

The Future of SEO: 5 Stats That Show Where Google Is Heading

Social media, followed by mobile and messaging apps, have replaced search as the leading sources of website referral traffic. However, it does not mean that search engines will become extinct. Users will continue to search to find the best purchase or get answers for their questions. I expect the search marketing space to evolve and get more competitive, given the rapid changes in technology and marketing strategies. Some areas where change can happen in the near future include web design, social media marketing, search algorithms, and result patterns.

Where does that leave Google? Let's look at some numbers to understand how the search landscape of the future could look like.

Trends in content search

Mobile browsing had overtaken traditional desktop surfing a few years back, and is now considered the primary source of information and commerce. About 80% of the time spent on mobiles is dedicated to apps, and by 2018, global mobile internet penetration will grow to 61.2% (source: Statista). This means that website traffic will move to mobile apps instead. When it comes to mobile traffic, social media apps have the largest pie but they are being replaced by messaging apps such as Whatsapp. However, this does not mean that content marketing will phase out.

Google has been trying to index content within apps and recently announced that it can now stream app content from cloud. Essentially, Play Store users won't need to download a new app to see its content. In addition, users won't need several apps for various tasks, as messaging apps such as WeChat, Facebook, and Kik are including bots to help users buy movie tickets, book cabs, etc. I expect messaging apps to increasingly complement search engines in the future.

Backlinks are outdated

Backlinks (an incoming hyperlink from one web page to another website) have an extremely important role in improving organic search rankings. But, I see them losing their place to Google bots that are powered by search engine algorithms such as Panda and Penguin. Although links that drive referral traffic will continue to be important, Google is expected to move away from the whole linking business.

User experience is top priority

The future of SEO is in the hands of user experience. If a website offers exactly what a user is looking for, it will get repeat traffic without getting their hands messy with manipulative linking strategies.

There are three simple ways to gauge user experience: time spent on the page, number of times user clicks **Back** on results page to find other relevant content, and click through rate or CTR. These three metrics can be accessed from a Google Search Console Account.

Social media is the new search

It's a common practice to search for content shared by other users on Facebook, which sees 1.5 billion searches everyday. Social profiles will soon help in indexing websites and search engines could index social content, meaning social and search will become one. In fact, Google is already indexing Tweets from popular and verified Twitter handles.

Voice search is becoming dearer

The common theme of any kind of search is personalization. Virtual assistants are becoming more intelligent and popular to serve this purpose. Google Now or Siri use past search results and history to bring results faster without having to edit the keywords. A good example is shopping history. Google will assess my preferred brand and suggest a new collection based on it. In future, we may not need to say a proper sentence and have a normal conversation with virtual assistants.

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