered definitely as a bad link or a link that should be "disavowed"?

- Site wide footer links / multiple links from same domain
- Blogroll link
- Forum posting / profile link
- Free directory links
- Links from same class C IPs
- Links from spun content
- Links to different industry websites from the same article / content
- Links from link-farm directories / pages

Links from non-English sites (for example - .ru, .jp, .cn, etc.)

If you have fallen prey to this techniques earlier by some unethical vendors who claim to be experts, it is always advisable to get rid of such links either manually or disavowing the links via Google Webmaster Tools.

From our end, we have adopted the below techniques as far as building links is concerned.

Backlink Analysis - Balancing of followed links to nofollow to have a natural profile. Check backlinks and traffic of sites from which we are getting links to find and weed out sites which are themselves hit by this update.

- **Link Velocity** - The first and most significant observation that stood out among sites which were affected by Penguin update was link velocity. We have reduced our link velocity since the update. Getting too many links quickly will be flagged easily by Google.
- **Anchor Text Diversity** – Continue to vary anchor text and lower the % of specific key terms focus. We have been doing this since 2012 and will continue to work the %'s.
- **Link Diversity** – Sites performing well have good link diversity including links from Guest Blog Posts, info-graphics, videos, local business directories, presentations, coupons submissions etc. Since Google prefers a diversified link profile. We recommend getting links from these sources. Most of these sources are also now part of new deliverables.

Apart from this, to get quality links you can also consider link reclaiming. Link reclaiming is the act of finding sites that mention you, your brand or a related story and simply asking for a link.

There are a number of ways to find opportunities for link reclamation:

- **Web Mentions** - [Google Alerts](#) is the most popular tool for monitoring mentions on the web, but Moz has also just released an alert function for their Fresh Web Explorer. Set up an alert for your brand name and when a site mentions you without linking send them an email.
- **Images** - Use Google's [Search by Image tool](#) to find out where people are using your images and ask for a link credit, this works almost 100% of the time.

Videos - If you are hosting video on YouTube you can use their analytics platform to see where your videos are being watched on external sites. Visit those sites and ask for a link to your website to supplement the video.

Local

Something that we have personally seen develop over the past two years is the influence of location on search results. Google are actively expanding the number of searches that trigger a local result as they understand which searches are relevant to a location.

You need to be clear about the locations your business really serves and try and make sure you don't look more local than you really are.

Schema is one way to show search engines where you are based and which areas you serve. Apart from this, you can also look at some local on-site changes like creating GEO based landing pages for each location you serve, optimizing your Google Places page by filling out as much information as you can and getting genuine reviews from your customers, implementing rich snippets and obviously altering the page titles and meta descriptions to feature the service and areas you serve.

Mobile

Mobile data has almost overtaken desktop. Results are starting to deviate more from desktop as search engines try to improve the quality of results by presenting results that will work well on mobile. For example, a site that is created in flash will not rank if the searcher is using a device which does not support flash.

If your site is not mobile friendly that doesn't mean it won't rank, but it's always best to give the user the best experience. Google has officially declared in a [blog post](#) that having a responsive design is the best way to move forward. Having a responsive design also has its own benefits from SEO perspective.

Social Media

The final piece of the search puzzle is social. While there is still no direct link between social and ranking, search engines are increasingly adding social elements to search results.

Google uses Google+, Bing uses Facebook and both show reviews. Social proof is a great way to encourage searchers to click through to your site.

Social is also the best way to promote new content immediately to encourage shares, links and engagement.

We already have social media integration as a part of our deliverables. In addition, to improve social signals, instead of doing social bookmarking of the articles submitted we will be getting social signals to those articles which will include (either of) Facebook likes, Tweets or Google+ Votes. Client participation is encouraged.

We hope this post has given you something to think about for 2014. Start planning your strategy for next year and get ahead of the competition.

02 WHAT WILL 2014 BRING FOR LOCAL SEARCH

As opportunity grows for businesses to connect with customers via search, so do the challenges of determining the best approach. Here are a few local search happenings to expect in this year.

National to Local Approach for Brands

The idea of a coordinated national to local strategy will become a reality for more brands and local businesses in 2014. Many local markets (and vertical industries) are very competitive and keyword saturated, making it difficult for national and regional brands, as well as for independent business owners, to win the online visibility game on their own.

National marketers that depend on the success of independent business owners (franchises, dealers, contractors) will find they can create a platform effect with a coordinated national-to-local approach to SEO, social media and content marketing.

Mobile Optimized Websites

Making sure a business' website is mobile optimized might mean the difference between being found by customers on a mobile browser or not. With more consumers shopping via mobile, it is clear that site traffic is moving to mobile. So, being mobile-ready is a must.

In 2013, we witnessed [Google giving prominence](#) in mobile SERPs to local businesses that properly configured their websites for mobile devices, and this will be a growing trend in 2014.

Some websites could even be penalized by Google and the other major search engines if they're not optimized correctly. Also on the mobile front, strategies like click-to-call will become even more interesting as they play a larger role in the digital lead generation strategy for many business verticals.

Google will Focus more on Ratings & Reviews

In 2013, Google focused on ramping up its local ratings and reviews. It will continue to try to gather this rich, hyper local content from local consumers to grow Google+.

In another sign of this effort, businesses with verified Google listings will continue to reap benefits including having the ability to see customer ratings and reviews in their Places for Business dashboard and the ability to reply to those reviews.

This means:

1. It will be important for businesses to encourage their loyal customers to write reviews. Businesses must verify their local search listings appropriately on Google and the entire search ecosystem.

Social Media & SEO Continue to Converge

Impacting local search, social media channels will continue to help drive traffic to a business' website, building valuable links along the way and driving significant referral traffic. In general, this traffic is very valuable as time spent, number of pages viewed and bounce rate numbers are comparable to organic traffic and other (more traditional) sources of referral traffic like directories.

Social signals will also continue to impact search algorithms since search engines now weigh "people links" higher than other links that can be "managed" or paid. Businesses successfully connecting with customers via social media channels will build more loyalty, positive ratings and reviews, natural backlinks and these websites are more likely to have higher conversion rates.

We believe amidst challenges, there is huge opportunity for businesses and brands here. In fact we have revamped our local packages which will help you to expand your local search visibility and reach consumers across multiple devices and platforms. Contact our Sales department for a copy of the deliverables.

03 ENGAGEMENT ADS: NEW WAY FOR GETTING CUSTOMERS TO INTERACT WITH YOUR BRAND

Google has developed a new ad format called 'Engagement Ads'. The purpose of these ads is to provide an interactive way for users to engage with your brand. Google recognizes that branding is a different marketing objective than direct response, so instead of paying a cost-per-click, they developed a pricing model called CPE (cost per engagement). Measuring and setting cost per engagement goals now provides the ability to measure the success or failure of your branding efforts on Google and its related networks.

Engagement ads allow you to take your brand building strategy and link it with the power of the Google Display Network. These ads are cross device functional, ensuring a consistent user experience. This is important to note as users engage with brands in a multitude of ways. Potential customers get the same user experience regardless of whether they are on a desktop, tablet, or smartphone.

How Do Engagement Ads Work?

Engagement ads are very similar to display ads but are more interactive. The ad expands when hovered over for at least 2 continuous seconds. Once the ad expands, users can interact with your brand in a variety of unique ways. Interactions can range from watching a video, to playing games, or viewing a product catalog. The two-second delay eliminates accidental engagement and allows for more effective reporting.

Should I Be Using Engagement Ads?

The answer to this question is yes! According to Google, users are 10x more likely to interact with a brand through Engagement ads vs. a standard display ad. Since advertisers are only charged when an engagement takes place, there is now true cost accountability over digital branding efforts.

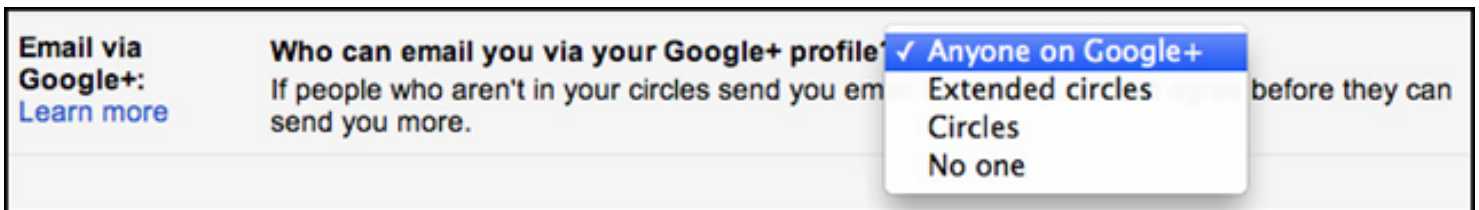
Engagement Ads Key Features -

- **Rich Creative Formats:** Easy to customize ad units allow you to enhance your message & reach your audience in new ways.
- **Engagement At Scale:** Reach billions of impressions a day through Google's expansive network reporting.
- **Accountable Branding:** Qualify customers by paying only when they engage.
- **Adaptive Learning:** Google network quickly adapts to show ads to users who are more likely to engage.

04 GMAIL'S NEW FEATURE WILL ALLOW ANYONE TO SEND YOU AN EMAIL USING GOOGLE+

From video technologies to Google glass, Google is now all set to roll out a new feature wherein Google+ will allow anyone to send you an email on Gmail. But wait a minute; don't you think that will bring in more of spam/creepy emails? Well, there is an option on Gmail to opt out of this feature too.

Now, how does this work? As you begin typing in the "To" section of the email, a drop down menu will appear with the Google+ contacts as well. A user can send you an email, but the real email id won't be visible to the sender until & unless you respond to that particular email. However, if you prefer to opt out of this feature, just head towards privacy settings, then move onto "Email via Google+" & change the default settings (Anyone on Google+) to extended circles, circles or no one.



Emails from any of your Google+ contact will appear in the "Social tab" rather than "Primary tab" only if the tab interface is enabled in your Gmail or else you are likely to receive all the emails just in one section. Looking at the positive aspect, this feature will be mainly useful to people who want to connect with their long lost friend or an unknown person but on the other end it might create havoc for users who are not so tech savvy. This will be particularly frustrating to the recipients.

Google+ will first enable the settings before introducing the new feature so that it doesn't become compulsion to all the users. There are a lot of people signing up for Google+, though many are still inactive but is it surely a win-win for Google+?