

SiteVisibility “Think-Paper”

Five Methods to Future-Proof Your SEO Campaign

July 2010



think
beyond
the clickTM

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Introduction

There's no avoiding that the last 18 months has seen some huge shifts in search, and old fashioned business as usual SEO is dead. What worked as a search marketing tactic to top Google's natural search rankings even a year ago may no longer have any impact.

Fool-proof strategies of the past no longer cut it anymore.

New and innovative techniques are required to gain the kind of visibility a company needs in order to get a positive return on investment in natural search marketing.

In this white paper we will highlight five of the biggest trends in search engine optimisation and show you how you can take advantage of these developments to ensure your SEO campaign is firing on all cylinders.

1: Real Time Search

Google are normally pretty tight lipped about their strategic direction, but in an interview with their VP of Search Product and User Experience Marissa Mayer for [The Guardian](#) showed surprising candour when she said,

"We think the real-time search is incredibly important, and the real-time data that's coming online can be super-useful in terms of us finding out something like, you know, is this conference today any good?" Mayer went on to say, "There's a lot of useful information about real time and your actions that we think ultimately will reinvent search."

So, if you weren't already concerned and captivated by the potential of real time search Google's interest should convince you.

So what is Real Time Search? What does it mean for marketers? How is it affecting the search results and what can you do about it? You've no doubt seen the increasing frequency with which real time search results are triggered in Google's results pages, as illustrated in the screenshot below. This is the tipping point of what has the potential to completely change the way SEO is carried out.

[Latest results for bp oil spill](#) - Pause

[MIKES WEB PAGE](#): TheAlexJonesChannel Paul Watson Breaks Down **BP Oil Spill** as A False Flage Event on Alex Jones Tv 1/... @mikes_web_page

[YouTube - Paul Watson Breaks Down BP Oil Spill as A False ...](#) - youtube.com

[Twitter](#) - 1 minute ago

[WITFNews](#): The once-endangered brown pelicans are again facing crisis – thanks to the **BP oil spill**. Details @ 7:15a on WITF 89.5 and 93.3.

[Twitter](#) - 7 minutes ago

[EdshelDee](#): **BP** buys top Google search result for 'oil spill'

[BP buys top Google search result for 'oil spill' - Telegraph](#) - telegraph.co.uk

Real Time Doesn't Just Mean Twitter

It's a shame, but a lot of people fall into the trap of when they talk about real-time search they just mean searching Twitter Tweets, actually it's far more important than that.

It's getting easier for everyone with internet access to publish content. This ease of production is making the content more topical. If it only takes you a few seconds to publish something you are going to cover what happens as it happens.

This presents a huge challenge to the current search paradigm.

*Google indexes what has been said,
real time search deals with what is being said.*

It's one of the few chinks in Google's armour and therefore has received a significant amount of attention from their product development team. But let's look beyond the hype and understand what we are dealing with.

There's been much made of Google's Real Time Search One Box (i.e. the content of the screenshot above) but actually Google's been making steps towards real time for some time. The three most well known of these tweaks are [Caffeine](#), [PubSubHubBub](#) and [Query Deserves Freshness](#) (QDF)

Google Caffeine

Most search companies have completely over-stated the significance of Google Caffeine changes which were mostly back end infrastructure tweaks. They are significant as a step towards real time though, as it reduces the load and resource required to spider content, an absolutely essential step if you want to be spidering every piece of content being created online within minutes.

Caffeine rewards those who publish the sort of content search engines love, but it won't cause significant changes in the search results like some people have claimed.

PubSubHubBub

A similar connected move is Google's ongoing involvement with PubSubHubBub. The crazily titled protocol is an extension of RSS and Atom feeds where the onus switches from Google constantly checking for updates to a website pushing content into Google's index when an update takes place. Again reducing the burden of spidering fresh content quickly.

If you're a publisher or producing content with topical significance you really should explore adopting this protocol to get an early mover advantage over your competitors.

Quality Deserves Freshness

Another real-time play has been having a significant impact on natural search results for some time is known as Query Deserves Freshness (QDF). Though slower than real time QDF is a concerted effort by Google to up their speed and make their results more topical.

QDF rewards recently published or indexed content with higher search rankings because they believe the content to be topical. However as the content becomes less topical its rankings correct to a position more reflective of the pages traditional algorithmic signals. This has been known by a variety of names; my favourites are the 'Google Honeymoon Period' or 'Reverse Sandbox'

QDF is an interesting and complicated topic in its own right but offers huge potential to deliver search engine traffic if it's part of your search engine marketing campaign.

2: Personalised Search

Too many people in the search marketing industry have their head in the sand about personalised search; there is a very real chance that every search user being presented with a completely unique set of results. This is a huge change in the landscape.

If a search marketing agency's role is to deliver targeted traffic and business through the search channel, we need to completely understand the potential implications this has.

What is Personalised Search

Put simply, Google has over the last few years changed the order of their search results based on a number of personalised results. Initially this re-sequencing only occurred for people signed in to Google accounts, but more recently this has also [been applied to people who are not signed in](#).

Theoretically this means that no two results pages are the same. If I search on my computer for the same term as you, I get different results. Though it has to be said, the actual variations are not always radically different.

Does it matter?

One important thing to understand when thinking about personalised search is that it is most likely to only really affect areas we search on frequently. Assuming someone is researching a new area of interest, their search results will be based on traditional algorithms as they have no data points to influence the results.

What does this mean if you operate in an industry with a mature marketplace? You will now find it hard to outperform incumbent market leaders for their existing customers. However as new customers enter the market place you'll compete on a more-level playing field.

Given the rolling 180-day cookie length, the importance of multi-touch marketing has increased. The onus is to receive visits to your site as early and frequently in the buying cycle as possible. Personalisation makes this type of marketing more appealing and so non-commercial visits to your website now can help you to rank higher for a commercial search query at any point in the next six months.

Historic SERP CTR really important

We believe natural search and pay per click should work in tandem. The two disciplines share a lot in common and personalisation is causing even more cross pollination.

One of the strongest personalisation factors is your historic click through rate from natural search results; This means learning from the best performing PPC advert copy and tailoring meta descriptions (the two lines of copy which appear below your natural search listing) accordingly.

Also you may like to explore Title tags which contain strong calls to action in addition to just keywords.

But I have Thousands of Visitors, How Can I Think About Them Individually?

It's hard to think about every visitor as individuals with unique personalisation paths, but you can use personas and demographics as a short hand. If you're carrying out persona development as part of your offline marketing this is another case where collaboration between agencies and in-house teams can lead to greater combined results.

People who take similar routes through the buying cycle will be very closely linked in terms of personality and background. These different personas will take a different route through your site, and your personalisation strategy needs to be comfortable dealing with both.

3: Micro-formats

Micro-formats have a bit of a stigma, they are seen by most strategic marketers as something technical which might not have the return on investment from implementation that they require, but over the last six months or so largely due to the increased use of [Rich Snippets](#) from Google it really should be on the top of any SEO to-do list.

Rich Snippets based on data in micro-formats come in a variety of shapes and sizes but some of the most prevalent are hCard which shows personal and address details like you can see in this screenshot of a search results page which pulling micro-format data from LinkedIn.

[Kelvin Newman - LinkedIn](#) ☆

Brighton, United Kingdom - Creative Director at SiteVisibility a Division of AI Digital Ltd
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[uk.linkedin.com/in/kelvinnewman](#) - Cached - Similar

Another common implementation which can gain extra screen real estate and attract more click throughs from a search results page is hReview which presents review data which Google can visualise on their results pages.

As you can see this extra exposure on a results page has huge potential to drive additional traffic to your site, so is a tactic that it makes sense to explore.

[Kodak Zi8 camcorder review - Pocket-lint](#) ☆

★★★★☆ Review by Stuart Miles - 3 Aug 2009

3 Aug 2009 ... **Kodak Zi8** camcorder - HD home movies from your pocket? <p>The follow-up to the Kodak Zi6, the new **Kodak Zi8** pocket camcorder from Kodak, ...

[www.pocket-lint.com/.../kodak-zi8-pocket-1080p-camcorder](#) - Cached - Similar

4: Social Search

I'll be honest with you social search is a term I'm not particularly comfortable with. It's being used widely within the industry with very little consistency in its definition and in many cases a lack of understanding of the way in which it impacts on natural search marketing.

So I'll avoid the buzzword jargon and explain how we understand social search and how we think you could be incorporating it in your campaign to deliver better results.

Google fundamentally works on a citation model. The more people who vouch for your credibility by linking to your site, and the more trusted the source, the more important your site is seen as. Google et al used links as the way of recognizing these citations.

However as more data and information is contained within social sites like Facebook and Twitter the traditional 'link graph' is being supplemented by the 'social graph' So citations without links will have the potential to improve your rankings, the context and sentiment of those mentions will likely have a similar impact in the future.

What this means is that you should be actively engaging with your communities where ever they congregate which may be a social network like Twitter or Facebook but could just as likely be a specialist forum or niche community site.

Social Search requires a sophisticated approach which acknowledges these complexities and understands how they interact with other disciplines like SEO, PR, advertising, Word of Mouth etc.

5: Video SEO

The discipline of SEO is growing ever wider in scope and potential, if people want something they search for it; if people want it businesses want to sell it, and if you have both these circumstances search can help to connect the two.

Video has always been a great way to promote yourself online, but increasing prevalence in search results pages make video an even more essential part of your SEO process.

To Host or Not

Traditional SEO best practice suggests keeping a significant proportion of your content on your own site and where you do share content on other sites you do so in return for a credible link.

This decision isn't as simple when it comes to video. Largely for technical reasons video is typically hosted on third party websites like YouTube & Vimeo.

Over the last couple of years the ease with which you can host video on your own site has fallen dramatically in cost and difficulty, which makes whether you host something internally or externally a marketing rather than a technical decision.

The benefits of third party hosting is largely focused around reach and audience. If you believe some stats [YouTube is the second biggest search engine](#) behind Google; you can't register in those search results unless you're hosted on YouTube.

The two main downsides are the lack of flexibility and lack of ownership. Secondly, the traffic is a step removed from your site. If you're a publisher it's hard to get a 'fair' share of the revenue generated by the adverts on Google and you'll definitely make less per view than if it was hosted on your own site.

If you are trying to generate leads or sales off the back of your video you may also struggle with third party hosting. Their prerogative after a view is to get the audience to watch another video, this is usually at direct odds with what you are aiming to achieve.

The decision on how and where you host your video has huge strategic significance and should not be taken lightly.

Media RSS & Video Sitemaps

If you decide to host your own video you will need to fully explore two rival protocols Media RSS & Sitemaps to fully benefit from the search engine potential of these video assets.

You'll all be familiar with RSS feeds; Media RSS (MRSS) has been adapted from basic RSS to deal more comfortably with media files like videos. Though not that widely used they seem to have a very positive effect on Google indexing videos. It was created some time ago by Yahoo, but much like micro-formats it's only recently really started to come into play. You can find out [more about the specification here](#). But as you would expect there are a number of plug-ins for most of the major CMS that handle the additional capabilities of Media RSS.

While Yahoo has thrown their weight behind MRSS Google seem to be favouring the [Video XML sitemaps](#) which work in a slightly different way. Video Sitemaps work in a very similar way to traditional XML sitemaps [bar a few tweaks](#).

Like normal sitemaps in isolation they're not going to completely shoot your video up the rankings but good indexing is a pre-requisite for good rankings so an important process to go through.

Another good feature of the Video Sitemap protocol is that it allows you to specify a thumbnail image which would be displayed when your videos appear in search results.

This is great for improving click through rates as without specifying the thumbnail Google will choose a still image at random - often the middle frame that may not be representative of the video as a whole.

Closing Thoughts

Search is a dynamic marketing discipline. Consistency and Quality of processes and procedures is important but without an emphasis on research, development and

innovation many of the most lucrative search marketing strategies and tactics can be missed.

If the tactics being deployed to promote your site don't include the most original and inventive methods available to you then you're missing out on an opportunity to move ahead of your competitors and reap the full benefits available from the natural search channel.

About the author:

Kelvin Newman (Creative Director)

Kelvin Newman has responsibility for R&D and maintaining the SiteVisibility web presence, including our No.1 ranking Podcast and Blog. Prior to joining SiteVisibility, Kelvin worked for Emap consumer media working across high profile magazine titles. In addition to this experience and client work Kelvin regularly produces popular search and digital marketing whitepapers and has also delivered speaker sessions at leading industry events.

About SiteVisibility:

SiteVisibility brings a team of search engine marketing & optimisation, social media, strategy, technical and R&D boffins together to create flexible, future-proof and truly integrated digital marketing campaigns that deliver better results from sensible budgets.



Client Portfolio:



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