

The Future-Proof

SEO



and Internet Marketing Plan

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Good SEO means understanding what Google is looking for and making sure that your websites and your clients' websites meet those criteria. But *great* SEO means preempting what Google is going to look like in the future and where it is heading. This way, you can 'future proof' your SEO against changes to the algorithm, or Google's overall direction.

This is a lesson that SEOs have learned hard in the past. The original version of Google worked purely by looking at the number of links pointing at a website and by looking at the number of times the keywords were repeated in the text. If you wanted to get to the top of Google back then, all you had to do was to post hundreds of articles, each with keywords stuffed into it, and likewise buy lots of links, swap lots of links and upload your site to link directories.

But then Google did a U-turn. Suddenly, Google didn't want people gaming its system any more. Suddenly Google didn't want people creating poor quality content by 'keyword stuffing' any more.

And let's be honest: it was obvious this would happen. The current system meant that anyone could get to the top of Google with a low quality site, without caring at all about the user. Google would not want to support that, because it would ultimately result in Google losing traffic.

Anyway, Google made its updates: it introduced Google Panda and Google Penguin and suddenly, thousands-if-not-millions of sites were massively downgraded.

Businesses closed their doors. Entrepreneurs had to get real jobs. It was chaos!

People ranted and raved at Google for not giving warning, for not telling people what it wanted.

But Google was doing what it always did: serving the *customer*.

And a few clever SEOs who saw this coming were ready. They had built sites using smarter strategies and their sites were aimed at the visitors more than simply being designed to serve Google.

That is what great SEO means now. SEO is in permaflux. The algorithms are never changing. In fact, the whole point of the 'Hummingbird algorithm', is that it allows Google to update its index constantly and in real-time.

So you need to do better. You need to get inside the mind of Google to create a future proof SEO and internet marketing plan...

CHAPTER 1

GOOGLE'S MASTER PLAN

Google's Master Plan

The Pixel 2 is Google's second serious foray into the hardware game and represents another step in the company's grand plan to be an 'AI first' company. This may sound a little strange to those who still think of Google as a 'search first' company. But the truth is that these are one and the same thing. Google's focus is still on indexing the web and on providing users with an easy way to find the information that they need.

Remember, Google's mission statement starting out was to:

"Organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

And that's also the way that Google makes most of its money thanks to advertising. Other ventures, such as YouTube, are famously still not profitable!

So, Google is all about search and AI just so happens to be the best possible tool for doing that better. One example of this is 'RankBrain', which is a machine learning algorithm that helps Google to better understand what people are looking for and how that matches the content it has indexed. Instead of just looking for precise word-matches Google now tries to look for content that provides the answers to your questions. Google is starting to understand what you say to it and dish up the best results as a response. Like talking to my sage-like Granddad (by which I do not mean the herb).

This allows for smarter search results, but it also helps to improve the natural evolution of Google Search: Google Assistant.

Google Assistant uses machine learning and AI in order to:

- Present us with information from the web *before* we even ask for it (routes home, train delays, upcoming appointments, snippets from emails)
- Present us with content it thinks we might be interested in
- Answer natural language queries with equally natural and organic responses - even letting us continue conversations about the same subject matter

Thanks to Google's constant development, its software can now listen to your questions and answer them with information it sources from the web. That means we can say:

"Okay Google, what is the weather going to be like tomorrow?"

Instead of:

"Okay Google, BBC weather London"

Google Lens gives us another example of this, by allowing us to simply take snapshots of the world around us and use that to bring up relevant information from the web. Again, this is only possible thanks to machine learning and computer vision. Essentially, "AI first" is not a step away from search, but a natural progression.

AI-first hardware

Now you may be wondering where hardware fits into all of this. If Google is so set on being an AI first company, then shouldn't it really abandon projects like Android altogether? Why get into the hardware game right now? What does The Pixel have to do with search? Only, like, everything.

If we return to the Google Lens for a moment, we can see the tight integration between Google's cloud-based AI and the hardware. Google Lens is only possible *thanks* to the hardware it's on. Without the smartphone to snap photos, provide location awareness and connect to the web, this just wouldn't work. Google Lens would be practically useless confined to a desktop PC. And even Google Assistant would be significantly neutered. Being able to get real-time updates from Google about trains is possible thanks to that aforementioned location awareness. And getting a reminder about an upcoming appointment is significantly less useful once you're at home and loading up the PC to play Minecraft.

Google's hardware is allowing it to blur the lines between digital and real. It's finally making good on that promise to organize the *world's* information – not just the web's. And if you look at Google's line of hardware offerings, they all conform to this vision to some extent.

We have the Pixel and the Pixel 2. What are the key features of those devices? Those would be Google Assistant and the camera. Pixel is *the* best way to experience the convenience offered by having an AI in your pocket. Google Home obviously continues this trend. The new Pixelbook is touted as having 'AI at the center'. The Pixel Buds offer real-time translation. This kind of functionality is undoubtedly appealing and it makes very clear Google's vision for the future of tech: essentially, to put the smart back in smart devices.

Google CEO SundarPichai told The Verge that he wants Google’s hardware to not just use AI but to be inspired by it. To the point where the core functionality wouldn’t even be possible without AI right at the crux of the experience. A perfect example of this is Google Clips: a camera that takes snapshots throughout the day by recognizing interesting moments and then picking the best ones for you.

“Computers should adapt to how people live, we’re in a unique moment of time where we can bring a unique combination of hardware, software and AI.” Says Pichai.

Google is an AI-first company and The Pixel 2 is an AI-first phone.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SEOS

What This Means for SEOs

So, if you’re an internet marketer, what does all this mean for you?

Well, for starters, it means that you need to make sure that you are designing your site in a way that is going to be ready for Google Assistant and a greater leaning toward mobile.

Google is creating a tool that will bring up search results based on natural language queries and to do this, it is reliant on a number of things our end. For instance, it needs us to add ‘semantic markup language’ to our website. This is additional HTML that will show Google where specific elements are in our content. For instance, if you write a recipe for a nice meal, then your markup language will show Google where the ingredients are.

This is how Google is able to show us useful information right on the SERPs (search engine results pages) when we search for something. When we ask ‘when did Abraham Lincoln die?’, Google itself will tell us without us even having to click the link.

Does that steal traffic away from us? Yes indeed. But unfortunately we don’t have much say in the matter because if we don’t offer this information, Google will use another site instead and we won’t be involved at all.

Knowing that Google is going to be getting more and more AI like, it only makes sense to design a website in a manner that it AI-friendly.

And seeing as Google is getting really darn good at machine learning (pattern recognition), it also follows that it is going to get better at computer vision: the ability to detect what is happening inside an image. For that reason then, it makes sense for we creators to add more images to our sites, seeing as Google will one day be able to assess those images and tell us what’s in them – and use this information to better help rank our content.

Likewise, it seems pretty apparent that Google is interested in the hardware game and that Android and Google Assistant are top priorities. That tells us that it is also likely going to be making even more of a push for mobile. It already did this to some extent with its mobile friendliness update, but we can expect to see the trend continue further in this direction.

What’s more, is that this will mean that keywords are likely to become less and less important. We already saw the role of keywords greatly diminish as Google moved more toward the use of synonyms and related terms – ‘Latent Semantic Indexing’ became the big buzz word. But now Google is going to be optimizing for natural language search. When you speak to an assistant, you don’t say ‘Buy hats online’. Instead, you say ‘Hey Google, where can I buy hats online?’.

That means Google needs to process these terms into questions and then understand content well enough to serve up relevant results. That in turn means that you need to stop repeating key phrases and instead start to answer the kinds of questions that people really have, in a natural and comprehensive way. It means that you need to look for niches – for questions that aren't currently being answered by other sites, but that are being asked nonetheless.

If I were a betting man, I'd say that this could tie in very nicely with the use of Quora and Yahoo Answers in order to build links.

CHAPTER 4

GOING MOBILE

Going Mobile

After all, Google is very keen for us to use its AMP initiative. AMP is 'Accelerated Mobile Pages', which is an open source initiative designed to encourage more site owners to create sites that will load in a flash for mobile users. This goes *beyond* mere mobile friendliness and essentially displays your entire website on a signal page with minimal chrome or navigational elements and with a huge focus on speed of loading. It is said that these pages load four times quicker than regular websites.

Google actually hosts these sites and again, there is some debate as to whether it is effective stealing your traffic... but you can still add your own ads and there is a lot of incentive to get involved. With AMP, your site will be featured in a slider at the top of the SERPs along with an image from your page. It will also have an 'AMP' logo next to it and in short, people will now be much more likely to see it and click it if they're on mobile.

If your site uses WordPress – and it *absolutely* should – then you can implement this in a single click. And again... you should!

At the very least, you need to check that your site is mobile friendly using Google's own checker tool. You need to check it for speed as well for a responsive design. That means it should change the size and position of elements depending on the size of the screen viewing it. And of course, it's old news by now that you should no longer use hover-over elements and the like.

Google's Rank Brain algorithm uses machine learning to look for natural language but it also looks for good UX in general. It's increasingly important that you look after the user through the entire experience. Your site NEEDS to compete with the very best sites in your niche. It needs to look and feel professional, with a strong brand and a strong mission statement. And it needs to do all that while being technically sound and well optimized for Google to find the answers it's looking for and present them *quickly*.

It's a tall order, but I think you're up to the challenge!

CHAPTER 5

THE GOOGLEPOCALYPSE

The Googlepocalypse

So, part of the job of a good internet marketer is looking into the crystal ball and predicting possible futures.

That *also* means you need to have contingency plans for every scenario.

And one of the most important scenarios to be ready for is the demise of Google. Either that, or the possibility that Google might de-index you for *whatever* reason. You simply cannot afford to be 100% reliant on Google for your traffic.

So, what do you do?

The first and most important thing to do, is to write fantastic content, to post consistently and to have a unique and interesting thing to say every time you do. Have a strong brand, a strong mission statement and a clear target audience.

All these things will help you to build fans. And fans are the most reliable source of income possible for your site.

The reason for that is that fans will come to your site *directly* and not via Google. You want traffic from people who simply 'check in' on your site every now and then to see what you've uploaded lately. Most of us will have a few sites we do this with.

If you can create that kind of loyalty, then you can survive a Googlepocalypse. Not only that, but you can sell many more products because you have the trust of the audience and they see you as an authority.

Likewise, you should build your following on social media. Now, a lot of people just don't know how to use social media. The key is to make sure that you are providing value. You'll do this very often by sharing links to interesting and useful pages and by sharing stories and news. You can also upload pictures though, or update your status with interesting points.

But the key point is to be very consistent and regular. Check out Facebook Page like IFL Science. They post *multiple times a day* in order to get their content seen by enough of their audience (only around 10% of your followers will see each of your posts). That ensures growth, because many of those followers will click 'like' or they will click 'share' or they will comment. This then encourages further growth.

The advantage IFL Science has here is that it has a full time team of writers churning out tons of content. The way you can at least *slightly* even the odds is to consider re-sharing your older content. Don't just ignore those old posts – they still have value and many of your followers won't have seen them!

Another tip is to build a mailing list. A mailing list is another direct form of communication between you and your audience and it is particularly personal and great for engagement. Add a form to your website using an autoresponder, and then send your emails out on a regular basis informing your visitors about what's next for your business.

Ask them to respond and then respond to what they say back! This is one of the best ways to keep a conversation going and to get them to engage with you and to become fans rather than simply subscribers.

You can use an incentive (such as a free ebook) to bring more people to your website, but be cautious about this – when you do that, you will risk creating a list full of people who just want a free book! Better yet is to make sure that the mailing list *itself* is the incentive. Talk about it in your posts – discuss how your VIPs got some advance information. Talk about the great extra tip you'll be sharing in your next newsletter. Likewise, on your 'squeeze page' (a single page dedicated to encouraging people to sign up), talk about how your audience will be getting fantastic quality information completely for free, all beautifully formatted.

If you can do all these things, then you will gradually end your reliance on Google and create *multiple* income streams for your traffic. Diversifying in this way has all kinds of benefits because now you are much more resilient. And of course there's nothing to stop you from having multiple Facebook pages that all promote the same brand or the same website. If you have a web page about fitness, then you could have Facebook page on healthy eating, on weight lifting on running... and all of them could share links to your site.

Better yet, why not create multiple sites and multiple brands? This is the strategy that Richard Branson used to make sure that Virgin as a brand could never be felled in a single go.

This is great in the short term but it also means that if your SEO plans *should* fall by the wayside because of some unpredictable move from the search giant, you will still be able to survive. This is how you create a truly future-proof internet marketing strategy.