

Has SEO Become More Important or Less Important?

A guide for Business Owners, Digital Marketers,
IT Managers and anyone who wants the latest on
SEO.



**Given the
Google Changes
Search Engine
Results Page (SERP)**

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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to discuss whether SEO has become more, or less, important for Web Design and Web Content given recent changes in Google's Search Engine Results Page (SERP). To set the scene we'll give you a brief reminder of the basics of Search Engine Optimization - SEO. This e-book assumes that you have at least a little understanding of SEO, maybe not the full details but enough to make an educated strategic decision on how much time and resources to allocate to SEO.

Assumption: Somehow you have been saddled with the responsibility to investigate what impact, if any, the Google SERP changes have on your SEO policy. You could be a small or medium sized business owner, marketing manager, digital marketing manager or IT manager trying to make sense of the recent changes to Google's SERP. Those changes are, in short, fewer sponsored ad slots (SEM) in the right side-bar of a SERP, limiting the ad spots for the first SERP page, thus increasing competition for the remaining spots. Before we dive into the changes and its impact on SEO, let's remind ourselves what SEO, Search Engine Optimization is.

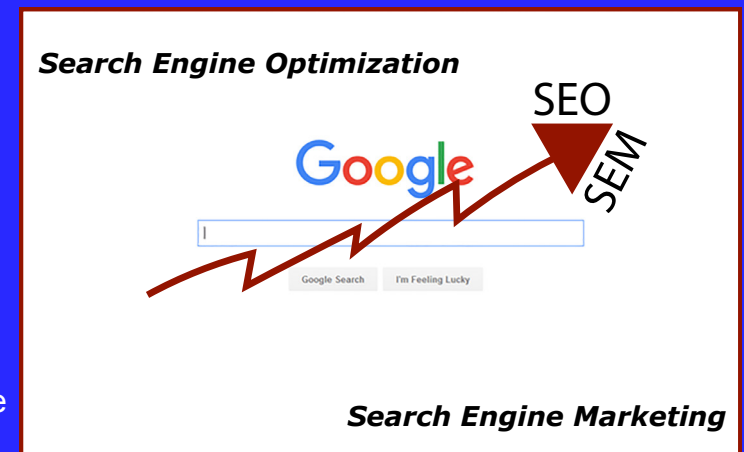
What is SEO - Search Engine Optimization?

THE ONLINE DEFINITION OF SEO BY WEBOPEDIA.COM:

Search engine optimization is a methodology of strategies, techniques and tactics used to increase the amount of visitors to a website by obtaining a high-ranking placement in the search results page of a search engine (SERP) -- including Google, Bing, Yahoo and other search engines.

THE ONLINE DEFINITION OF SEO BY WIKIPEDIA.COM:

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of affecting the visibility of a website or a web page in a search engine's unpaid results—often referred to as “natural,” “organic,” or “earned” results. In general, the earlier (or higher) ranked on the search results page, and more frequently a site appears in the search results list, the more visitors it will receive from the search engine's users, and these visitors can be converted into customers.[1] SEO may target different kinds of search, including image search, local search, video search, academic search,[2] news search and industry-specific vertical search engines.

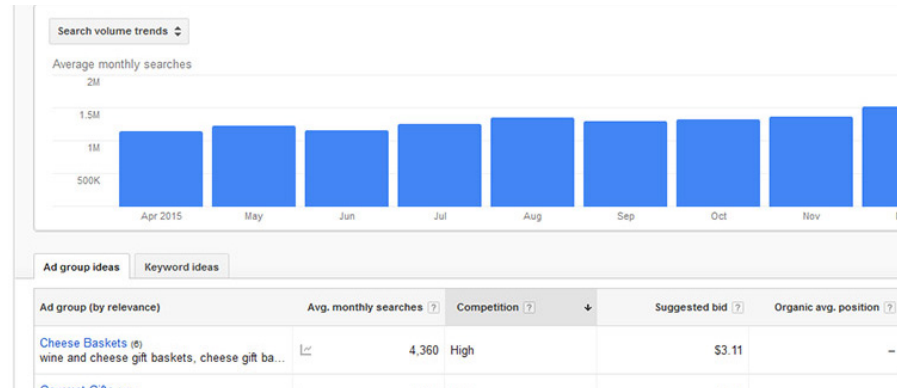


Definition SEO - Search Engine Optimization continued.....

OUR INTERPRETATION OF SEO:

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of affecting the visibility of a website or a web page in a search engine's unpaid results—often referred to as “natural,” “organic,” or “earned” results. It represents a methodology of strategies, techniques and tactics used to increase the amount of visitors to a website by obtaining a high-ranking placement in the search results page of a search engine (SERP) -- including Google, Bing, Yahoo and other search engines.....(and here comes the part that is key to understand).....

by manipulating web-content, pages, blog posts, images, graphics and videos to include a URL, tags, title, description, alt text or paragraph, heading and more, **to match your content as close to perfect as you can, to the search result a user is expecting when entering a keyword or key phrase.** SEO is aided by having reputable and important third party web-sites link to your content. The more important you seem, the more important the search engines believe you to be. Seniority and speed plus responsive and mobile availability play a key role in your SERP ranking as well.



A low search average per month/year combined with a high number of returned page results on the SERP means “High Competition”. See above....

The Google Search Algorithm and SERP

The whole premises of the Google Algorithm (and other search engines) is to offer the searcher a list of sponsored and organic (un-paid) search results as close to what they are searching for as possible. The search results are links to a web-page, image, video or other content on someones web-site (see box to the left).

What Google displays in the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) is not just organic results. Usually, although this changes depending on the (type of) search, Google shows one to four ads on top, called sponsored ads. Additionally they sometimes show images (see box on the right), local addresses and a map. In the right sidebar they used to show eight to ten ads, sponsored results, however in early 2016 Google changed their SERP output and now they offer only one to three ads, if that.

This SERP change of policy may have a significant impact on anyones Search Engine Optimization and SEM Strategy. Let's explore the potential impact in the next section.

The screenshot shows a search for "Gourmet Food - Specialty Foods in Boston". It includes a map with several locations marked, such as Debra's Natural Gourmet, Asian Gourmet, and Taj Gourmet Foods. Below the map is a list of these businesses with their ratings, addresses, and phone numbers. There are also links to their websites and directions.

This is a sponsored search result for "Charcuterie Assortment by Harry & David" priced at \$39.99. It features an image of the food assortment and a "Shop for gourmet food on Google" button.

This is a search result for "Images for gourmet food". It shows a grid of four images of various gourmet dishes, including what appears to be a charcuterie board and other plated foods.

More images for gourmet food

This is a search result for "Gourmet Food Store - Cheese, Truffles, Smoked Salmon ...". It includes the store's website URL, a description of their specialty foods, and a list of featured items like "Cheese And Butter - Foie Gras & Pate - About Us - Truffles And Mushrooms".

This is a search result for "Gourmet Food & Specialty Food Gifts | Williams-Sonoma". It features the Williams-Sonoma website URL, a description of their gourmet food and gift options, and a list of featured items like "Croissants & Pastries - Food - Williams-Sonoma - Cooking Sauces - Oils & Vinegars".

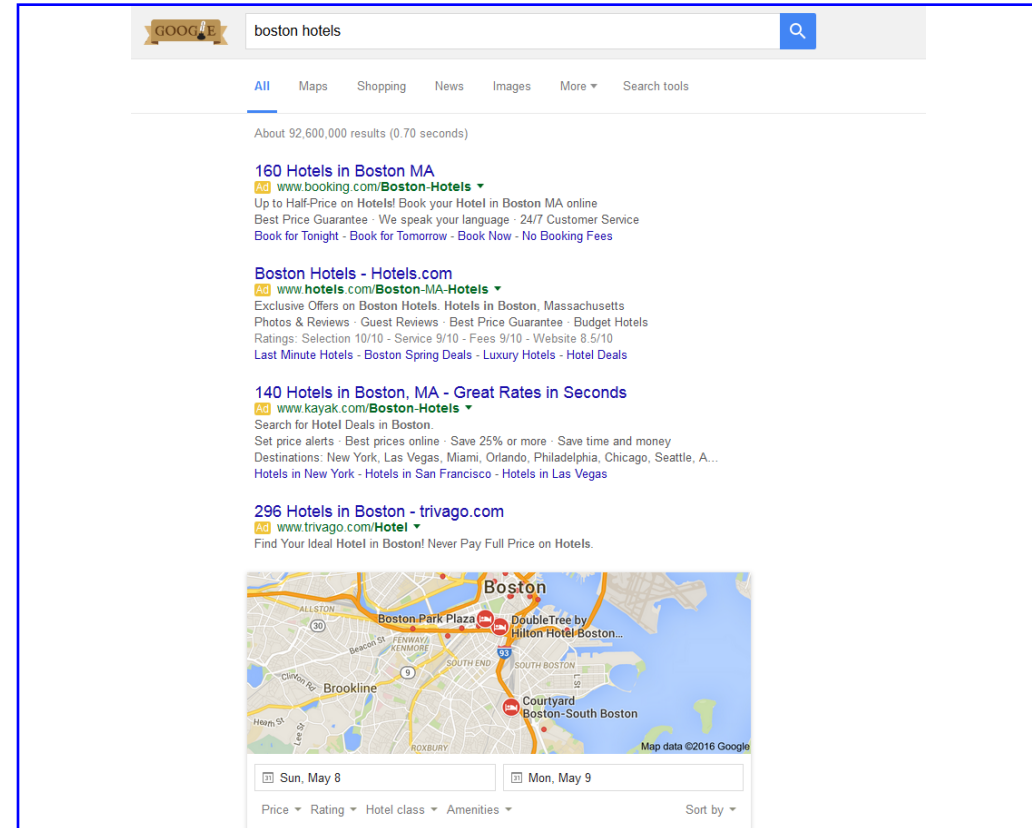
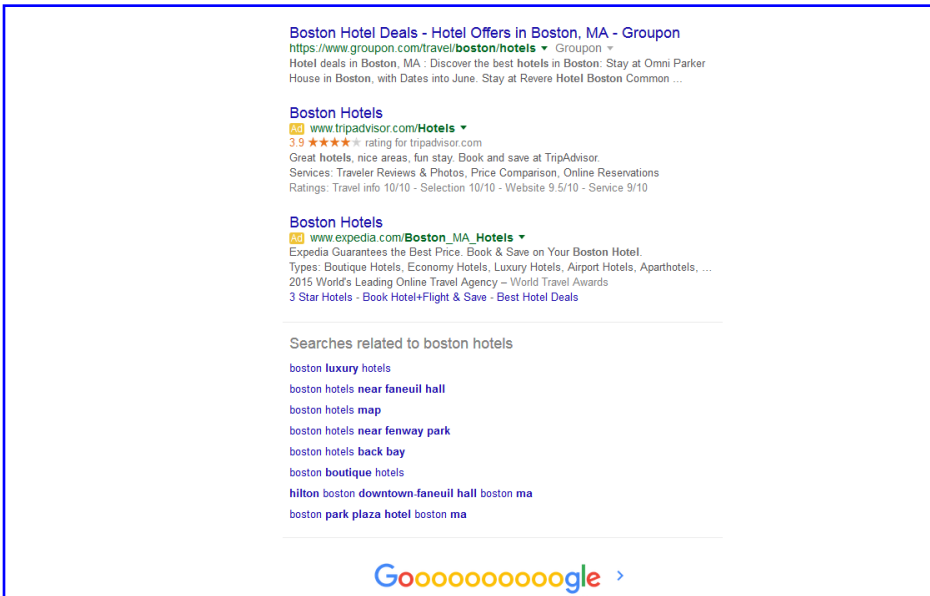
2016 Changes to Google SERP's

Less Advertising Slots on Google Serp's

Google recently (early 2016) changed up the SERPs. Although it is difficult to nail down exactly what, when and how, it has become clear that Google has cut the number of “Sponsored Ads” in the right sidebar.

If you search for “Boston Restaurants” or “Chicago Restaurants” no ads show up anywhere, apart from one ad on top and a map with a list of restaurants underneath, incl address, tel.nr and reviews.

That map and list does not have an “Ad” icon next to it, so we assume it is not sponsored. That does not mean however that the spot on the list isn't paid at the source, wherever Google pulls the list from.



Top Section Google Search for Boston Hotels

The number used to be 8-10 ads in the right side bar, and now when searching for “Boston Hotels” seems to be more often than not 0-1. Google sometimes increases the top ads from 1-2 to 2-4, but does not make up the loss of the ad slots in the right side-bar. The ads at the bottom of the SERP seem to have stayed consistent at 2-3 slots. the same applies when you search for e.g. “Chicago Hotels”. Page 2 of the SERP had no ads other than 3 at the bottom of the page.

Some Important Statistics

Let's look at some of the statistics regarding online search before we draw any conclusions. Recently, I heard some interesting chatter through the grapevine. Word on the street is, "if you need a product, you go to Amazon.com, but if you are not sure what you want, you do a Google search". Now, of course this is just an impression some people may have but it makes a point that if you don't know what you want or what destination (web-site) you need, you do a search, whether through Google, Bing or other search engines. So how many people search, click on organic search results versus sponsored ads (paid search) or use other tools to find what they are looking for?

93% of on-line experiences begin with a search.

65%-70% share of the Search Engine Market is owned by Google.

70%-80% of the users ignore paid ads, and click on organic links.

75% of users do not look past page one of search results.

39% on average, of a brand's customers come from search.

72% of business owners with an SEO strategy reported that it improved their bottom lines.

Search is the #1 driver of traffic to content pages, beating social media by 300%. while SEO leads have a **14.6%** close rate, while outbound leads (such as direct mail or print advertising) only have a **1.7%** close rate.

For Google Searches, **18%** of all organic search clicks go to the **#1 position** on the SERP, **10%** go to the **#2** position and **7%** of organic clicks go to the **#3** position.

What Do The Numbers Tell Us?

SEO Driven Search and SEM Driven Search

- **Search is THE top starting activity** of on-liners, and the majority uses Google Search!
- The **majority** of people who search click on the **organic results!**
- Most people **do not look beyond the first** results page!
- Most businesses say that they **get their customers through search**, and an SEO strategy improves their bottom line.
- Only a **small number of people click on sponsored ads** (which may get significantly costlier btw).
- **Search is the #1** to drive people to content pages!
- Organic leads have **17.5% closing rate** vs outbound mail (direct mail and print advertising) **only 1.7%**.



Digital Marketing, getting the word out to your (potential) customers, has many tools to accomplish that. But **SEO is the heart** of the matter, the foundation of building your business on-line, the foundation of **what we used to call at Gillette “Building the Cathedral”**. [Read more on “Building the Cathedral” on www.40parklane.com.](http://www.40parklane.com)

SO WHAT IS SEO'S STATUS GIVEN GOOGLE SERP CHANGES?

Looking at the full scope of things, the fact that search is the #1 factor driving people to content pages, combined with the fact that there are fewer advertising slots on SERP's (and only page #1 counts anyway, as people seldom go beyond the first page), **SEO is more important than ever, one could argue even critical..!**

So What SEO Parts Should I Focus On?

SEO Check list:

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Set up Google Analytics•Register your site at Google and other Webmaster Tools•Create a Site Map for search Engines•create a Site Map for Visitors of your site•Create a robots.txt file•Page Load Speed•If you use Wordpress - get the Yoast SEO plugin.•Use browseo to find errors•Use Screaming Frog to find broken links, errors and crawl problems. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•<i>Use Google keyword planner or any other tool for that purpose</i>•<i>Look at competitor link profiles</i>•<i>Incorporate your primary key word (for site or page) into the URL.</i>•<i>Are your title tags 65 characters or less? Does it include your keyword?</i>•<i>Are your meta-description tags 155 characters or less? Does it include your keyword?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•<i>Are you using an H1 tag? is it before H2-H6? Are you using only one H1 tag? Does it include your keyword?</i>•<i>Do you have enough search engine accessible text? Does it include a healthy amount of your keyword?</i>•<i>Do you use synonyms for your keywords in a healthy amount?</i>•<i>Do your images and videos have Alt Text tags, readable by search engines?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Do you link to internal pages with relevant and understandable anchor text (link text)?•have you started creating outside links, links from credible and high traffic and relevant third party web-sites?•Have you made sure you don't have duplicate content?•Have you set-up social media accounts with your web-site, brand name in it?•Is your site mobile friendly?•Have you added authorship |
|---|---|--|--|

The above table is a pretty comprehensive SEO check-list although I'm sure some more items can be added to the list.

The section highlighted in Orange is **the core of SEO** and the foundation to **match User Search Keywords and Phrases to Content Results. YOU START WITH DEFINING YOUR TARGET GROUP, KEYWORDS THEY USE AND GO FROM THERE!**

Ad spots are limited and expensive, organic search is the #1 to drive traffic to content pages, so in addition to writing compelling content **for the correct target group**, the above steps in Orange are **crucial to proper search engine indexing** and search matching results.

Put yourself in the mind-set of your (potential) customer and figure out what keywords and key phrases, or synonyms thereof, they would use to find your web-site, page, blog post or any other asset that they could be looking for. If you have done the above Orange highlighted steps, you are on your way, **you have laid the foundation of the SEO Cathedral.**

All other steps are also important, but **if you don't get the SEO core right**, all other efforts are moot and in effect a waste of time!

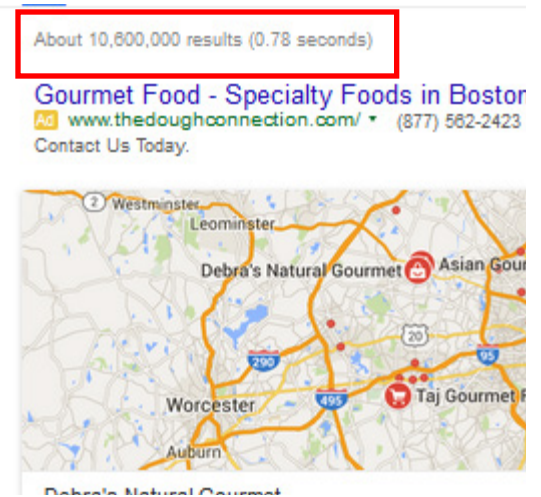
Final Thoughts

Each day millions of pages are created around the world by professionals, stay at home mums or dads who want to blog for fun or to earn some money, celebrities who want to stay in touch with their fan base and the government who want to offer information and statistics about what is going on. **This means that millions of people** are building an internet data base of content, which at one point or other will be duplicate or at least overlap.

More and more people will have written about the same product, service or travel topic as time goes by. Google search, with its ever evolving algorithm is trying to offer the reader some links to web-sites with pages that (should) have the information or content we are looking for, out of millions of pages about the same topic (**see red box to the right**) **So what happens if we are all creating similar content** and Google cannot distinguish between content by one author versus another? How do we set ourselves apart?!

The difference will be the quality, uniqueness, freshness and visually attractiveness of the content. And that's where your creative design and web-design play a key role. **Creativity and innovation will be the game changer** when everything else is equal. Like the Iphone was the culmination of Apple's (read Steve Jobs) innovative and creative urges. Apple's rise is the perfect example where, despite the fact that everyone was creating a mobile phone, Apple's creativity and innovations lifted them past the competition straight to the top by creating more than a mobile phone!

So SEO is more important than ever and organic search outshines sponsored search and social media to drive traffic to content. But unless you write compelling content, quality content and unique content within a visually attractive surrounding, all your SEO efforts will have been for nothing. **Be creative, be original, be yourself!!**



This white-paper was written by Hans van Putten, Digital Marketer (B2B and B2C) and Web Designer.

Hans van Putten is the Founder of 40parkLane, llc an award-winning gourmet food manufacturer, from 1998-2016 with the brand name Carolyn's Handmade. The food business was sold in 2014 and HvP has since further extended his already significant role in Digital Marketing and Web Design.

You can visit www.40parklane.com for further information.

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