

# Guidelines for Programming ‘Trending on Bing’

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## TOB Tile Programming Principles

**The overall goal when programming Trending on Bing (TOB) is to maximize engagement and Distinct Search Queries (DSQs) by giving Bing.com homepage readers an appealing balance of news content.**

This includes general interest, politics, entertainment, sports, science, health, and those viral moments everyone is searching for on Bing. Our team of editors are news curation specialists, and these guidelines will instruct and reinforce best practices.

**We are comprehensive and concise.** Our short copy provides a quick overview of the topic with links to trusted news sources.

**We are as objective as possible.** We pay attention to gender, race, and any potential biases. We aim to maintain neutral copy by focusing on the topic under discussion, avoiding commentary or conclusions. We don't feature opinion pieces or editorials unless the editorial itself is trending.

**We review numerous legitimate news sources, as well as real-time search data and social media, to identify stories that are trending.** That, plus good editorial news judgment, determines the content we publish. Stories selected should be organically trending on news and social media sites and drawing searches on Bing.

**We avoid sensational copy** or stories that could be viewed as inflammatory.

**We don't publish 'fake news' or propaganda.** We are careful to point out inconsistencies or inaccuracies to combat disinformation.

**We avoid 'evergreen' stories with no clear news hook.** We can, however, intentionally program certain types of feature stories to improve the carousel's overall mix, avoiding overly negative news cycles.

**We are mindful of the overall 'feel' or tone of the carousel.** When covering political stories, we remain conscious of what stories are being represented in the carousel, and any perceived bias in the selection process.

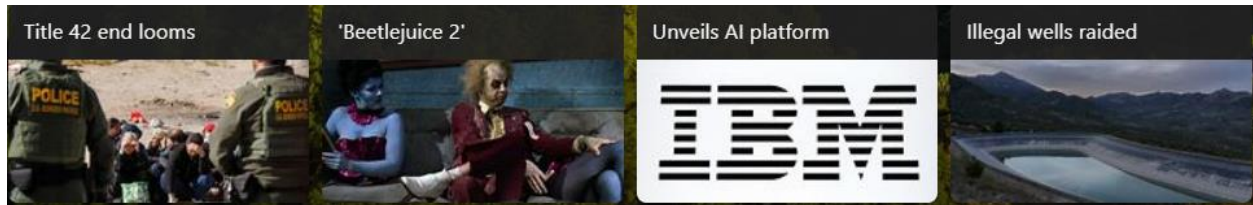
**We are careful not to overload the carousel with one topic category or news subject.** If necessary, we lock tiles to give breathing room among topics.

**Important breaking news is locked to the front of the carousel** to ensure we understand the magnitude of these stories versus lighter fare.

**We do not use Trending on Bing to advertise products or features** that are commercial in nature, so as not to undermine our news authority or trust with users. If a monetizable query is spiking in search, like 'Black Friday deals', we can consider an exception.

## Content Selection

**Figure 1.** *Trending on Bing news tile carousel*



**Editors use news content aggregators and internal tools.** Scanning major news outlets and social media apps are ideal for story sourcing. Bing News and Google News use popularity algorithms to inform programming. Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and other social media outlets have news sections that can surface stories not seen elsewhere. Microsoft engineers have created multiple internal tools to dissect Bing search data and identify trending searches. Bing editors draw from these tools for our daily work.

**Every story we choose to program into the carousel is telling users this is worth knowing about.** We don't have to tell every single story. These content choices cannot be replicated by a machine. This is displaying the best of human insight and judgement. We need to consider the values we want to put out into the world. The most important element is timely, relevant information.

**Stories are selected due to several factors, including:**

Viralness: Is the story attracting attention across social media?

Newsworthiness: Is the story appearing on multiple reputable news sites?

Tone: Does it fit the overall voice of the carousel?

**Strive for topic diversity** and a good balance of 'hard' news, politics, entertainment, sports, business, science, health, innovative tech, and other topics (See Figure 1).

**Get in front of a breaking news story.** For instance, if we know an event has just happened or is coming later in the day but the term is not spiking yet, put the term into TOB if there is a reasonable expectation that it will start spiking soon. We don't want to look out of touch.

**Consider an 'Editor's Pick' for stories that may not be trending organically.** Consider 'good news' topics to help with overall tone and to lift the mood. We should seek to inspire as well as inform. However, do not program 'evergreen' stories. There still needs to be a news hook and good news search results.

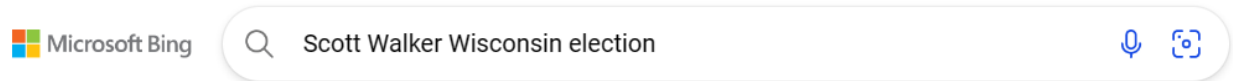
**Editors should challenge themselves when writing about a notable death.** It is easy for the tiles to look repetitive in the carousel, especially when there are multiple deaths in the news. Describe what that person was known for during his or her lifetime. We must assume users will not make an instant connection by the name or picture alone. Space is tight, but giving context to that life lived can help better inform our users.

### **Imagery and stories we should aim to avoid in TOB:**

- Terrorists and mass shooters - Use an image from the scene instead.
- Gun photos pointing at the user.
- Nude or semi-nude people - No nipples, side boob, or an image overly cropped to give the appearance of nudity.
- People in underwear
- Racist images – We don't want to avoid important stories completely but need to avoid showing the racist image in question.
- Prophet Mohammed images.
- Grisly details of children who are the victim of a crime.
- Images of children in distress.
- For children who are charged with a crime, we can use imagery if released by authorities and used by major media outlets. We normally do not identify, in text or through images, juveniles who are witnesses to crimes.
- Graphic medical images.
- Drug use.
- Vomiting.
- Sexual or racy content – 'Porn' should not be in the query, headline, or topic, and the names of porn stars should be avoided (ex. Stormy Daniels).
- Dead bodies or autopsies.
- Close-up photos of insects, as some users are sensitive to this.
- Profanity.
- Gang imagery.
- Non-neutral political images.
- Product images that look like ads.
- Suicides and related imagery - Be extra careful when reporting on suspected suicides. Unless the cause of death has been confirmed by police or medical examiner, it is safer to just note the death in the headline and avoid the cause of death.

## Choosing Search Queries

**Figure 2.** *Bing news tile search query*



**Queries should use keywords relevant to a story that are as unique and specific as possible to help surface the most relevant associated news articles.** However, being too specific might result in sparse news results. A balance must be struck with a query phrase that contains keywords that are specific, but general enough to provide a SERP full of relevant, complimentary content.

Example: 'Scott Walker Wisconsin election' is a good query. 'Scott Walker Wisconsin' is probably too general, as the governor of a state is going to have multiple news stories about different topics. 'Scott Walker tries to cancel Wisconsin election over coronavirus' is too specific and will lead to very few news results and repetitive results. It is best to avoid phrases like this that sound like a full headline. Make sure you include the full name if a last name could have a different meaning. For example, use 'Scott Walker' and not just 'Walker.' When using a name in a query, always add a modifier or verb (See Figure 2). News results for just a person's name could drift to a different story than the one the tile is focused on.

**Queries may sometimes be repurposed as headlines, so avoid ambiguous phrases that could be interpreted incorrectly.** The query 'Polygamous Arizona girls' was meant to describe a story involving a polygamous sect leader abducting girls from Arizona, but by itself could be interpreted as the girls being polygamous by choice.

**We have no control over all the elements displayed on the search result page, so we must be careful with Bing query selection.** When reviewing query SERPs, ensure:

- News results are TOP. We want fresh content. Timestamps should not be older than 24 hours in your top news results, especially if it's a huge, developing story.
- Links/captions should not contain inappropriate content, even if they are below the fold. Many SERPs are imperfect, but just make sure users will understand that we're answering their queries.
- Pay close attention to Image answers and Video answers. {Damascus bombing} could generate some gruesome images and videos. Sometimes adult content sneaks into Videos.

**Queries should always support the intent of the tile headline.** We don't want to confuse readers with a mismatch. If news results change due to an update on the story, a headline or query update will be needed.

**The bigger the story in general, the broader your query.** The more popular a name, the more specific you should be to avoid ambiguity.

## Headline Composition

**Figure 3.** *Bing news tile headlines*



**22 characters is not much space, so common abbreviations are used.** However, try to avoid getting so creative with abbreviations that the reader might be confused. The same can be said for sentence fragments. They are fine to use if the intent is clear.

**Editors should always strive for neutral language that does not imply a bias.** We never want to give the impression that Bing has an opinion on these tile stories. Describe the story, but don't imply judgement of any kind.

**Headlines are sentence case,** unless the term is a song, album, show, or film name like 'Beetlejuice 2' (See Figure 3). In those instances, use title case per AP style guide.

**Double check for typos.** Make sure all name spellings are accurate. Crosscheck against other sources. Ask another editor to check your work before publishing if someone is available.

**Don't use exclamation marks in copy.** The only punctuation that can appear are question marks, and these should not be overused.

**Engage the reader but avoid something that reads like 'clickbait'.** We want copy that motivates a reader to click on a tile but make sure they will be satisfied with the resulting experience. We don't want a reader to feel 'tricked' by a headline that leads to less than satisfying content.

## Specific Topics

### Political Stories

**Avoid inadvertently taking a side.** When possible, editors should choose a general query as opposed to focusing on one angle of the story. When choosing to update a story with a new tile, avoid the reactions of specific individuals. We should aim to provide an entry point. This keeps the bias out, and lets users choose the story angle they want to read when they scan results on the SERP.

**Aim for generality over specificity.** Headline copy such as 'Controversial retweets' focuses on why the overall story is generating interest without the appearance of choosing sides. With most tiles we aim for specificity when possible, but in these cases, we should take a more general viewpoint of the topic.

**Polarizing politicians like Marjorie Taylor Greene require special handling.** Much as we saw with Trump, we need to be careful of not amplifying misinformation through her statements or actions. Don't publish stories that simply recirculate a statement she makes, which is often untrue or designed to spread disinformation. Don't feature live press conferences. Do publish news about these polarizing public servants if it concerns the actual functioning of government and their place in that process.

**Avoid job approval ratings or poll tiles,** as they tend to polarize users and different statistics are frequently up for debate. Polls are often accused of trying to sway voters using loaded or manipulative questions.

**Be wary of published studies by media outlets.** If there's only one source, or not published by an official government agency, avoid programming it.

## Entertainment Guide

While entertainment stories attract high engagement, we avoid 'tabloid' content to improve overall quality, engage unique users, and create a more trusted voice for the Bing brand.

### Stories safe to feature:

- Releases/Reviews: Movies, albums, trailers, books, games, programs
- Interviews of A-listers
- Awards shows
- Red carpet
- Deaths of well-known or recently well-known/impactful personalities
- New projects or roles
- Ratings and box office numbers
- Divorces, breakups, engagements, and weddings
- Babies and child custody battles

### Stories to avoid:

- Overdoses, unless it leads to death.
- Parties
- Meaningless arrests
- Affairs
- Hairstyles
- Naked photo shoots unless there's a social or serious news issue being addressed.
- Celebrity opinions on hot-button topics. If the personality is not a direct participant in the news story being referenced, we should avoid programming in TOB.

## Sports Coverage

**Think twice about programming tiles on lesser-known players**, or covering random trades and staffing changes, as these tiles are among our lowest performers.

**We should avoid most game recaps** unless the game is decisive, or the event is at a championship level. MLB World Series, NBA Finals, NCAA Tournament, and similar competitions are fine for TOB.

**As with celebrities, avoid gossip or salacious content** such as dating rumors, arrests, and drug use. You can program topics that move beyond the sports genre, such as domestic violence. Be wary of news on trades, injuries, or firings. Those tend to perform lower. Tiles that pertain to larger social issues like homophobia tend to do well.

**Are game spoilers OK?** We don't hide game results in TOB. The proliferation of cell phones and sports notifications has created a media environment in which readers must actively avoid spoilers by their own actions.