



CREATING QUALITY CONTENT FOR YMYL SITES



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INTRODUCTION

As with virtually anything in the [SEO](#) industry, the community is relatively evenly split between people stating that EAT (expertise, authority, and trust) is the future and those saying that it doesn't matter. As with most things, both sides are pretty much wrong. EAT is not something that is becoming important – it always has been.

Expertise, authority and trust have been important for the success of brands in industries that could be considered YMYL (your money or your life) for years. What has changed is the way that this is being measured.

EAT as a term was adopted and quickly abandoned in recent updates to [Google's Quality Rater Guidelines\(QRG\)](#), but still represents a reasonable target to focus on for brands within sectors that could qualify for the YMYL definition (finance, medical etc.). The issue for brands looking to develop a strategy that takes EAT into account has been that the concept has by turns been overcomplicated, oversimplified and misrepresented.

While Google's QRGs are not advice for SEO, they do offer insights into how Google wants the algorithm to work and the focus on EAT (then shifted to 'quality') represents an interest that Google has always had in improving the quality of search results. This is something which is especially important at a time when disinformation is at the front of the minds of many tech companies.

The main thing that has changed in relation to EAT is that it is likely to be increasingly reliant on complex algorithmic measurement and machine learning in addition to older methods which made judgements based on inbound links, unique and substantial content.

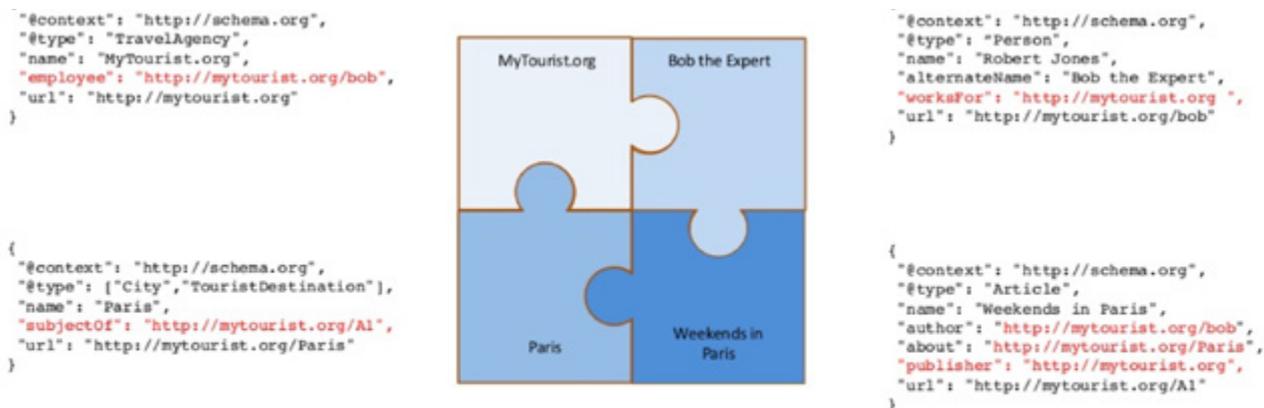
In this eBook, we're going to take these older measurement methods as read – that you are actively attempting link building activities, that you are producing unique content etc. and look at some of the methods which may benefit a site in achieving expertise, authority and trust for their YMYL brand.

COMPLETING THE JIGSAW

If you have spent any time on the [Click Consult blog](#), you will have seen us regularly mention the concept of a distributed database – the purpose of a search engine is to function as a retrieval method for the data stored in this database. This has involved a phenomenal amount of progress since the mid-90s as Google sought methods of understanding the information on the web. In 2011, the major search engines of the time – Microsoft, Yahoo and Google – came together to form the [Schema](#) project which aimed ‘to create and support a common set of schemas for structured data markup on web pages.’

At a recent [Benchmark Search and Digital Marketing Conference](#), we were pleased to have one of the original members of the Schema community, Richard Wallis, speaking on the topic of markup and structured data – and the metaphor used during the talk was that of a jigsaw.

The argument for schema from this perspective is that you can view your content as a piece of the jigsaw that is the wider ontology of your industry. To properly fit, and to be correctly contextualised within that ontology, it needs to connect with as much of that external meaning as possible – and this can be done using markup.



A basic graph of entities

MARKUP AND ME

Since 2011, the number of different types of markup has grown tremendously to include everything from individuals to multinational organisations and encompassing medicine, science and even has, in development, markup for three dimensional objects (which will come in handy in an augmented reality heavy future). The purpose of crafting your content and using schema markup is to help the various algorithms currently attempting to parse the EAT value of content.

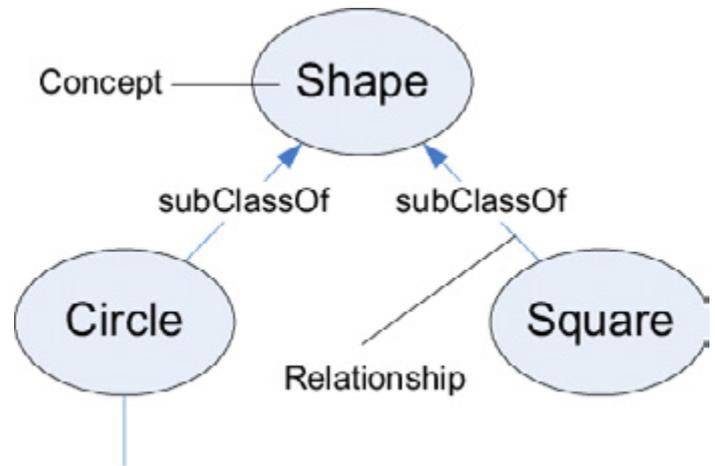
While the jigsaw image on the previous page was representative of a travel writer, the same is also true of YMYL content and sites. Just as schema markup can provide a computer readable layer of information allowing you to communicate that a piece of content is an article on a tourist destination etc. it can equally offer similar depth to content on a site that is within a YMYL industry.

Take, for example, a piece of content written for a pharmacy site, the following schema types could confer an additional layer of EAT on the content:

- **Person:** - [Person markup](#) can define the individual writing the piece. Combined with subsets like 'knowsAbout' which allows you to define the areas of expertise held by the author, 'memberOf' which offers you the chance to define any professional bodies they belong to and 'sameAs' which provides the option to link out to other appearances on the web – such as their page on the medical register in the case of a doctor.
- **Drug:** - [Drug markup](#), a subset of 'thing', 'medical entity' and 'substance', allows – in the same vein as the touristDestination in the previous jigsaw image – allows you to specify the drug that your expert is writing about, with modifiers like 'mainEntityOfPage' allowing you to designate the drug as the subject of the content.
- **Pharmacy:** - [Pharmacy markup](#), like the organisational markup in the previous jigsaw image, allows you state your brand's authority as a retailer operating within this specific vertical. Obviously, operating within this sphere requires various regulatory hoops are jumped through – and satisfying these requirements can confer a degree of trust.
- **Article:** - [Article markup](#) defines the content as a creative work and can be augmented with citations to other recognised academic works that can reinforce the usefulness of the piece in relation to improving the knowledge of the reader.

While this list is not extensive, it gives an indication of the amount of additional, machine readable context that we can add to our content to make it easier for search engines to reach the conclusions we need them to in order for our content to rank well in the search engine results pages (SERPs).

This all positions our content within existing industry 'schemas' – ontological frameworks of meaning and information that define specific terminology and allow the various algorithms powering search to identify how your content fits within the greater whole of industry knowledge – referred to by Google as the 'knowledge graph'.



```
Any time, and  
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC  
"http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD  
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml  
<head profile="http://gmpg.org/xfn/11">  
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; char  
<title> Website title</title>  
<meta name="generator" content="WebGen" />  
<link rel="stylesheet" href="style.css" type="text/css" media="s  
<link rel="icon" href="favicon.ico" type="image/x-icon"/>  
<link rel="shortcut icon" href="favicon.ico" type="image/x-ico  
</head>  
<body>  
<div id="setmain">  
<div class="topdiv">  
<div id="flashlogo">  
<object type="application/flash" data="paramlogo.swf"  
" height="112">  
"movie" value="paramlogo.swf"  
"value="best"/>
```

QUALITY CONTENT

It's easy right? Produce quality content and you'll be fine – except that nobody really says what 'quality content' is, and even if they were to do so it wouldn't be true. Quality content has become the 'quantum' of the digital marketing industry – something that one can say with a hand wave to discourage further questions. Used as an adjective, 'quality' means 'of good quality, excellent', which is just as hand wavy as the definition we're trying to escape, so we'll try to define things a little more thoroughly here.

Defining quality

As stated previously, the definition of quality as we use it is somewhat unhelpful, so in order for quality to serve any purpose for us as a descriptor, we're going to need to add some useful depth to what we mean, or should mean, when we talk about quality.

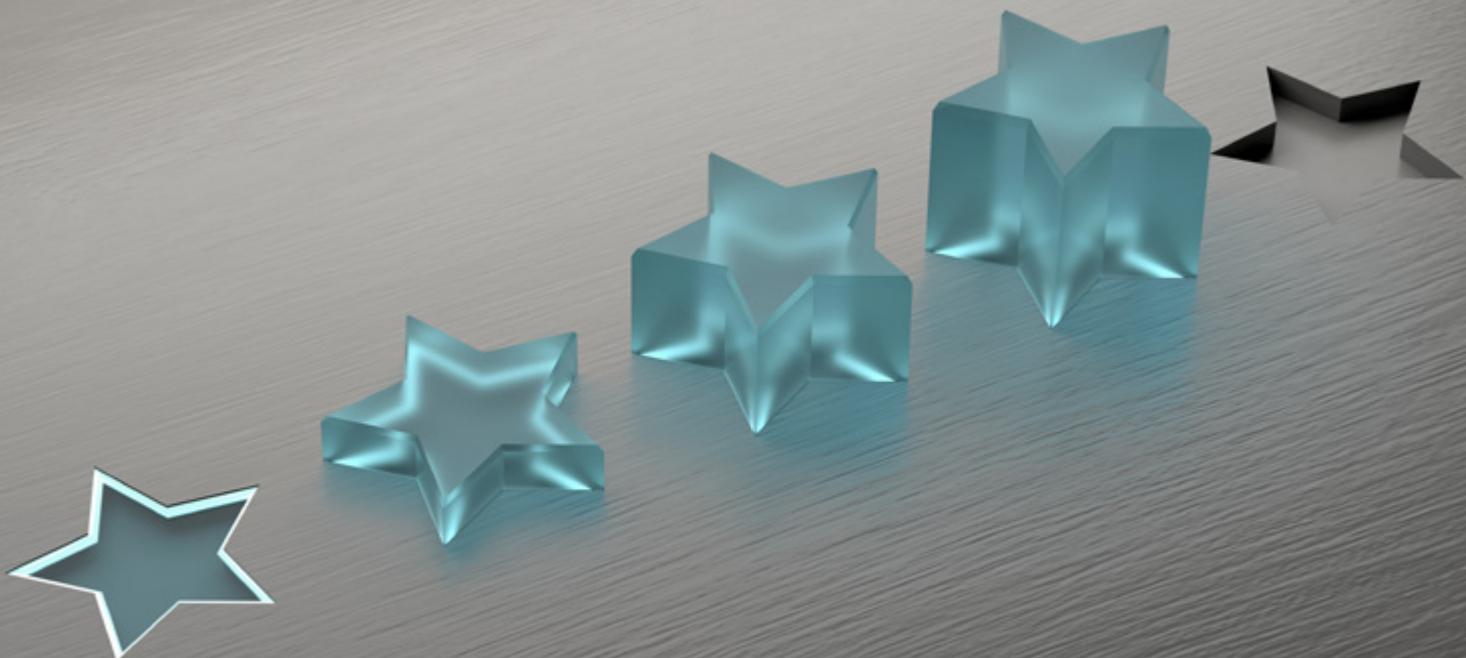
For example, there are works of accepted quality across various fiction and non-fiction genres – but regardless of the intrinsic quality of a creative work aesthetically, it will do very little to help the rankings of an industrial tool hire business. For that reason, we can state that the 'quality' that we are looking for is not exclusively the same as its worth or worthiness. In this regard, the term 'quality' becomes almost self-negating – we could hire the unequivocal (were it possible) list of the world's best writers to write for our site, but unless those writers had a background in industrial tool hire which, though I may be wrong, I don't think either Margaret Atwood or Salman Rushdie accused of, it would serve to offer little to the site as a whole.

What quality content needs in order to be 'quality':

- Assuming your content is backed by the correct markup, each schema type and subtype for your content should tick the correct boxes – the 'person' writing should have some authority in the subject area (reinforced by 'sameAs' references to external profiles and posts).
- The content should be written clearly, structured properly and spelled correctly. While the writing need not be worthy of a Nobel Prize, Google has stated as long ago as 2011 that poor spelling and grammar could negatively impact ranking, while proper structure – with correct use of <h> tags to denote subsections etc. all add to the clarity of the piece.
- The content should be exactly as long as it needs to be – which might sound non-comital; however, certain pieces of content do not need excessive length. In past eBooks, we've referred to this as 'substantial'. This is not to say that all content should be 1000 words (such studies that recommend 1000-word minimum lengths tend to be correlative rather than causative), there are types of content that do not need as much content as others (please, let us stop having to read the Proustian preambles that so often accompany recipes – the BBC ranks for most recipe queries without it!). Write as much as the query you are targeting needs to answer it.

- Be helpful! In the course of the last few updates, some of the sites which have suffered most have been those within YMYL industries – and there is reasonable anecdotal evidence that many of those sites contained financially motivated CTAs on otherwise informational pages, or sought to conceal the true intent of the content.
- Address the query with natural language. With the growing complexity of the algorithms used by search engines has come much improved ability to understand language – both at the query and content levels (especially since the BERT update – with BERT standing for ‘bidirectional encoder representations from transformers’ allowing the algorithm to ‘read’ content more effectively). While it can never hurt to feature the keyword in the content, the most important part of catering content to a specific target query is that the content targets the query. In whatever form is best – be it blog post, image, video etc. the content produced should clearly, helpfully and thoroughly address the query; so solve problems where there are problems, convey information where information is requested and do so in the clearest, most easily understood format you have at your disposal.

Quality – at least in terms of content for the purposes of digital marketing – is not a subjective description but a qualitative one. By ensuring that your content meets specific minimum standards of structure, grammar and spelling, by appropriately addressing target keywords, and looking to achieve a balance between writing for the consumer and structuring for the machines, you can achieve ‘quality’.



LINKS AND YMYL

Simply put, links have always been the most important ranking signal. The context that they give, the authority they confer have always made them one of the easier methods for search engines to deduce the value of a page in comparison to the hundreds, thousands or even hundreds of thousands of competing pages. What is in the process of changing and has been slowly improving for the last decade, however, is its ability to judge the value of links.

20 years ago, or thereabouts, there was ample proof that simply ‘farming’ links could boost a site’s rankings. There was a proliferation of link-farms, link networks, directory sites, or whatever you want to call them, on which it was possible to buy links or many hundreds of links – and these links worked. However, as the years have gone by, there have been dozens of updates, many thousands of penalties and tens if not hundreds of statements from Google and Googlers about links and link profiles.

One of the improvements that came from an endeavour to combat this was PageRank (the patent for which was updated back in 2018, though it was referred to as a ‘link analysis approach’ rather than as PageRank and was [covered by patent expert Bill Slawski](#)). Among other things, PageRank involves a qualitative assessment of a link’s value based on its distance from a ‘seed site’ (a place from which a Google crawl of the web starts) which are typically an authority in a specific niche – or as the patent states:

“In one embodiment of the present invention, seeds 102 are specially selected high-quality pages which provide good web connectivity to other non-seed pages.”

This particular invention from Google is of a ‘distance ranking algorithm’ – where, while there is no such thing as ‘trust’ (or trust flow, or link juice), there is a decay of the impact of a link that increases the further the linking site is from the seed site. This means that a link directly from a seed site (a source of industry expertise) is worth more than one from a site that has been linked to by a seed site and on and on.

This, in addition to the increasing importance of the knowledge graph, industry ontologies, and improving entity detection have obvious potential impacts (whether or not these are in use presently, I can’t find academic sources – but it’s easy to infer the potential) on how we should be approaching links at present and moving forward.

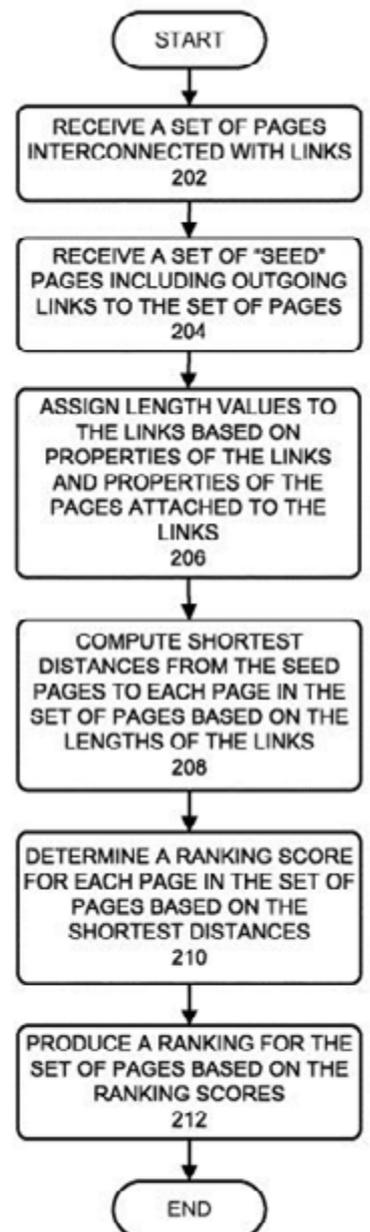


FIG. 2

Source: Google Patent

CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT LINKS

At a time in search where algorithms are increasingly complex – and their ability to determine things such as industry relevance and the position of content within a knowledge graph or ontology, links will be the connective tissue between categories and concepts, and brands will need to ensure that they are using links to establish themselves within existing industry ontologies.

For this reason, the importance of where a link is placed will need to be calculated in a new way. While, previously, the authority of a site would be paramount (often calculated by and leading to an over-reliance on Domain Authority), this should be secondary to the relevance of the linking domain and its authority within the industry.

For example, if you have a car parts auction website with content that satisfies the points made in this eBook — if a link for the site is placed on a site that is predominately about baking, it will be less useful for the brand's part in the overall industry's ontology than one from a site half as authoritative (in terms of DA) but which is focused entirely on car parts.

The calculation of link relevance will need to take in the relevance of the entire linking domain, not just the paragraph surrounding the link, the anchor text or the target site's estimated 'authority'. This means that, whether you're part of an agency working on behalf of a client or an in-house SEO, the requirement to thoroughly understand the search landscape of the vertical you're operating in will be tremendously important – we can't continue to place links based on authority and expect them to have the same impact on visibility.



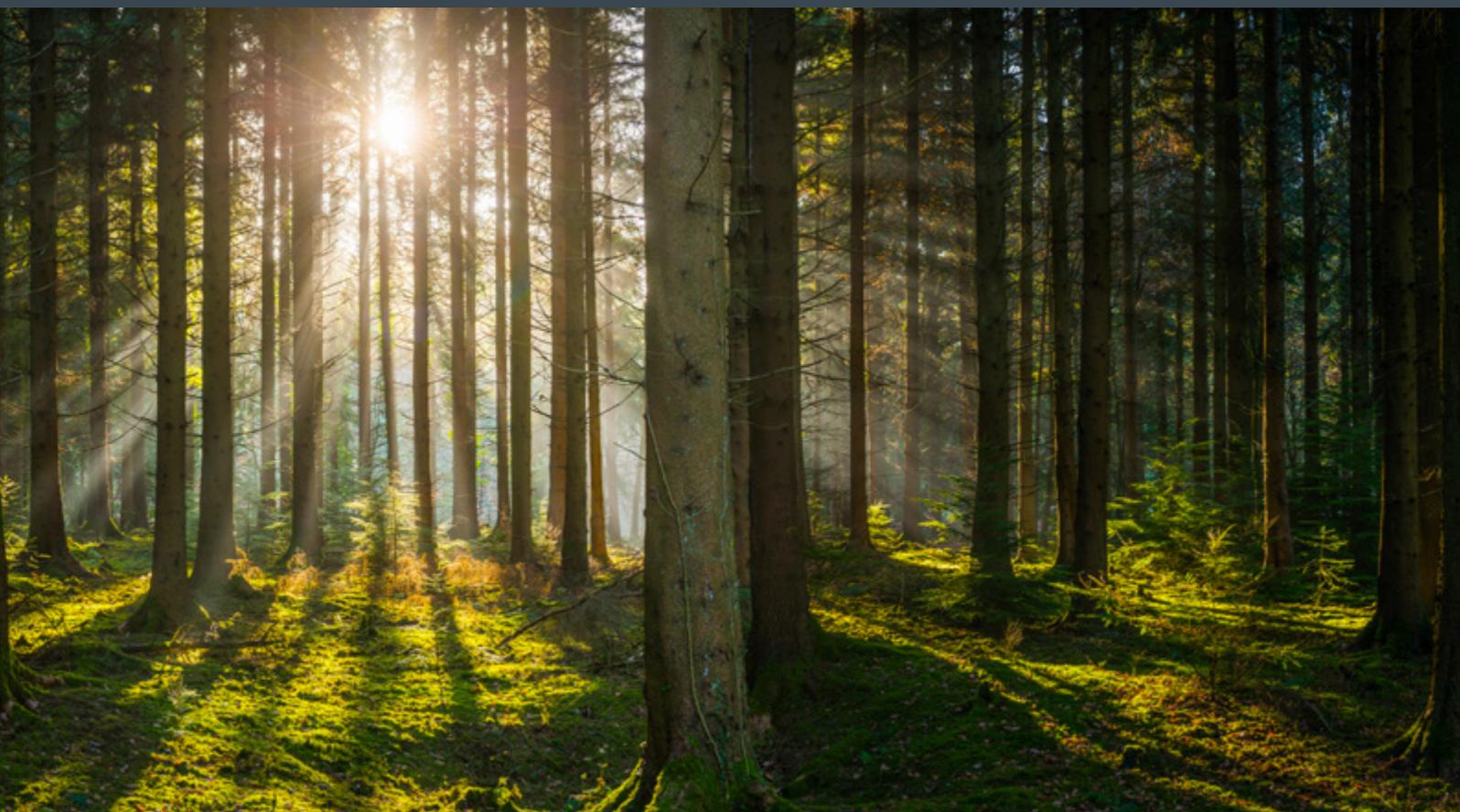
CONCLUSION

EAT is not, itself, a ranking factor – it's something that can be inferred about your site (by the algorithms used by search engines) from your technical and creative on and off-page efforts. EAT is especially important within YMYL sectors due to their potential to impact on the health and wellbeing of users. Therefore, earning 'EAT' is the result of dozens of potential optimisations and activities – an accretion of expertise, authority and trust that is earned over time through citations, published works, and experience – just as it is for an individual.

While experimentation has likely been going on for a while (with some sites suffering comparative drops during an unnamed 2017 update) with components of EAT, the concept itself is simply another step in the growing ability of algorithms to understand information. Just as the BERT update has allowed for better natural language 'understanding', there will be further updates that deal with similar elements of a site's ability to be trustworthy information sources for a wide range of query types – and the advice will remain the same: there is no way to optimise for [insert update name].

While this is true to an extent – optimisation is being applied very narrowly in such advice. As stated, there is no single tweak or tactic, but there is a lot of hard work that can be done to build your site's expertise, authority and trust and to ensure your site continues to perform at the level your expertise deserves.

There is an often quoted Chinese proverb: the best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago, the second best time is now.



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ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning digital and search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC). Part of global consumer brand business Ceuta Group, we have a team of 70-plus specialists and a portfolio of more than 60 clients worldwide.

Our complementary services include content marketing, outreach, social media, conversion rate optimisation (CRO) and international/multilingual search marketing. We can also offer training and consultation to support your teams or existing strategy.

Click was named Search Agency of the Year and Digital Agency of the Year 2018, adding to our long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'. We're also a Google Premier Partner, a Bing Select Partner and feature in The Drum Recommends.

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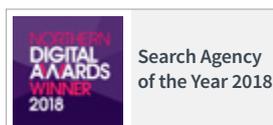
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Most Effective Agency 2018



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