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The Last Days Of SEO

by Chris Copeland, Friday, Feb 22, 2008 12:00 PM ET

I STARTED DOING WEB SITE promotions in 1996. Back then, the term "search engine optimization" (SEO) had yet to be coined, and the industry was nothing more than a random collection of individuals emailing sites asking for links. Early Yahoo submitters recall fondly the days when extra information on a submission would expedite the process, while Infoseek ever so briefly engaged in instantaneous updating of its indexing, which allowed SEO specialists to submit and resubmit pages based on real-time results.

But the days of SEO have been numbered for some time. Now, this is *not* one of those columns. You know, the column where someone rails against search engine optimization and explains how it is an antiquated technique whose course has been run. Rather, this is a look at the evolution of SEO to DAO.

What's DAO? I'll get to that. But first, let's examine what SEO was...

SEO

Over the years, search engines have been described as dinosaurs. Often, the best way to explain what an engine looks for and how it "reads" a site versus the human interacting was to describe them in terms equated with dinosaurs: big, slow and dumb. Engines were so text-dependent that, in many cases, the best pages for optimization were FAQs. Marketers had a tough choice to make: optimize for a search engine or optimize for the people who would use a search engine. The term "search engine optimization" was really a perfect descriptor of the target segment a company was optimizing for, versus who or what they were optimizing.

The slow evolution to 3D and Universal

Over time, engines have been trying to find more and more ways to bring relevance into their listings. Emphasis has shifted from a focus on page elements to the off-site criteria. It began with PageRank, and now is morphing forward with Ask 3D and Google Universal bringing other aspects of media into a results page. Interestingly, a recent study by Keynote Benchmark highlights how

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user perceptions may be changing based on the evolution and availability of diverse content. In the [study](#), Google held its usual position as the leader in all four measured categories: Overall Customer Experience, Brand Impact, Future Usage and Customer Satisfaction. But the surprise in the results was largely the improvements of Yahoo in terms of consumer satisfaction and experience. The growth was attributed to two things: 1) search assists and getting consumers to their desired topic sooner, and 2) tighter linking to both internal and external content and community that satisfied the searchers needs.

Yahoo's Director of Customer Insights, Michael Kronthal, explained Yahoo's path by saying, "In the future, people will be sharing information on a massive scale, and we believe that is the next chapter of growth for the Web. We're looking to tap that valuable knowledge and integrate it into our Web search experience, so that Web search is not just searching Web sites for information, but also delivering the knowledge that individuals have through their collective experiences... . We'll actually be leveraging the knowledge that exists within the one giant social network."

Introducing DAO

It seems like the trend is shifting from optimizing for a slow, dumb engine, and is moving towards a more sophisticated integration of elements, be it image, video, consumer reviews, or social networks. This changes what is getting optimized from the platform to the asset. That is why the future is all about Digital Asset Optimization (DAO) and not about SEO. Digital Asset Optimization properly assigns value to the platform or device as the conduit for marrying content and intent. By understanding how video can be optimized, a search campaign can be successful on Google or YouTube.

Earlier this week, fellow Search Insider David Berkowitz [discussed](#) the new Samsung set top See'N'Search. The device is just one example of how search is going to evolve. I've said this before, yet it still has not sunk in for many. Search on the desktop is not the end game. It is the starting point today, and Google has won that medium. When we think about Mobile Search, Local Search, Video and Image Search -- and even search on the set top, we have yet to declare a winner, and I would suggest we have yet to even meet all the players.

The closing paragraph of the Keynote study summed it up fairly well. "Whatever the front end, whatever the search domain, the news is sure to be good for users. With such intense competition, and so much money at stake, the leading search providers will continue to make the user experience better and better, and make it easier and easier to find whatever it is we seek."

So, the future of SEO as defined today is a bleak one. Whether we merely change the description of SEO or use a new acronym like DAO, the days of success being optimization for 10 text links on a standard results page is going to end up just like our old description of the engines: as dinosaurs. Extinct dinosaurs.

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