

Is Your SEO Strategy Outdated?

To optimize Google SEO, don't design your website for Google. An expert explains the paradox and other tips for SEO now.

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

Nearly every Google algorithm update is described as a “game changer.” That might sound like just a buzzword, but it is usually true. What search engines are looking for today is very different from what they were looking for five years ago. Some SEO (search engine optimization) practices are no longer beneficial, and some are even harmful to your website's ranking.

THE OLD SEO

If your SEO strategy still includes any of these outdated practices, it's time to stop.

High keyword density. Early incarnations of Google relied almost exclusively on keywords. Search results favored pages with content that precisely matched the search term. If that phrase was used several times, it was considered highly relevant. The internet was flooded with content that was dense with keywords, but lacking in true value. The flow of text sounded unnatural or even nonsensical as the same exact phrase was repeated over and over again.

Keyword stuffing (the practice of excessively repeating keywords) led to low-quality, useless articles, which is the opposite of what Google wants to serve. Over the years, the algorithm was changed to put less emphasis on density, and move keyword-stuffed sites out of the top search results.

Excess internal linking. Keywords don't need to appear on a page to impact its ranking. Google also notices the words in anchor text, which is linked to a page. Like keyword density, this technique was once over-used and abused, lowering the quality of content. Again, Google has adjusted its algorithm accordingly. Today, overoptimization of internal links can lower your website's position in search results.

Low-quality inbound links. Google analyzes the number of inbound links going to your website. This is one of the metrics used to determine authority. Smarter search algorithms also analyze the quality of those links. Your website will lose authority if its “link juice” comes from low-quality, spammy directories. Purchasing links is especially prob-

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lematic. In fact, it is against Google's Webmaster guidelines (support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66356?hl=en)

Deceptive practices. Deliberately tricking visitors or misrepresenting your website is not a good practice. These techniques, often called black hat SEO, have never been recommended by ethical marketers. Fortunately, Google has gotten very good at detecting and penalizing black hat methods.

THE NEW SEO

What should you be doing instead?

Keyword relevancy. Keywords are still very important in dermatology SEO, but modern search algorithms are looking for quality, not quantity. The keyword does not need to be used excessively. It does not even need to match the search term exactly. In an effort to accommodate voice search and natural language search, Google puts more importance on the user's intention than on the exact wording of the query.

The target keyword should also be the topic of a webpage. Google is looking for related terms, in-depth information, and quality content. There is no longer an ideal keyword density. It should be used as often as it naturally fits in the flow of text, and adds value to the article—no more, no less.

Building quality links. The new rules for internal links are similar to those for keywords. If two pages are genuinely

related, and a link between them would benefit the user, include it. In a large site, there may be dozens of internal links to a page, or there may be none aside from basic navigation. Links should be included or excluded based on their value to the user.

Also focus on quality when building inbound links. Professional associations, dermatology-related publications, patient information websites, reputable business directories, and similar links are beneficial. The more authoritative and relevant the referring site is, the more authority it gives your website.

Engaging content. People no longer just read a webpage; they interact with it. Although Google's algorithm does not directly measure user engagement, it is designed to seek out the most engaging content. Features such as videos, contact forms, chat services, subscription offers, and other interactive content will hold the viewer's attention and aid your search ranking.

Website usability. The biggest mistake in SEO today is designing websites for Google. While that might seem counter-intuitive, Google is making every effort to serve websites that were designed with humans in mind. One of the most important clues that Google uses to determine usability is your website structure and basic navigation. It should be consistent, logical, and easy for the user to navigate. Other important usability metrics include page loading times, frequency of errors, bounce rate, and technical problems.

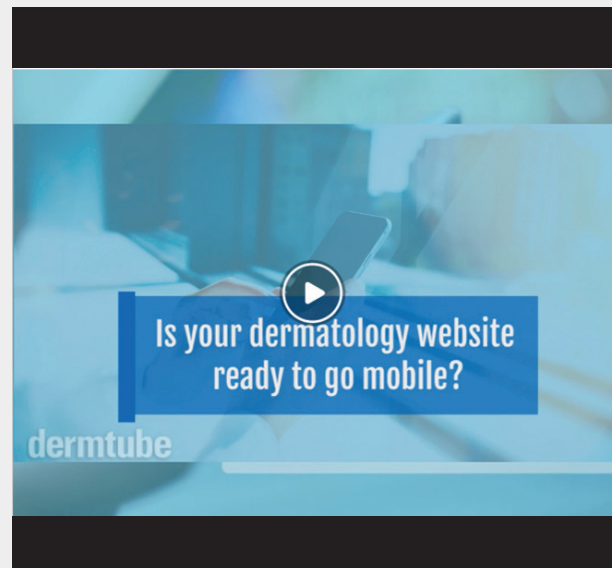
Mobile friendly. A high-ranking website will deliver a good user experience, on any device and any size of screen. Responsive websites, which detect the device and adjust accordingly, are especially popular. They deliver appropriately sized graphics, proportionate layouts, and convenient navigation when viewed on small screens. However, unlike some mobile-specific versions of websites, they do not strip away valuable content and information. The mobile user can access the same information that a desktop user can, in a convenient format.

EVALUATING YOUR SEO

How can you tell if your marketing team is keeping up with the latest standards? One way is to familiarize yourself with the performance metrics for your website, pay attention when you are presented with reports, and ask questions if you aren't sure what they mean. Educate yourself about SEO best practices, and about your own website. However, you don't have to become an SEO expert in order to check on the welfare of your website.

Quality and user experience are Google's top priorities, and every algorithm update is designed around those concepts. Keep this in mind as you browse your own site. Imagine that you had never seen it before. Would you

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immediately know what practice the site represents, and what that practice's specialties are? Would you be able to locate information easily? Would you consider the articles well-written? Does the content provide information of actual value to a prospective dermatology patient?

Optimization no longer requires website owners and designers to think like a machine. Instead, Google is focused on teaching their algorithm to think like a human. The number one rule of today's SEO is to design for people first. ■

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