

AI is Transforming Google. What's it Mean for Your SEO Strategy?



Quality content remains important as Google search algorithms become better able to “think” about search queries.

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>> Google’s search engine is the modern go-to for virtually anything a person might seek, including dermatology services and information. Statistics show that 97 percent of search users look for local businesses, according to 99Firms, and nearly half of all Google searches are location-specific. Search engine optimization (SEO) is at the heart of successful dermatology marketing, which is not likely to change. What is changing is the way that Google handles searches. That means your content marketing strategy needs to evolve to keep up.

BERT TO MUM AND BEYOND: CHANGING THE WAY GOOGLE THINKS

Google search is entirely automated, using an algorithm to return the best possible results. It might seem inaccurate to say that Google “thinks.” However, the very goal of AI (artificial intelligence) is enabling computer systems to perform tasks that would typically require human intelligence. Google developers use AI to fine-tune the algorithm with the goal of analyzing and responding to queries much as an expert person would. In other words, Google search is learning to think like a person.

The first notable milestone was BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers), implemented in 2019. It is a natural language processing technology that helps Google better understand the context of search terms. That allowed it to better match web pages with the true search intent, even without a precise keyword match.

A more recent—and even more impactful—update came in 2021 with the introduction of MUM (Multitask Unified Mode). It is said to be 1,000 times more powerful than BERT, with the ability to understand the information in images,

translate languages, and discover highly relevant related topics. Additionally, MUM provides a framework for expanding comprehension of information in audio and video formats.

OPTIMIZING FOR A SMARTER GOOGLE

What does all of this mean for your dermatology marketing strategy? The simple answer is that you need to think beyond keywords. As an example, you might want to increase new patients for dermal fillers. A decade ago, you would accomplish this by predicting search terms and creating articles with those exact phrases. If a person searched for “dermal filler procedure,” then a page with the words “procedure for skin fillers” would not rank. That exact matching of terminology was more important than the content and actual information on the page.

That was then, and this is now. What changed?

Exact matches are no longer necessary. Google is not easily confused by nuances of language, such as:

- Synonyms (dermal filler vs. skin filler)
- Word variations (filler vs. fillers)
- Order of words (procedure for fillers vs. filler procedure)

Topic is important. Google’s improved comprehension of context and meaning applies not only to search queries but also to the pages that it indexes. Years ago, this article might have appeared in a search about dermal fillers simply because the term is included frequently in the text. To a human reader and modern search engine the article is clearly about marketing and SEO.

Simply including keywords is not enough to catch Google’s attention. Your content needs to be:

- On topic. If you are optimizing for “dermal filler procedure,” the content should discuss just that. The article should be not just about dermatology, not even a general article about fillers, but specifically about the procedure.
- In-depth. Just as Google is getting better at detecting irrelevant content, it is also better at differentiating information from filler or fluff. In other words, do not just discuss the topic but also provide information of value.
- Factual. Google’s general drive to improve search results, combined with recent issues of fake news, has led to a specific focus on accuracy.

It is not all about text anymore. Written content, particularly targeting specific keywords, has long been a pillar of SEO. While that is not likely to change anytime soon, the scope of content is expanding. As noted above, the MUM update helps Google better understand images, which will likely develop into other content formats, such as audio, video, and more. Additionally, the popularity of image search is growing, which presents yet another facet in SEO.

The non-text content on your page should be:

- Relevant. For example, videos about related topics, infographics that illustrate information from the article, or “before and after” procedure photos are great choices. Avoid generic, unrelated, or off-topic images.
- High quality. Blurry photos, very low-resolution videos, or poorly designed graphics do not look good to the human eye. As Google’s ability to recognize these types of content improves, the clarity of imagery takes on a new level of importance.
- Optimized. All media should be in a format supported by most web browsers and appropriate for the content. Additionally, descriptions, captions, alt tags, and other metadata should be optimized to help Google identify the subject.

FINAL THOUGHT: FUTURE-PROOF YOUR CONTENT MARKETING BY FOCUSING ON QUALITY

It is often said, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” In many ways, that is true of Google. With near-daily algorithm updates and dramatic technological advances, the search engine’s functionality is in a state of continuous change. However, Google’s goals have remained largely unaltered since its inception.

The first priority that Google names in describing its approach to search is to “deliver the most relevant and reliable information available.” They have long encouraged content creators to focus on quality, because that is what they seek to deliver to searchers. Outdated techniques, such

as keyword stuffing, worked at one time, only because they confused more simplistic versions of Google’s algorithm.

SEO’s technical aspects, such as keeping up with web standards and ensuring compatibility on all devices, may change dramatically as technology changes. However, in content creation, a focus on quality is a tactic that will never be outdated. The more search technology improves, the better Google will get at reaching its goal of accurately identifying good, relevant, useful, high-quality content. Making that your priority is the best way to be prepared for future changes and search updates. ■

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Authenticity matters to today’s health care consumers. This Ekwa Marketing (ekwa.com) video walks dermatology practices through five ways to stand out from the pack. All providers must consider how the products they use, the vendors they patronize, and the business practices that they engage will endear patients to them and help to build a flourishing community of “brand advocates.”

Watch now: PracDerm.com/GetReal