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CREATIVITY AND SEO - CONTENT CREATION



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INTRODUCTION

It's a common, though changing, misconception in marketing circles that search is a discipline that requires less creativity and more brute force mathematics – to code your way into the good graces of an uncaring algorithm. In a sense, the reason for this lies in the origins of search marketing (see our eBook '[Why Search Marketing is Marketing](#)'), as a group of coders threw themselves in to the 'Google Dance', implementing a number of techniques which sought to capitalise on one or another of the many and various loopholes of the Google algorithm in order to take their own, or clients' websites to the top of Google's search engine results pages (SERPs)

These so-called 'black hat' tactics, from keyword stuffing to invisible text, from link farms to content scraping have slowly, though not entirely, disappeared and are all but completely useless to the modern search marketer – but they have left the industry with a reputation for being underhand and opaque, a reputation that, while some sections of it may have earned, the industry as a whole no longer deserves.

Over the last couple of decades, Google has improved its algorithm and implemented numerous filters and penalties that have driven positive changes in the search marketing industry, making it a far more transparent industry than most, while serving almost as a unifying enemy that has allowed the industry to retain the cooperative feeling of the message boards it originated on.

However, one place that many brands and agencies have failed to adapt is in its attitude to content – which, while content is a major focus, can either be seen as a necessary evil, which means that quality suffers, or as outreach material only which means that quality content is only used externally. This is no longer the case, and the realities of the modern web require that attitudes to content creation need to change.

ARE CREATIVITY AND SEO INCOMPATIBLE?

The main myth that has arisen – predominately because of poor search engine optimisation (SEO) practice – is that SEO is somehow incompatible with creativity. Myths of keyword densities persist to this day, while minimum word count rumours (anywhere between 250 and 350 depending on where you find it) have been joined of late by rumours of word count targets in the thousands.

What this amounts to, when combined with the ‘necessary evil’ view of content that persists in the industry, is a focus on the wrong things where content is concerned and a relegation of creativity to second fiddle – or at worst, the creation of creative content is seen as a completely separate endeavour to SEO.

In reality, while far from perfect, the Google algorithm is inordinately more capable than it is given credit for – especially as it is now far more reliant on machine learning than we are either told by Google or give it credit for as an industry. With in excess of 400 ranking factors, it is no exact science, but among the main drivers of ranking are, in the modern day: relevance, usefulness and authority.



RELEVANCE

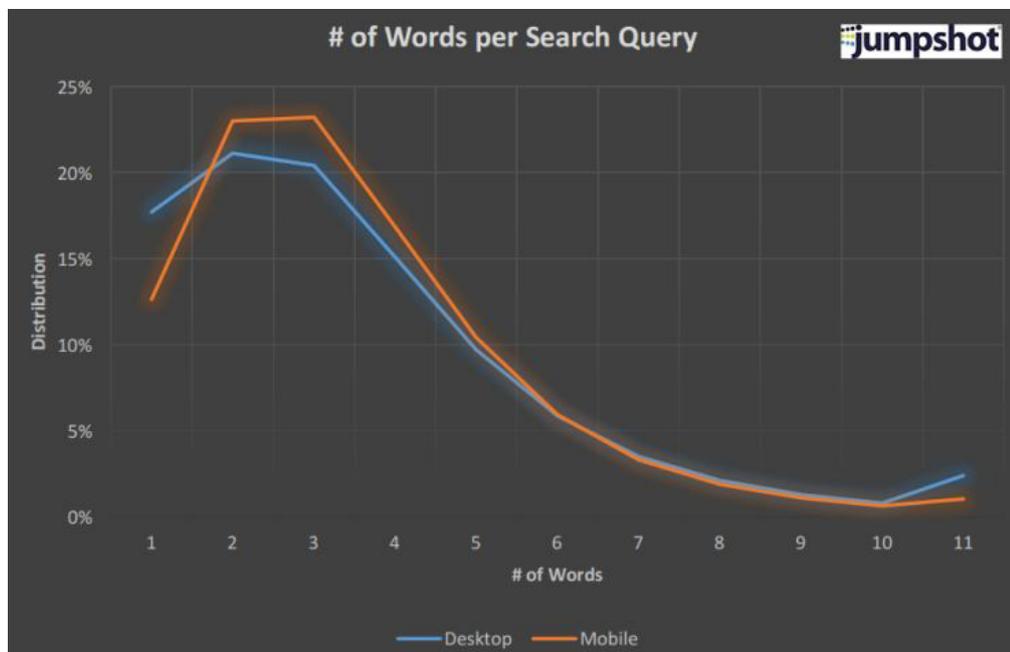
First on the list comes relevance – while not the most important ranking signal, it does determine for what the content will be ranking and it is therefore imperative that this is addressed in the early stages of your content creation.

While relevance may not seem at first thought to be the most conducive aspect of content creation to inspiration, it is an area which can really drive the creativity of a project. Content, in its most basic form, is the material on a website that is used to attract users and propel them towards conversion in one way or another – but this leaves a tremendous amount of creative license to be had.

The way we can make use of our creativity when addressing relevance can be broken down in to two main categories:

WHAT WE TARGET

It is tempting, when looking at what we want to target, to look for the trophy keywords in our respective industries – top level keywords with enormous volume and, consequently, enormous competition. However, while it is unlikely that the importance of these key terms will ever completely diminish, their value to SMEs has already been reduced by the level of investment they require and is being reduced further by changes to the way people search.



As we move further away from the origins of search – both in terms of time and device – we are seeing the length of queries increase. While we may still search for “keyword” on our desktops, we are much more likely to search for “best+keyword” or “keyword+near me” from our mobiles and there is plenty of research that suggests voice searches are much longer again.

As such, we can get a little more creative in our targeting in order to gain a foothold in our industries – we can look to forgo our single key term targets and extend our targeting to longtail keywords, including seasonal, location based and best of types of queries (and many more).

We can expect, as traditional search recedes further in to the past, query length to grow ever longer and more specific and, as this happens, we'll see the market for niche brands increase – as we've seen on (what remains of) the high street, with larger multinational brands increasingly bypassed by younger generations in favour of experiential niche or artisanal brands.

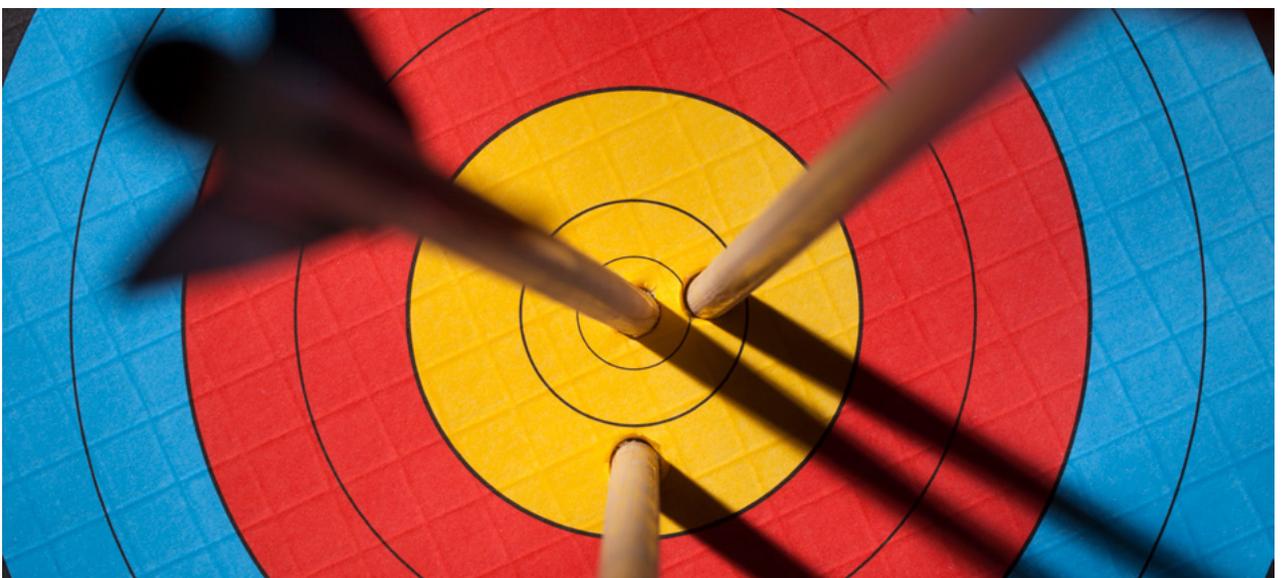
For this reason, it pays for brands to be more creative when choosing the keywords they target – and it will continue to grow in importance as natural language search becomes the standard.

HOW WE TARGET

This is another area which has been trapped in a bygone age, but which is gradually catching up with the shifting conversation. While previously we have seen brands target keywords using their landing page content, it is increasingly the case that this will be reserved for high intent keywords – while we look to increase the amount of secondary content we host on our sites.

That won't be a revelation to most – as most brands will now host a blog – but what we will need to consider is the growing usefulness of user generated content (UGC), of information first content (how to or comparison pieces) and other varieties of consumer first content. Not only does this kind of content increase the number of keywords we can target (more than capable of making up for the lower numbers we'll pitch for by choosing to avoid the trophy keywords), it is also more capable of building a bond with consumers which is vital for the long term success of brands both large and small.

This can be done across a broad range of types of content, too. By looking to target more varied and long tail keywords, we open up the possible varieties of content we employ. Written content can take the form of recipes or guides, we can create infographics that explore important aspects of your industry while videos can be anything from informative discussions to simple entertainment.



USEFULNESS

Usefulness is not a traditional concern of SEO, but is one that has been an important factor in ranking since the introduction of the [Panda update](#) – which sought to address a host of content quality issues – and has been growing in importance throughout a series of frequent and unnamed updates in 2018.

Usefulness can be redefined for SEO as ‘being where the customer is, offering them what they want’. It is a mind-set that has been ubiquitous for some time in paid search, but which is still trailing behind somewhat in terms of SEO and, specifically, in content. Paid search, for example, has dealt for a long time with levels of intent – with the best paid search experts creating campaigns which cater to the needs of consumers from awareness right through to conversion. This is something which can and should be replicated when it comes to content on your brand’s site.

When we create a brand or work within a specific market or industry for an extended period, we do so because we have or develop an expertise that sets us apart. That gives us a lot of leverage to use when we look to be creative regarding our usefulness to consumers.

Take learning as an example; when a brand has expertise within an industry, it instantly has a wealth of knowledge that may not be immediately apparent to its consumers – who may require its product but not necessarily understand its industry. By looking to improve the knowledge of our consumers, we can not only more easily explain the need for our products and services, we can also build trust and loyalty with our consumers. We can implement creativity in the service of usefulness, therefore, by:

COMMUNICATING OUR KNOWLEDGE

Brands know a lot about what they do and the industries they operate in - that’s why they do it - they are attempting to turn passion and knowledge in to profit. However, while our consumers may need our products or services, it’s our job to tell them why, and that opens up a host of opportunity to be creative. You can give product breakdowns, walkthroughs of key elements of your offering, guides that will help your consumers to get the most out of your product, or ways to use it that will help them in ways they might not think of – all of which can help to build trust and make sure that when it comes time to buy, your brand is the first one they think of.



CATERING FOR DIFFERENT LEARNING METHODS

People learn in a variety of different ways – and in catering to different learning styles opens up your content plan to a host of different content types. Some of these types will even open up their own unique types of appearance in the [SERP rich results positions](#) – whether that’s in text, as part of video carousels, or in image search – for information on how to use technical markup to increase the chances of this, you can download [‘A Beginner’s Guide to Structured Data and Schema Markup’](#). A few available options are as follows:

Visual learners may like:

- Infographics
- Diagrams
- Process flowcharts

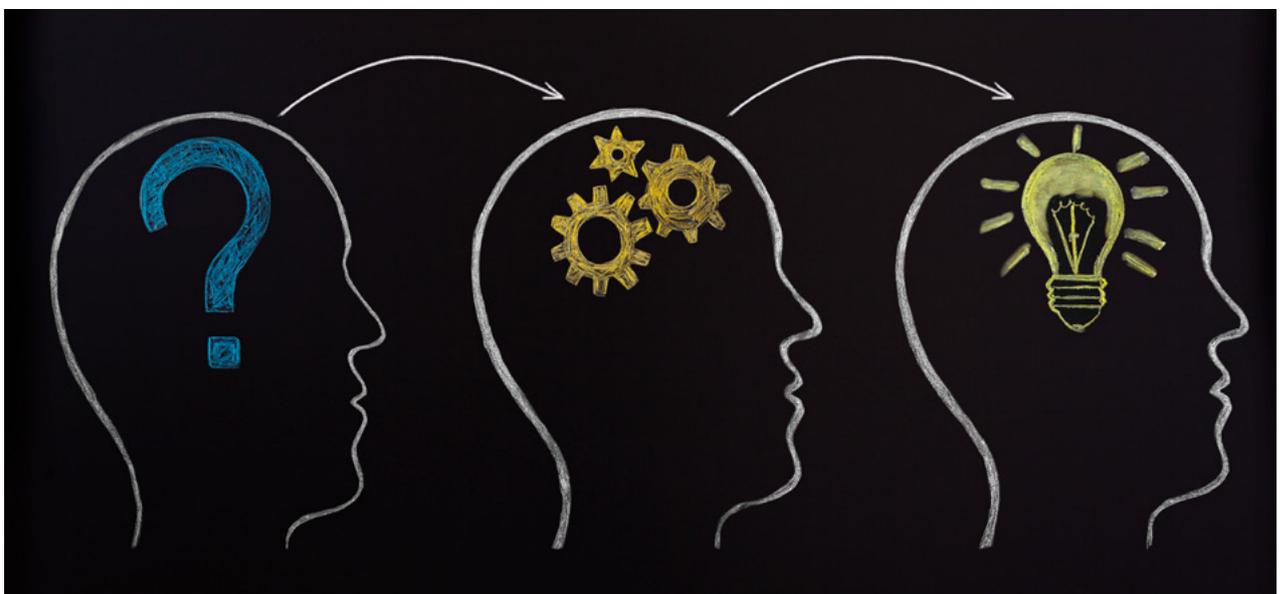
Audio learners may like:

- Podcasts
- Video

Text learners may like:

- Listicles
- Discussion pieces
- Walkthroughs
- How to articles

It’s even possible to reuse all of or part of different pieces of content in each form, extending the lifespan of your content as well as increasing its possible reach and usefulness to various types of learner.



AUTHORITY

Still the primary ranking signal, authority comes from inbound links – the number of sites (or, at least, of quality sites) that see you as a worthy reference source. Creativity is going to be one of the key components of earning this authority. However, while this is often seen as an endeavour solely the responsibility of content marketing and/or outreach, brands can look to leverage the expertise they have to build this authority in other ways.

As mentioned previously, the production of creative content which is relevant and useful to consumers can make you a reference point for consumers, earning links from bloggers that have a passion for your industry, you can also look to offer your expertise to industry websites and magazines – many of whom will accept pitches for high quality articles from industry experts and will be happy to include a link to your site (even if only in an author bio or similar).

Link building and authority are some of the most difficult things to improve upon in SEO, but while link building through outreach is a great way to do it, it is also possible to use your expertise and creativity both on your own site and those of others to develop your authority in the early stages, when content marketing campaigns can be prohibitively expensive.

MAKE EVERY PIECE OF CONTENT COUNT

Content shouldn't be produced for content's sake – each individual piece should fulfil a purpose for both you and your consumer. While your content plan may well require a blog post per week, if it takes two to get something worth publishing, then it's the content plan that needs to change, not your work. If you need more time to make sure your content is the best you can produce, you should take it.

DON'T KEEP YOUR EXPERTISE TO YOURSELF

There are, in virtually every industry, magazines and websites that cater to the industry as a whole – from HR to tractor manufacture, there are publishers that look to communicate the latest developments and best practices to the industry at large. Many of these sites actively seek content from thought leaders and experts in their field and some will have a greater reach than your own website. So, consider carefully which pieces of content you can use to pitch to third party publishers as you can build your authority – both within the industry and in the figurative eyes of the Google algorithm by offering your expertise to the wider industry.

CONCLUSION

While there are innumerable factors involved in the calculation of the modern SERP, it is possible to boil them down to three themes which we can look to incorporate in to our content – each of which allows for the proliferation of creativity. These are: relevance, usefulness and authority. Creativity can help with each in the following ways:

Relevance

- Be creative when deciding on and prioritising keyword targets.
- Look for new and interesting ways to target those keywords.

Usefulness

- Look to take advantage of your depth of knowledge to build trust and loyalty.
- Offer a wide variety of content to cater to the different ways consumers absorb knowledge.

Authority

- Create link-worthy content.
- Look to offer your knowledge and experience to industry publishers.

For more information on getting creative, you can download our specialised [SEO Uncovered series](#), which provides details on how to combine technical SEO with creativity, how to build authority through building relationships and how to measure your success.

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ABOUT US

Located in North West England, Click Consult is a multi award-winning search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC), with over 70 professionals employed and with a portfolio of over 60 clients from across the UK, Europe, Americas and Australia.

Click was named Search Agency of the Year 2018, adding to its long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within both RAR's and Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Blog

Click Consult regularly posts actionable insights on its blog – dealing with all aspects of search marketing. From technical SEO to PPC, content marketing and Analytics advice, the Click Consult blog has something for everyone of any ability.

eBooks

Click Consult produces in depth eBooks on aspects of search marketing on a regular basis, dealing with the latest best practices, changes to standard practices, methods of improvement and more.

Infographics

Sometimes what you need is a quick point of reference about complex subjects. Thanks to its team of highly talented designers, Click Consult is also able to distil its vast experience into easy to understand visual content.

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