Developing and Testing Content

Developing Content

User engagement metrics, which measure what users do on your website and how they do it (such as time on page, session duration, bounce rate, and returning users), have become unofficial ranking signals with Google.

Gone are the days when posting a 400-word article with a 2% keyword density could boost a page's search rankings. Now, poor quality content has a far more negative impact on a site, causing it to drown in a sea of content that was created just for SEO purposes.

Yes, the way content is interacted with online is definitely on Google's radar, as shown by Google's recent patent filing. So, while creating a sound content marketing strategy is necessary to attract and retain users, it also improves a site's Google search rankings. Therefore, focus on producing quality content, and you will reap a boost in SERP rankings as a secondary benefit.

The key is to always strategize before producing any content. Don't just simply churn out content for content's sake. Once you start producing great content and your users engage with it and boost rankings at the same time, you'll understand why this is the far superior approach.

1. Define Your Goals

Great content is created for a specific purpose, and this purpose needs to be defined. Ask yourself if you are creating content to boost brand awareness, generate leads, convert users, attract past customers, improve search ranking results, or something else altogether.

Once you have clearly defined your goals, you need to determine if a content strategy is in fact the best way to achieve them. Don't assume content is the best option in every situation. For instance, content might be of little use in converting users at the bottom of the sales funnel; however, it could be invaluable in boosting brand awareness and lead generation.

Different segments of the sales funnel warrant different types of content. So, you will need to decide what content is most appropriate for a person to receive at a given time. That way, you will have the right conversation with the right person at the right time.

2. Research Your Audience

Your content strategy can be effective when you know who your audience is. Valuable information can be gleaned by checking what types of sites your prospects are already visiting, which content they engage with, and which social media platforms they share content on. This can be done by enabling Google Demographics and Interests for the types of sites prospects engage with and Google Analytics for the content they engage with, and by reviewing which social platforms are more popular for sharing on content pages.

Delve into Google Analytics to determine which content is producing the best results. To find the best results, sort by different factors such as Average Time on Page, Bounce Rate, and Page views. With this information, create content that is targeted to the user, rather than content that you want to read. Your goals for creating this content are to increase Average Time on Page, decrease Bounce Rate, and increase Page views.

3. Focus on Your Niche

It's a sad fact that the Internet is full of content that shouldn't even exist. This content either already exists elsewhere and is simply reposted or doesn't provide any real value. Most people don't see 99% of this useless content because it doesn't appear anywhere near the top of SERPs.

To avoid having your content lost in that pack, create content that stands out, is unique, has a distinct voice, and, most important, offers genuine value to readers.

The more specific you are and the more you focus on your niche, the greater your chances of establishing yourself as an authority in your field, whether your readers are looking for information or entertainment.

4. Measure Your Results

Measuring the results of your content marketing efforts is one of the most important aspects of developing an effective content strategy. Churning out content without analyzing your user

feedback is akin to having a phone conversation on mute. You need to know what your audience liked as well as what they didn't like, and why. Here are some of the most important metrics to understand.

Content Testing

Content Testing, which is also known as Usability Testing, can simply be defined as a practice of testing whether the written content is appropriate & suitable for the audience in question, and whether or not they are able to understand & comprehend it. The main objective of content testing is to validate User Experience, i.e., the purpose is not to check whether the reader 'likes' the written content, but to ensure that it provides them appropriate and suitable information, which is written accurately and is readable, understandable, and helpful.

As content is a crucial part of understanding, learning, and getting to know the services and products provided by an organization, it is extremely necessary for them to test it properly. With the assistance of content testing, one can gain perspective on content quality, presentation, and format.

Steps in content testing

Content testing allows one to test alternative variants of a website's content and assists developers and designers in finding out which pages, components, and combinations of components are most effective with the visitors. Therefore, following is the process of content testing for your reference:

a. **Identify testing goals:** The first and the most important step of content testing process is to identify the goals and objectives of testing like:

o   User requirements.

o   Content Strategy.

o   Context of the content.

o   Targeted users.

b. **Test Plan Creation:** Once the aim of testing is decided, the team prepares a proper plan for implementing the process of testing. Here, steps are followed to test the quality, comprehensiveness, usability, readability, accessibility, search ability, and more, of the content.

c. **Monitoring Tests:** The third step of content testing is to monitor the tests. This helps testers and organization get valid information regarding:

o The usefulness of the content.

o Readability of the content.

o Contents accessibility and more.

d. **Analyzing the Results:** By analyzing the output/results, team can take the necessary steps to improve the quality as well as the context of the content. This will allow them to cater to all the requirements of the users and improve the content according to their needs.

e. **Test Content with Users:** Once the aforementioned stages are completed, the team gets the content tested by the users or the targeted audience. This helps them get credible and trustworthy feedbacks and reviews, which further allows them to make accurate changes.

Tips for Testing Content on Websites

1. Avoid recruiting proxy users:

In every usability study, you should always aim to test your designs with representative users. However, when testing content, your recruiting criteria should be even more stringent. Take extra care to recruit the right participants.

Those people evaluating the information on your site should truly be representative of your user population: they should have the same mindset, situation, AND user goals. The flexibility you have with recruitment depends on the use case and type of information on your site. You may have some leeway with general e-commerce sites, but for content-rich, research-intensive activities or for B2B websites, you must find people who fit the exact circumstance.

It is impossible for proxy users to instantly acquire knowledge or know the situation well enough to assess the value of the content. For example, people who have just been diagnosed with a serious medical condition are more likely to relate to the content accurately than someone who is asked to pretend to be interested about a disease.

It's not good enough to recruit participants who generally fit the demographic profile, such as by age, gender, income level, and location. Such criteria are too broad to give you deep insight. General recruitment criteria won't cut it. You must find people who are actually in the process of researching the information you are evaluating.

2. Be aware of the limitations of unmoderated studies:

Unmoderated studies are done without the facilitator present: Participants work on their own. This method can be useful for getting user feedback on narrow parts of the site such as workflow or snippets of information. However, when trying to discover how people conduct research, compare offerings, and make decisions, the best approach is to conduct a moderated study, where the facilitator is present.

Content studies tend to have long stretches of time when the user is simply scanning page after page—in silence. When left alone (such as in an online unmoderated situation) users may feel awkward and wonder whether they're being helpful. Without proper feedback and reassurance, participants often alter their behavior by approaching the task in a more superficial manner. Task times are often shorter for online studies than in traditional test settings. When on their own, participants assume that the goal is to work quickly, not realistically.

Also, the facilitator can ask the user for clarifications. With unmoderated studies, you miss opportunities to ask personalized, user-tailored follow-up questions. Even though participants are instructed to think out loud, they often forget to explain their actions and thoughts.

3. Give tasks that are tailored for each individual:

In most traditional usability studies, researchers follow a prepared script and give study participants prescript tasks to perform. For content testing minimize your reliance on a script. Spend time at the beginning of each session to discuss the participant's situation and make sure the task scenario matches their exact circumstance. It's OK to prepare some more generic tasks

prior to the study, but be willing to modify or craft new ones on the spot as you learn more about the participant's situation, and as the session unfolds. You want to give participants the freedom to research a topic as they please, so you uncover what's important and what's not. Don't rigidly control the activities or force an unrealistic task. The more pertinent the tasks, the more vested people are at completing them.

The best results occur when study participants forget about the testing environment and immerse themselves in the activity rather than merely going through the motions.

4. Remember, there is no right answer:

Unlike well-specified tasks (e.g., "Find the opening hours for the Fremont public library"), open-ended tasks don't have a definitive answer. Open-ended tasks are meant to assess content quality and relevance. Use this time to learn how people explore and research, what questions they have, how they expect information to be communicated, and whether your site meets their needs.

Consider competitive testing: Sometimes you can get insights into your users' needs by allowing them to search freely on the web or by letting them visit competitors' sites rather than restricting them to your own site. Don't worry that you're wasting precious testing time: if users are truly representative, the insights will often be revelatory. And you can always limit the free exploration to a small part of your session.

5. Set expectations for time allocations:

Open-ended tasks have vague end points, often leaving participants wondering how to best spend their time. At the beginning of reach session, tell people to work at their own pace and not to worry about the time.

6. Get comfortable with silence:

Expect long stretches of quiet time while the participant focuses on processing the information. Don't appear impatient. Avoid being interruptive or fidgety. Injecting too many questions while users work breaks their concentration and alters their behavior. If you need to ask a question mid-task, keep it neutral, such as "What are you thinking?" or "What are you looking for?" Once users answer, let them continue. Resist the temptation to blast questions. Save questions for the

end. When user testing is conducted well, users behave authentically and the study generates realistic findings.