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AI and SEO: The Impact of ChatGPT and Bing Chat

Because of the recency of the tech, it's hard to make definitive claims about how to optimize for chat AI. That said, there are a few promising elements in Bing's initial product, as well as a few evergreen SEO tactics that could be useful for positioning to reap their benefits.

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ChatGPT technology has been rapidly adopted for many applications on the Web, including search engines. One of the most notable working examples of this is the Bing Chat Mode now integrated into normal search result pages and the competitor product Google is working on currently — here's an example of a response from Bing Chat to a query, "Plan me a workout for my arms and abs with no sit-ups and no gym equipment. It should only take 30 minutes."

As with many who are evaluating the potential risks, opportunities, and important factors to consider with the rise of ChatGPT, I put together some thoughts on my point of view as this tech continues to roll out in search.

Recency and lack of data as important factors to consider

The integration of chat AI tech into search is extremely new as of 2023. We can't be certain how chat AI tech itself will change over the next few years or even months, as well as the additional layer of how search engines will or won't implement it. There is a potential third layer of unforeseen factors, which is the ways in which chat AI tech will interact with different regulatory rules on search engines in different regions of the world.

Currently, SEO tools lack the ability to track what percent of organic impressions are going to chat AI features. It's still uncertain to what degree Google and other vendors will be adding this info to SERP features data in Google Search Console, if at all. It's virtually impossible to do true opportunity forecasting right now because of this lack of visibility.

The business value of organic search to Search Engines

Search engines have a vested interest in maintaining the quality and relevance of their organic search ecosystems.

Here's why:

Organic search is around 53% of trackable web traffic.
The value of paid search listings and the revenue search engines derive from them hinges on consumers' continued perception that organic listings are meaningful and trustworthy.

Search engines implement new SERP features on a highly data-driven, experimental basis. Features that are seen as harming UX or driving users away from search tend to be quickly modified or retired. But will the convenience of ChatGPT impact click-throughs and web traffic?

Currently, the main concern about chat AI technologies in search is whether they will negatively impact clickthrough rates for organic search results. If more searchers get the answer to their query directly on the search engine results page, fewer will be motivated to click through to the vendor sites that rank for that query and engage with website content, which are still shown alongside the Chat/AI response.

While it's possible that reductions in global organic CTRs may occur, it's not highly likely that this would affect the types of organic traffic that many brands are interested in capturing. Take Google's so-called "Zero Click" SERP features, such as Quick Answers and Featured Snippets, for example, which scrape excerpts from sites to answer a searcher's query. Despite this, research has found that organic CTRs have not been meaningfully impacted.

Potential opportunities and recommendations

As mentioned above, because of the recency of the tech, it's hard to make definitive claims about how to optimize for chat AI. That said, there are a few promising elements in Bing's initial product, as well as a few evergreen SEO tactics that could be useful for positioning to reap their benefits.

Drive more organic clicks with "Learn more" features and in-response hyperlinks. In the Bing example above, the chat AI widget displays a set of links to relevant sites in addition to the generated text response. Currently, we don't know how those sites are selected or their relevance to the chatbot's generative response, but they may be a new opportunity to drive more organic clicks.
Follow Google Chat AI developments closely. While Bing's relevance in organic search continues to grow, Google is still the largest presence and where the vast majority of web searches and organic traffic comes from.
Ensure structured data features are in place. Especially on informational content like blog posts and resource articles. Schema tagging maximizes the visibility of page elements (especially multimedia like video embeds) to search spiders, and may similarly help with the ability for search AI to absorb site content and learn from it.
Develop evergreen, deep-expertise content. By going deeper than a chat AI could realistically do in the limited screen dimensions of a SERP, brands can ensure they capture "I-want-to-know" searchers seeking more nuance, as well as continue to provide high-quality content to attract prospects and engage existing customers.
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