



5 MEGA TRENDS THAT WILL IMPACT SEO IN 2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world of SEO is ever-changing and 2016 has been no different. We have seen a number of major Google algorithm and online market changes that will continue to impact SEO in 2017. The intent of this guide is to brief you on the five most important SEO trends or “mega trends.” We’ll explain the implications of these trends and offer practical action steps to allow you to gain the edge over your competition in 2017.

The most important trends covered in our 2017 SEO Trends Report include:

- Why optimizing for mobile will be the most important SEO move you make in 2017
- How content marketing has evolved and its critical importance in the coming year
- How new trends such as voice search will impact the way you tackle search
- The importance of playing in the Google ecosystem to boost your overall results
- How artificial intelligence, especially Rank Brain, will impact your SEO tactics

5 SEO MEGA TRENDS OF 2017



HOW DO WE PREDICT THE FUTURE?

Keeping up with new trends is no mean feat. In this guide we analyzed existing data on current trends, plus we've included our own internal tests, along with the insights we have gained from managing hundreds of SEO campaigns each month. This process gives us the empirical data needed to help us predict the key trends included in this eBook. Below are examples of a few 2016 trends we have used as a basis for our analysis.

Examples of 2016 SEO Trends that Will Impact 2017

THE ALGORITHM	THE CHANGE	THE IMPACT
The launch of Penguin 4.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The algorithm now devalues links rather than punishing sites. • Penguin is baked into Google's core algorithm, updating in real time. • The new Penguin is more granular. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The feasibility of negative SEO is greatly diminished. • Penguin 4.0 pushes SEO closer to real marketing. • Google algorithms use artificial intelligence and will become smarter over time.
Google Possum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The biggest update to local search since Pigeon in 2014. • Impacted 64% of local SERPs • Diversified the local results • Prevents local spam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local business will rank outside of physical city limits. • Google will siphon off traffic to their local listings and maps, away from local websites. • Local and organic filters will run more independently.
Google Splits Search Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizes mobile search over desktop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google's quest to create a better mobile search experience means that smartphone users will receive better mobile optimized content.
Google Quality Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google RankBrain is a machine-learning artificial intelligence that continues to get smarter as it learns which search results are most relevant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaming the Google Algorithm will become harder as algorithms such as Panda, Penguin and Payday, become progressively smarter.
Google eliminates the right rail for paid search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google eliminates the right rail on desktop. • Adds a fourth paid search result for more popular searches. • Google matches the user experience for paid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On mobile, results are less visible as they are pushed below the fold.

<http://searchengineland.com/everything-need-know-googles-possum-algorithm-update-258900>

TREND 1

OPTIMIZING FOR
MOBILE CONTINUES
TO GROW IN
IMPORTANCE



You don't need us to tell you about the shift to mobile that has occurred over the last five years. Mobile devices now make up more than half of all web traffic and this trend will only increase in 2017.

What you may have missed is that in October 2016, Google's Gary Illyes announced at Pubcon in Las Vegas that Google intended splitting their search results into separate versions for mobile and desktop in the coming months. This announcement confirms the mobile-first stance that Google has been promoting for years. So what does it mean for site owners and SEOs?

PREDICTION: Web design will move away from a traditional desktop mentality to one where mobile is given primary or at least equal consideration to desktop.

Responsive design is nice but does it really give the mobile user the experience that they need? If you are redesigning your website, begin with the mobile user experience. Consider load times and the ability to consume and interact with content on a small screen.



ACTION: Consider mobile user experience and design for mobile first

PREDICTION: Mobile speed will consume a large part of your focus in 2017

Slow load times impact user experience, and Google made this clear in April 2015 with Mobilegeddon, an algorithm update focused on mobile speed. Studies have shown that a one-second load delay results in a 7% reduction in conversion.

The introduction of Google AMP (Accelerated Mobile Pages) at the end of 2015, allowed webmasters to build web pages for static content that will load extremely fast. This clear preference for speed by Google was tested by our team and returned a few very interesting results. First, we found that we could improve mobile speeds by 15% to 85% by AMPing our clients' pages. Second, Google indexed and ranked these new pages higher soon after launching them.



ACTION: Invest in AMP development for your key pages

CAUTION

There is a downside to doing AMP incorrectly, namely, poor conversion. Simply converting your AMP page with an AMP plugin often means stripping out the styling that makes your pages attractive and helps them to convert. Make sure to re-incorporate your styling including colors, fonts and logos to improve the user experience.



TREND 2

CONTENT
DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGIES WILL
CHANGE



Okay, we may never again say that content is king, but the truth is that SEO is really all about content. **Expect to see these content trends becoming critical in the coming year:**

- 🎯 Organic content development will align with paid search
- 🎯 Content will be diversified and video content will grow rapidly to accommodate smaller mobile screens
- 🎯 SEOs will embrace shorter content again
- 🎯 Content development will be heavily topic- and hierarchy- based to generate results

PREDICTION: Content Strategy will align more closely with paid search

Google removed the right-hand side ads on desktop in February 2016. Thankfully, this move has had minimal impact on desktop SEO results. On mobile, the SEO community continues to be concerned as popular organic search results are pushed below the fold by as many as four paid ads.

It is no secret that content development is becoming more strategic. We are finding that collaboration with the paid search team is becoming more commonplace. Content teams meet periodically with paid search teams to compare organic results for paid search spend. SEOs now analyze which organic results show up above the fold for so-called “money terms.” Writers then match content for these terms with buyer needs. On the other hand, when content for paid ad results gets pushed below the fold, writers tend to focus on developing discovery topics that make each page a high-performing online experience.

 **ACTION:** SEO and paid search teams need to work together to strategically develop content

PREDICTION: Content Development will move from keyword to topic development

Although keywords are not dead, intentions and topics are becoming more important considerations when writing copy for your website pages. To rank for competitive topics, you will need to go beyond optimizing topics on a page by planning out themed hierarchies or silos in your URL structure. This means building out themed content pillars or building out sections of your website for each topic.

 **ACTION:** Focus on building content pillars rather than individual topic pages

PREDICTION: Content writers will focus more on mid- to longtail keywords

As Google adds more advertising to the SERPs, placement of organic results will be further pushed below the fold. A good strategy is to focus on mid- to longtail keywords that are less competitive and will build rankings and traffic.

 **ACTION:** Write content focused on mid- to longtail keywords to build traffic





PREDICTION: Content will focus on intent and will slowly grow shorter again

Over the last few years, there has been a strong correlation between longer and longer content ranking well in the Search Engines. Thankfully, it seems that this trend is slowly changing. In fact, in an interview with Steve Rayson of Buzzsumo for the Content Promotion Summit, he shares that 81 of the top 100 most shared B2B articles were short-form content.

What we are seeing is that user interaction and user experience are more important than content length. Latent Semantic Indexing (related keyword) tools are another trick to make shorter content rank well.

 **ACTION:** Write content focused on user interaction and great user experience rather than length


PREDICTION: Dynamic content development will become the big rage

As Marketing Automation becomes more ubiquitous, the technology is now available to serve up dynamic content to web visitors. For those of you not familiar with the concept, dynamic content lets you change the content on a page based on a visitor's demographics or behavior on your site. For instance, if a lead visits your site for the first time you can provide them an eBook or white paper. If the visitor returns to the site more often, rules can trigger new content on the same page that instead offers an instant discount to close the deal. Dynamic Content is a very exciting change for SEO content development and the implementation possibilities are endless.

 **ACTION:** Learn how to build dynamic content to increase conversions and user experience

PREDICTION: Content will become diversified and the rise of video will grow.

As mobile rises in importance, the way that content is delivered will change. Video content will play a major part in the mobile user experience and will gain more prominence. Users find reading lots of text on a small screen difficult. It is so much easier to scan a few bullet points and watch a video than it is to scroll through long paragraphs of text. Web visitors, especially Millennials, prefer consuming content in the form of images, videos, memes and graphs than by reading text.

 **ACTION:** Produce new mobile-friendly copy in the form of videos, images, light text with lots of white space and bullet points that can be easily consumed on a smartphone.

TREND 3

VOICE SEARCH

Google's I/O developer conference in May 2016 introduced some major announcements that indicate Google's direction, including two new technologies: voice search and natural language processing. These features are going to be an important part of Google's future. Google's voice search will allow users to employ more natural language to search the web. At the same time, Apple has made strides to improve SIRI while Microsoft continues to make some outstanding improvements to their voice search service, Cortana. Devices like Google Home and Amazon Echo put powerful search capabilities around the house. So what does this mean to marketers?




PREDICTION: As voice search algorithms get better, more and more people will be using voice search

This is not much of a prediction as more and more searches are using voice now. In fact, 1 in every 5 searches on Google Android is a voice search. That means we need to be building our content to meet the demands of voice search. The first big difference is that we don't search the same way with voice as we do with a keyword. Most voice searches are much longer and are very specific. What that means for us is that our content needs to answer questions and our product descriptions need to be more detailed and keyword rich.

 **ACTION:** Write content for voice that answers questions. If you own an eCommerce site, make your descriptions more detailed so that they match longer-tail search queries.

PREDICTION: SEOs will focus on offsite channels to generate more mobile traffic

It is important to be aware of the types of results that your Smartphone returns after a voice query. For instance, if you ask SIRI on an iPhone "Find me a dentist near here," Yelp listings will be returned. Based on these results, it is well worth it to put work into building out your Yelp listings. The same may be true for other offsite directories for your industry.

 **ACTION:** Test out typical voice queries that may result in search results for your business. For listings such as Yelp, ensure that your profile and related content is well written to take advantage of voice search results.

TREND 4

SCHEMA AND MICRO-FORMATTING

Although schema and micro-formatting have been around for several years now, only the more tech-savvy SEOs have been including them on their web pages. This will change in 2017 as more and more companies see the benefits of jumping on the micro-formatting bandwagon.

You may ask, what is schema and why should I care? Schema is a type of micro-data that makes it easier for the search engine to analyze terms and translate them into search results. For instance, Google's Rich Answers use information from popular web pages to answer users' questions on the web. As always, it is our job as SEO and web owners to make the life of the Search Engine crawlers as simple as possible, and that is where schema comes in.

PREDICTION: SEOs will aim for Google's direct answer box with rich snippets

You may have noticed that when you ask a question on Google you receive more than a list of search results. You also get an informational box at the top of the page that displays a quick answer to your question. This is Google's Rich Answer Box, which is a featured snippet and the new holy grail for SEOs. There are a number of ways you can get your content featured in the Answer Box.

1. Start by trying to identify some more advanced questions that your audience might be asking. We recommend reviewing Quora and Yahoo Answers for the types of questions that prospects are asking. You want to look for "how", "why" and "where" questions.
2. Answer the questions directly, and try to be as clear as possible. Depending on your business, you may also want to write definitions for more technical search terms you can identify in Google's keyword planner.
3. Make sure that the user experience on your page is good. Include headings, bullet points, images and other relevant data. It is better to answer a question in list form than a big paragraph of text.
4. Include Schema Markup and SEO best practices. That means using the keyword or phrase in your header. Use citations and interlinking to make the content as relevant as possible.
5. Review your schema code with [this](#) structured data testing tool.



ACTION: Write content on your website for Google's Rich Answer Box.



PREDICTION: SEOs will embrace schema and micro-formatting throughout their website.

Schema markup is one of the most powerful, but most underutilized forms of SEO available. This will change in 2017 as SEOs begin to understand how micro-formatting can boost search results.

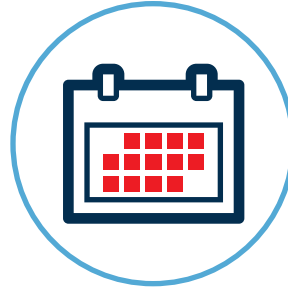
There are hundreds of markup types:



Local businesses



Restaurants



Events



Reviews



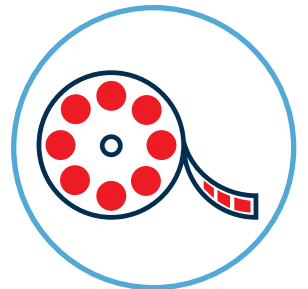
Apps



Books



Products



Movies



ACTION: Review your website for opportunities to add schema markup to your website.

TREND 5

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Google has invested heavily in machine learning and artificial intelligence. This has made Google one of the biggest corporate sponsors of AI, and they have made a significant investment in it for videos, speech, translations and search. In fact, Google uses an AI called RankBrain to rank most of the search results we see every day. RankBrain isn't there to replace Google Algorithms but rather to enhance them. Another important trend to consider is that Penguin 4.0, announced in September 2016, is the last of the Penguin updates. Future algorithm updates will be treated as real-time signals, just as Panda, Mobile-Friendly, Payday and Top Heavy all became part of Google's AI. Instead of warnings and penalties, Google will devalue spam in real-time.



PREDICTION: Expect algorithmic updates instead of penalties

RankBrain combined with other key algorithm elements will allow Google to utilize AI to fine tune the signals for a given category, location or even keyword.



ACTION: As search gets smarter and more refined it makes no sense to try and game Google. It makes no sense to try anything but white hat tactics to get ahead in 2017

CONCLUSION

As always, we wrap up this year's annual trend briefings with a call to action. While it is our job to watch trends, ambitious SEOs and business owners should apply these trends to create a compelling future in 2017. Yes, 2017 will be just as competitive, if not more than 2016, but trends are the secret weapon that you can turn to your advantage.

So, do us a favor and take action on a few or all of the items we have listed to create a compelling future for your business in the upcoming year. If you need our help, National Positions is always here to assist in any way we can.

NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

Talk to one of our experts.

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