



GUIDE

SEO & CONTENT: What will (still) be important in 2023?

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SEO & Content: What remains? What comes?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a broad, constantly evolving field in online marketing. As a result, website owners need to stay on the ball. Where is the trend heading, what topics will carry over into 2023, and what new ones will emerge?

One thing we can reveal is that content will still be king. However, what content creation will look like in the future is currently occupying the minds of many in the profession. Will artificial intelligence completely replace human editors and copywriters in the foreseeable future? How can they optimally prepare themselves to respond to the advancement of automated text generation?

In addition to these questions (which already caused a stir in 2022 that has continued into this year), this whitepaper also explores other content creation trends and technical aspects relating to search engine optimization, all of which will be keeping the online marketing industry on its toes in the near term.



Content

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Part I: Content



SEO trend #1:

Content quality and the significance of E-E-A-T

For years now, content quality has been a major SEO development, so you could say it's a trend that's here to stay. Given that Google keeps reiterating how important high-quality content is for its search engine, this aspect is definitely deserving of the number 1 spot among the SEO trends of 2023.

The helpful content update: another milestone for content quality

True to form, Google once again fine-tuned its quality criteria for good content when it rolled out the helpful content update in August 2022. This update aims to increasingly promote and reward content that is primarily intended to help users. In contrast, unhelpful content that doesn't offer much added value will be identified better and ranked lower (source: Google¹).

What is unhelpful content? Examples are:

- » Content that is primarily intended to generate clicks and where the actual content and how it can benefit users are secondary (e.g. clickbait)
- » Content that merely summarizes other sources without adding any value itself
- » Low-quality content created by AI (more about that later)

Content written by people, for people – that's the maxim of the helpful content update. SEO best practices (such as incorporating relevant keywords) can obviously still be applied, but only to the extent that they add genuine value to the content. According to Google, an entire website can be negatively impacted by unhelpful content – how much it is impacted depends on the quality of the website as a whole, though. Google advises companies to review their content and remove less helpful content (source: Google²).

¹ <https://developers.google.com/search/blog/2022/08/helpful-content-update>

² <https://developers.google.com/search/blog/2022/08/helpful-content-update>



Effects of the helpful content update

Experts predict that the update will have a significant effect on rankings. The gap is likely to grow between helpful content and texts that have so far been frowned upon as having been merely created with SEO in mind.

Although the expected drastic ramifications haven't yet been felt to their full extent since the update, website owners can't afford to lie back and do nothing. After all, the update is based on machine learning and will probably only reach its full potential over time as the algorithm learns more.

Google is training its algorithms to rank high-quality content higher, while identifying and accordingly penalizing texts that have been created by artificial intelligence – at least that's what the “written by people, for people” principle implies at first glance. That said, Google has meanwhile communicated that automating content does not go against its guidelines per se, as long as it has been primarily created for users and is helpful to them.

Automated text generation and its role in content quality is currently a hot talking point. We take a closer look at the issue as part of [SEO trend no. 2: “Artificial intelligence and machine learning in content creation”](#).

E-E-A-T as a factor in content quality

One of the many factors contributing to high-quality texts is whether the author has proven expertise and qualifications when it comes to the topic being discussed. That's where the E-E-A-T model comes in, which stands for expertise, experience, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness. Although it isn't anything new, it deserves a mention in the context of content quality. In short, it entails the following:



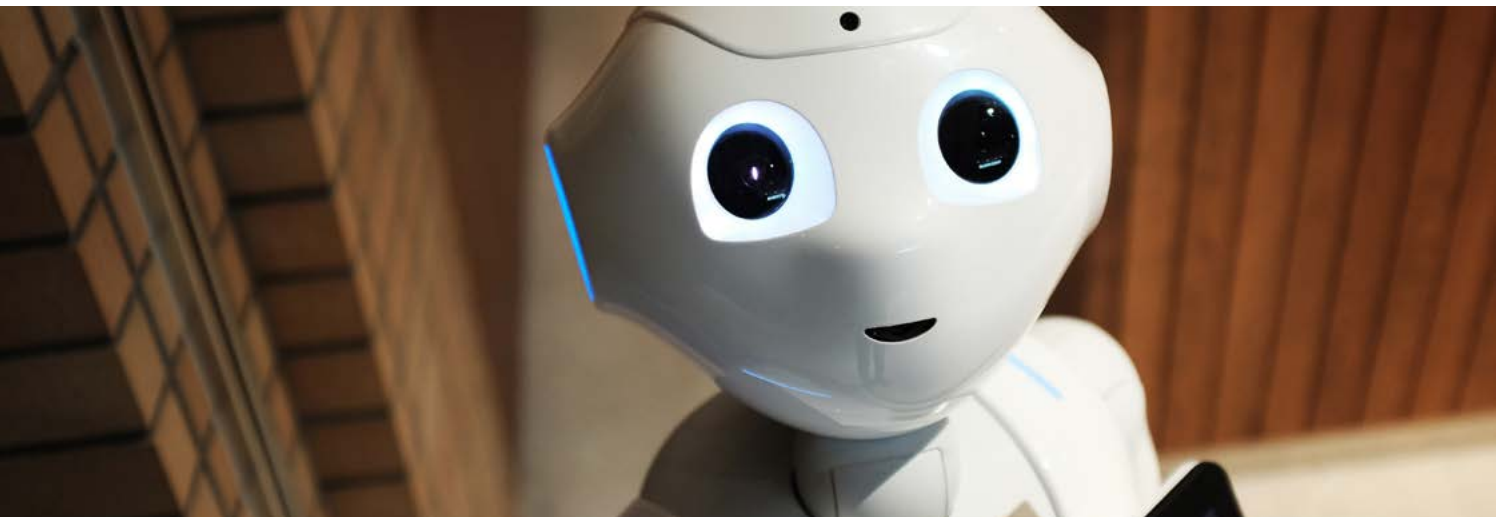
- » **Expertise:** Highlighting the expert status of authors on a website adds value to their texts. Readers know that the information is being provided to them straight from practice and from someone who is conversant with the subject.
- » **Experience:** Do the authors have first-hand experience with the presented topic? Google ranks personal experience as more credible and helpful.
- » **Authoritativeness:** Are the website, the organization behind it, and the authors leaders in their field and the topic at hand? Do they reference high-quality sources? Does the text contain high-quality content and specialized knowledge? If so, that indicates authoritativeness to readers.
- » **Trustworthiness:** Do the brand and authors have a good reputation? Are security factors incorporated, such as an SSL certificate, privacy policy, legal notice, and T&Cs? Has the website been linked to by other trustworthy sources? If so, the search engine and users will also trust it.

If a website meets the above standards, Google can identify it more easily as being of a high quality and consequently give it a better ranking. E-E-A-T is especially relevant for websites that explore YMYL topics. YMYL – short for “your money or your life” – refers to topics ranging from health to finances and insurance, basically anything that could impact a person’s life or financial situation.

Besides all those aspects, numerous other factors contribute to boosting content quality, including a clear, structured layout, easy navigation within an article, and useful links. If you want to learn more about the systemic requirements that are conducive to good content, part II of this whitepaper delves into technical SEO.

Summary

If you want to implement SEO measures that will guarantee long-lasting success, your content in 2023 needs to be well researched, well written, helpful, and full of genuine added value for users. In other words, your texts need to be of a high quality and written for people.



SEO trend #2:

Artificial intelligence and machine learning in content creation

A Webmaster Hangout with John Mueller in April 2022 caused an uproar on the SEO scene when he indicated that Google would clamp down on content created by artificial intelligence. However, Google itself talks about “spammy automatically generated content” in its Search Essentials (source: Google³) rather than referring generally to artificially created content. Spammy content means “text generated through automated processes without regard for quality or user experience” (source: Google⁴).

Is artificial always bad?

Ultimately, it all comes down to whether there is a manipulative intention behind the content creation, i.e. an attempt to generate content with the sole aim of manipulating rankings. The search engine wants to identify spam and low-quality content, as Google’s Danny Sullivan posted on Twitter in November 2022⁵: Content must be helpful and reliable; it doesn’t matter whether it’s produced by an AI or a human. Texts should be written for humans and not for search engines – [see SEO trend #1](#).

³ <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/essentials/spam-policies?hl=de#spammy-automatically-generated-content>

⁴ <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/essentials/spam-policies?hl=de#spammy-automatically-generated-content>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/dannysullivan/status/1589682365777211428>



Many companies rely on artificial intelligence when they have to create large volumes of text on a low budget. That's often the case with product texts, which have the advantage that their structure can be largely standardized and their features, e.g. technical data, can be clearly defined. The latest AI models for text generation already deal pretty well with such specific parameters.

Identifying artificially generated content

But how does the search engine even know when content has been created automatically? Ever since it was launched, Google has worked on the basis of recognizing patterns. If it detects patterns that are malicious, spammy, or artificial, it can apply a penalty.

AI-driven content creation is still in its infancy, but is based on continuous machine learning and so will keep on improving. At the same time, Google is constantly refining its recognition algorithms. The neck-and-neck race between the search engine and AI content creation will keep everyone on tenterhooks. For users, all we can hope is that the quality of the content will remain the priority, regardless of whether it's created by an AI or a human.

ChatGPT – a sensation in automated text generation?

Countless tweets, posts, articles, and blogs have revolved around one thing since November 2022: ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer), developed by the U.S. company OpenAI, is set to revolutionize artificial content creation. The AI-based chatbot provides answers to questions or commands entered by users. Thousands of these commands have already been tried out since its launch – from responding to straightforward emails right through to writing code, there doesn't seem to be anything that the tool can't do.



The quality of the answers and solutions depends on a range of factors. For one thing, ChatGPT can't yet access information after 2021 because the tool has only been trained using data prior to that. So, when asked the question "Who is the chancellor of Germany?" at the beginning of 2023, the answer it provided wasn't even Olaf Scholz

How precisely commands are formulated also plays a big role. The more unclear a request is, the vaguer the bot's response will be. For example, it will only produce a very general text when asked to "write an application for a position as an SEO analyst at company XY". But if you refine the command by saying "discuss the following job requirements, describe my CV, etc." and feed the tool the relevant data, you'll get a much more detailed draft.

Many usage scenarios can already be excellently executed in ChatGPT when the aforementioned points are taken into account. Caution is still called for, though. That's because machine learning is based on probability – when creating a text, for example, the tool calculates which word combinations belong together in the majority of trained cases and thus which ones are more likely to correctly answer the question it has been asked. There is no guarantee. For everyone who earns their living from writing, that's good news because a human still needs to ensure the required quality by fact-checking, improving, and adding to the text.

Summary

We can definitely picture a situation where we treat artificial intelligence as an assistant when creating content – even if we can't yet fully rely on AI delivering accurate and up-to-date facts. Humans are by no means dispensable yet, since they still have to check and improve the AI's output. Lots of additional tests and trial runs will be needed to determine how cost-effective this kind of approach is. Either way, the further development of AI will certainly be one of the most suspenseful topics in online marketing in 2023.



SEO trend #3:

Digital storytelling: modern narratives

This trend isn't new either, but will continue to gain momentum: good stories are highly engaging and sell (themselves) well. Nowadays, storytelling in a digital format is an essential tool in content marketing.

Tugging at the target group's heartstrings

By telling a captivating story to your target group, you directly reach it in a state where humans are extremely accessible: through their emotions. When we're presented with facts, our brain switches on in order to process them. Feelings, on the other hand, are triggered by our subconscious, something that is difficult or impossible to control. Emotions also influence our purchasing decisions, more so than rational factors. That's where emotional marketing comes in, often in the form of digital storytelling.



Stories are a great way of conveying feelings, whether in a text, video, interactive game, or podcast. In turn, social media, websites, and apps are ideal for presenting these stories. Reminiscing about how a company started out is one tactic that was already popular back in the early days of marketing. It goes a little something like this: “My great-grandmother came to the U.S. in 1903 and decided to try her hand at basic needlework in the backroom of a dressmaker. But then ...” – and already, we find ourselves gripped by the story of a clearly remarkable woman who carved her own path, making us want to know more.

In advertising, modern protagonists often go on some heroic journey. They feel something is missing in their life and make it their mission to do something about it. At the end, they usually emerge as a new person from their experiences. Digital storytelling can be funny, action-packed, sad, thought-provoking, and even tear-jerking. It’s about achieving victories, fulfilling dreams, or discovering a completely new way of life. The products advertised in this way often play a subordinate role and instead merely act as a vehicle for the leading character to reach their goal. After all, customers will be able to relate more if they can put themselves in someone’s shoes.

Summary

If you’ve got a good story to tell, you’ll be able to tap into a powerful form of content marketing for you and your company. Packaging services, products, and pressing societal issues into great stories enables you to grab the attention of the relevant audience.



SEO trend #4:

The success of short videos on TikTok and other platforms

Video content is another online marketing trend that has been unstoppable for years now. Videos can ideally complement an SEO strategy because they are self-explanatory, easy to consume, and entertaining. Particularly when it comes to boosting brand awareness, their potential is undeniable – you only have to think about employer branding as an example. In e-commerce too, video content isn't all about increasing the conversion rate or instantly accelerating profits; a well-made film can also work wonders for a company's reputation.

Social media platforms offering short videos

YouTube kicked it all off. Users have been uploading all kinds of videos there since 2005. The platform is especially popular for longer films – in the field of marketing, these might be detailed explanatory videos on products or services, how-to videos, or unboxings.



However, YouTube now has quite a few competitors on its heels: Instagram was launched in 2010, followed by TikTok in 2016, with both platforms focusing strongly on visuals and quick entertainment. TikTok in particular has been gaining ground for a while now. While it started out by providing small doses of content in the form of 15-second videos, longer formats are now also possible. Nevertheless, the concept remains the same: entertainment on literally any topic, delivered quickly and consumed even more quickly. That especially appeals to a younger audience.

There are still more active users on Facebook (2.9 billion), YouTube (2.5 billion), and Instagram (1.4 billion), but TikTok is catching up: more than 1 billion people now use the network each month, making it one of the most successful social media platforms in the world. TikTok currently ranks sixth among the social networking sites used globally, and its growth seems to be unabated. Worldwide, users spend an average of 90 minutes a day on the platform; the average session lasts 10.85 minutes (source: [demandsage.com](https://www.demandsage.com)⁶).

Video content as a marketing tool

Short videos clearly have a whole lot of marketing potential, and the other social media platforms have caught on to that fact. Instagram followed TikTok's example and introduced Reels, which are also short clips in portrait format. The videos shouldn't exceed 30 seconds and can be creatively enhanced using various tools (source: Instagram⁷).

YouTube didn't want to miss out on offering its own short format for quick entertainment either and so rolled out YouTube Shorts with a maximum length of 60 seconds. These videos are also generated by users; all they need is a smartphone (source: YouTube⁸).

⁶ <https://www.demandsage.com/tiktok-user-statistics/>

⁷ <https://about.instagram.com/de-de/features/reels>

⁸ https://www.youtube.com/intl/de_ALL/creators/shorts/

The user statistics for videos speak volumes: people currently watch 17 hours of video content per week, which is 3 hours more than four years ago. Sharing is also a marketing factor that shouldn't be underestimated because people are twice as likely to share videos than any other type of content (source: Wyzowl⁹).

YouTube continues to be the undisputed number 1 in terms of video marketing. However, certain age groups, namely Gen Z and Gen Alpha, have now predominantly moved over to the newer TikTok platform because they feel it is much more relevant (source: t3n¹⁰).



Summary

Marketers can no longer avoid embracing the topic of video marketing, particularly short-form videos. Search engine optimization measures are currently still largely focused on YouTube and should continue to play a role there, but it can pay off for a company to adapt or realign its content strategy to keep up with users migrating to other platforms. As always in marketing, it's all about what target group you're wanting to reach. Not every company has to be active on TikTok just for the sake of it.

⁹ <https://www.wyzowl.com/video-marketing-statistics/>

¹⁰ <https://t3n.de/news/verweildauer-dau-tiktok-instagram-1485919/>

Part II: Technical





SEO trend #5:

What the page experience update means for user-friendliness

Users visiting a website want to have positive experiences on it. That means it needs to work quickly and smoothly and give them the results they're after with minimal effort, whether they're buying sneakers or researching a holiday destination. The page experience ultimately determines a company's financial success. For that reason, optimizing it will continue to be a key task for all SEO managers in 2023.

What is the measure of a good page experience?

A poor page experience manifests itself in the form of negative user signals, such as higher bounce rates and fewer conversions. Optimizing the page experience in terms of load time, interactivity, and stability can be beneficial in a number of ways:

1. Improved page experience for visitors → think “usability”
2. Improved Google ranking → think “Core Web Vitals”

Website owners should aim to give their users the best possible page experience in addition to high-quality content. Google's John Mueller already argued that years ago: “For me, the top priority would be usability.

I wouldn't start by optimizing the HTML code or the internal links, but instead really come together with users to see how they get the result they're after. How do they get on with the website, where do they encounter problems, or what areas are unclear?" (source: onlinemarketing.de¹¹). This interview was a while ago now, but the advice is still just as relevant.

So, how can the quality of a page experience be measured for real users on mobile and desktop devices, and what factors play a role here? Since June 2021, the page experience has been determined by "Core Web Vitals", among other aspects.

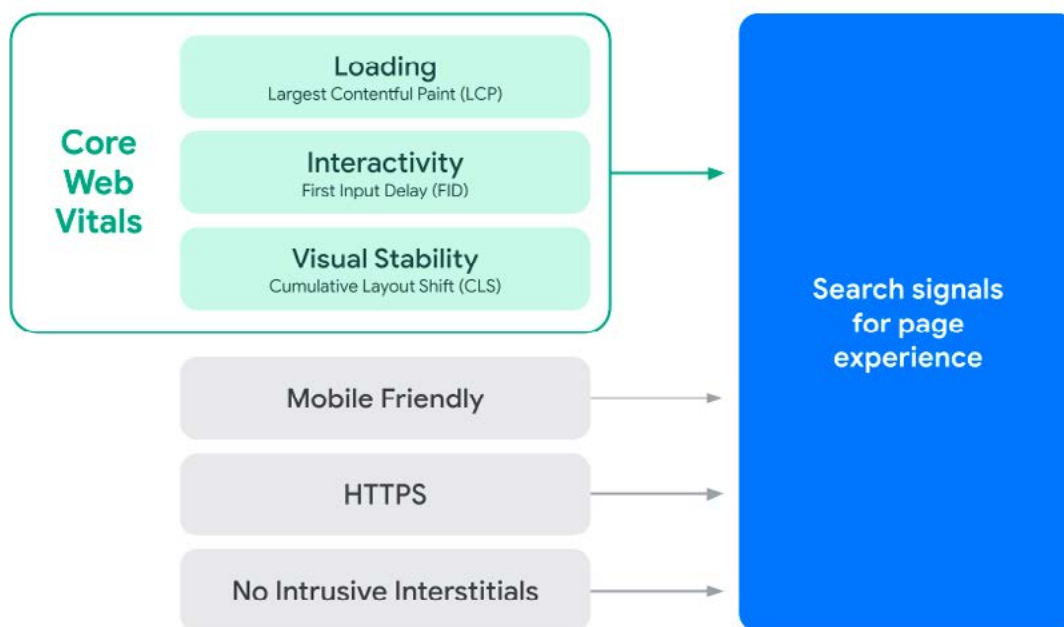


Figure 1: An overview of the signals for evaluating the page experience (source: Google¹²)

Overall, these Core Web Vitals have made a really positive impact since they were introduced. Many website owners have optimized their pages for a better experience. However, the potential hasn't been fully harnessed yet. The Core Web Vitals also only evaluate a website from the perspective of the technical page experience. If site owners only optimize the technical aspects, but neglect their content, they will be missing out on an important component for achieving a good ranking.

¹¹ <https://onlinemarketing.de/seo/seltene-seo-tipps-google-john-mueller-interview>

¹² <https://webmasters.googleblog.com/2020/05/evaluating-page-experience.html>



Summary

In 2023, websites will still have to be created and optimized with people front of mind. How they perform in terms of search engines should only be a secondary consideration. Many site owners have seen positive results by optimizing their page experience, and this trend is likely to continue. At the same time, users are becoming more and more discerning, and the competition is getting bigger and fiercer. Companies can no longer afford to ignore the usability of their website.



SEO trend #6:

Visual search & multisearch – searching with images and more

How users search for information, entertainment, products, or services online has changed massively over the years. While we used to type individual words into the search field to then be shown text-based data, searching is now much more versatile – and Google is ahead of the game here.

New search features

At Search On 2022, Google announced not only new features for Google News and Google Shopping, but also the rollout of multisearch – a feature that puts the visual experience in the spotlight. Visual search is not a completely new trend, but it is increasingly catching on. And for good reason: the human brain processes images much faster than text, so it makes sense to utilize that factor for online search as well. Google Lens was released back in 2017 and has been continuously enhanced since.

The visual search feature perfectly caters to a wide range of industries. Multisearch lets you take a photo with your mobile device. Google Lens will then search for the image and the user can enhance the image search by adding specific keywords. Multisearch therefore facilitates much more complex search queries. For example, you can take a photo of a bicycle that you like the look of in the street, add a bit of information or a couple of keywords, run a search, and instantly you'll be shown a list of sellers – that's how quickly consumers and companies can be brought together nowadays.

It doesn't just work for consumer goods, though. Maybe your houseplant is looking sad, but you don't know what it's called. If you want to bring it back to life, you can simply take a photo of it and add the keyword "care instructions" or "how do I look after this plant?" to your search query.



The "near me"¹³ feature is also new. It lets you take a picture of a particular meal and run it through the search engine. Google will then display a list of nearby restaurants that have that dish on the menu.

Google generally wants to deliver more visual responses to search queries, whether in the form of stories or short videos like we see on social media (see „SEO trend #4:“) or by highlighting tips or other relevant data in an appealing format.

Figure 2: When running a search on the city of Oaxaca in Mexico, the first search result is a story.

¹³ <https://blog.google/intl/de-de/produkte/suchen-entdecken/search-on-2022-google-suche-google-maps/>

Multifunctional search

Multisearch is currently only available in English, but it is set to be extended to 70 other languages, further reinforcing the growing relevance of multifunctional search. After all, users are also becoming increasingly versatile in their search methods by searching across devices and using a vast array of features. Voice search, for example, is also increasingly gaining ground – although not quite to the extent that many had hoped.

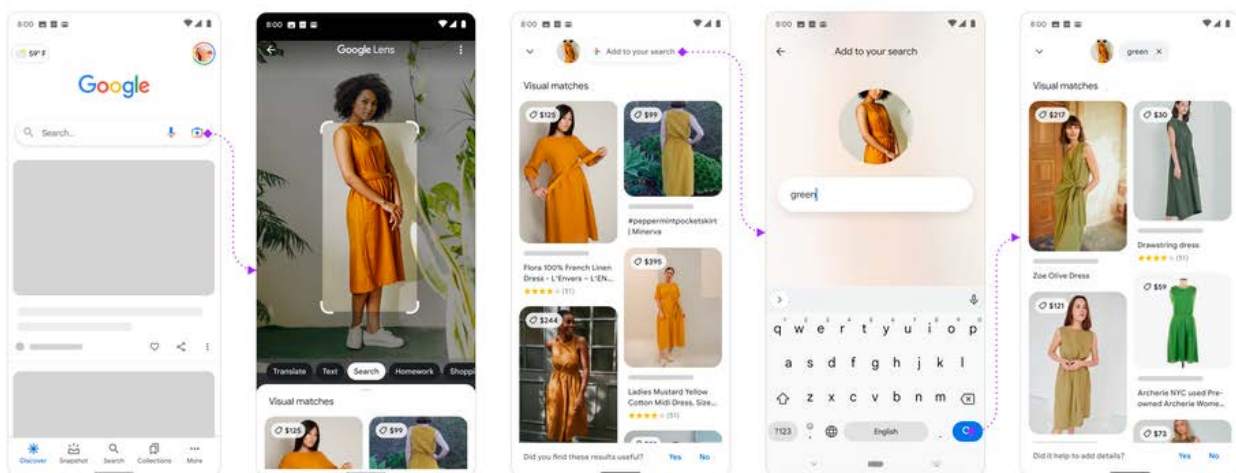


Figure 3: The multisearch results for a dress, taken from <https://blog.google/products/search/multisearch/>.

Only time will tell how well it will all work in practice. Either way, users are likely to really embrace the convenience, versatility, and appealingly presented results of multifunctional search.

Summary

The expansion of visual search features means one thing for companies and organizations that have an online presence: content shouldn't just be made up of text, but should also incorporate videos, photos, illustrations, infographics, and other visual material – not forgetting the relevant SEO markers, such as descriptive alt texts or image captions. Once the multisearch feature has been rolled out for other languages, you may need to adapt your SEO strategy to the new search method.



SEO trend #7:

Rich snippet optimization

Google keeps increasing the number of rich snippets displayed on its search engine results pages (SERPs). Rich snippets are normally shown right at the top of the page and are highlighted to make them stand out. They grab the attention of users by including things like FAQs, rating stars, lists, and product awards. Experience has shown that they generate a higher click rate and thus more organic traffic.

It can pay off for website owners to optimize their pages with an eye to rich snippets as part of their SEO strategy. The first step is to mark up content with structured data. Structured data as defined by [schema.org](https://schema.org/docs/schemas.html)¹⁴ makes content on web pages machine-readable and gives search engines important context behind the information being provided. Although structured data doesn't directly influence the ranking, it does mean that the search engine will actually consider making the page a rich snippet in the first place.

¹⁴ <https://schema.org/docs/schemas.html>

Rich snippets for videos

Going back to „SEO trend #4:“, there are also a number of ways to optimize video content for rich snippets (source: Google¹⁵), at least on YouTube. Timestamps is one option; these take the user straight to the part that interests them in a video – like jump markers in a text.

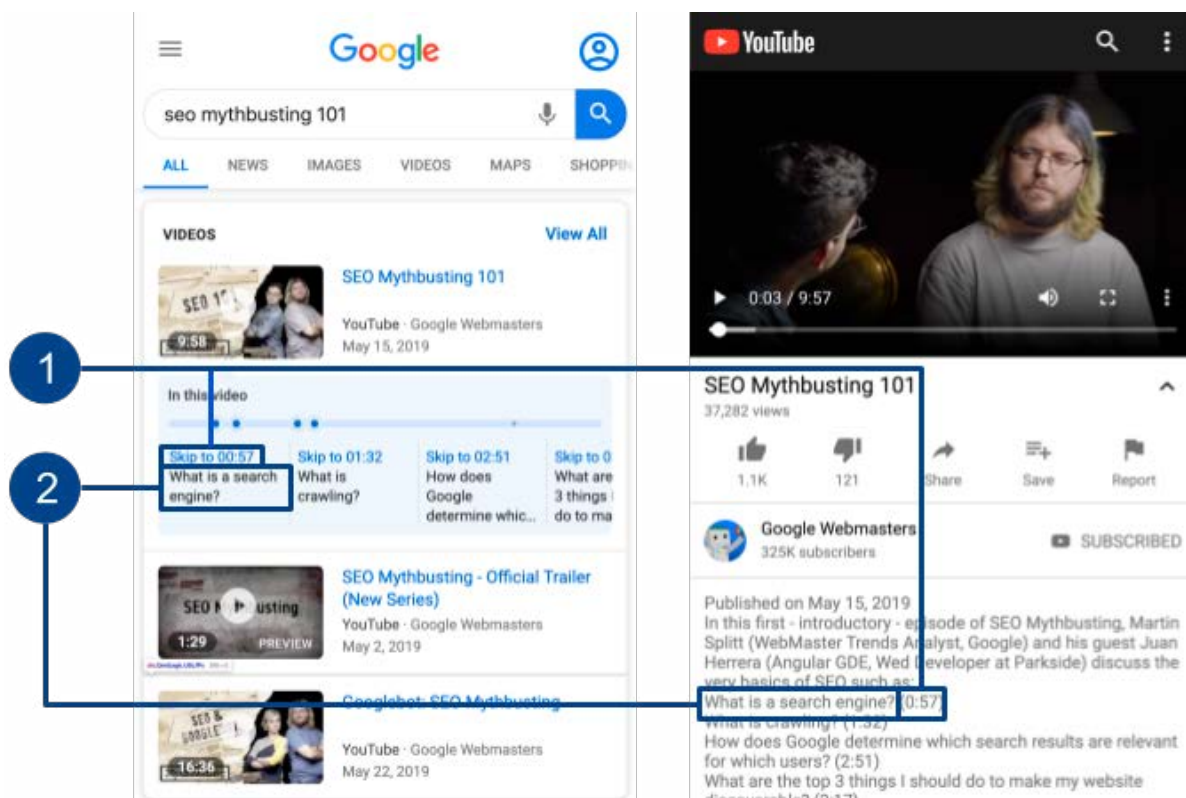


Figure 4: Marking timestamps in a video, taken from <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/advanced/structured-data/video?hl=de>.

Summary

In 2023, Google is expected to continue testing and rolling out extensions in the form of rich snippets on its SERPs. Website owners should therefore get to grips with structured data and mark up their pages in a way that is relevant to their content. Rich snippets increase click rates and allow Google to understand a web page better.

¹⁵ <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/advanced/structured-data/video?hl=de>

Closing remarks

In 2023, the key success factor for effective search engine optimization will continue to be striking the right balance between content quality and an outstanding user experience.

For years, Google has been emphasizing the importance of high-quality content. It wants users to be given the best possible response to their search query; in other words, results that are useful, helpful, and unique. Content should be reliable and accurate and provide users with genuine added value.

The search engine is continuously training its algorithms to better understand and rank content. For that reason, SEO managers should make an even more conscious effort to align their content with user needs. Automated text generation by artificial intelligence can be used as an aid, but humans should always check that the information is accurate and offers added value to users. Complementary media and methods, such as videos and digital storytelling, should also be considered to diversify and round off the user experience.

Generally speaking, an SEO and content strategy should be future-proof and tailored to the target group. Future-proof means that both the content and the user experience need to work seamlessly from a technical perspective and be designed with users front of mind – in other words in a user-friendly way. By focusing on Core Web Vitals and using structured data, to name but two strategies, companies can gain a lot from optimizing their websites.

However, future-proof also means that companies need to keep an eye on the latest market developments and assess which ones should be incorporated into their strategy – multisearch is just one example.

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