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< Ranking #1 In The Minds Of Your Customers />

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Dear Reader, or should I say Customer?

The Art of Search

Thank you for downloading this excerpt from "The Art of Search", my forthcoming book on SEO management strategy soon to be published by Sub@omic Limited.

What follows is a chapter from the book that challenges the reader's preconceived idea of what the challenge posed by Google represents by considering what Google's model of the web looks like.

Just as with the rest of the publication, you'll find no technical jargon in this text because I believe that SEO success isn't achieved upon the basis of an 'SEO package' bought from a snake oil salesperson who just happened to be in your area with a great deal on SEO.

SEO is a strategic management issue and, surprisingly, not one for the techies. Being able to think like a Customer is the critical skill that all who practice The Art of Search will require; once you accept this then you'll realise that you're not simply a reader but you're a Customer.

I hope you enjoy this excerpt and I look forward to notifying you once the book is published.

Kind regards

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The Art of Search

"SEO 101 – Google's Model of the Web"

The SEO management strategy 2,500 years in the making.

Sun Tsu said:

"Hence the saying: If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt; if you know Heaven and know Earth, you may make your victory complete."

3.1 SEO 101 – Google's Model Of The Web

Just as you and I do, Google has its own unshakable model of the Web.

Google's model of the Web is a mathematical definition of what constitutes a good (trustworthy) website, a definition based upon a business logic expressed through a number of algorithms.

The reliability of Google's algorithm and the speed with which it is able to return results is the foundation of its immense market capitalisation. It's all about trust. Google ranks websites that it trusts and we've come to trust the results Google presents us with.

Just like there is secrecy surrounding the recipes of certain foods & beverages it is not inconceivable that very few people would be either willing or able to tell you precisely what the entire set of Google algorithms look like; very much like the Monty Python sketch[1] that suggested Britain developed the funniest joke in the world during World War II. So funny was this joke that it killed on contact. So dangerous was this joke that, during translation, translators were only permitted to work on a couple of words as to learn even a portion of the joke would have inflicted serious injury.

You can never know what Google's algorithm, that exists to seek out good websites, is so if you thought that this book would tell you otherwise then it's time to think again. You need to drop the hang-up that most people appear to have about the algorithm - you must accept that it exists but that you'll never get to see it and that all you'll ever get to see is its output.

The parallel between war and search becomes even clearer when you begin to accept that this is not a particularly new challenge, as working out the formula from the output alone was precisely the problem facing the intelligence community based at Bletchley Park in the UK during World War II whose work on breaking the Enigma Code and The Lorenz Cipher proved decisive factors in securing an allied victory. Both the Enigma and the Lorenz message encryptions between the German fighting forces could refresh with each message transmission and Google too routinely changes and refines its algorithm in order to keep its results fresh; so even if Google's algorithm was ever leaked it would pretty much be outdated and obsolete the moment it was published.

Nevertheless, people still obsess and continue to get hung-up about the fact that Google's algorithm changes and, as much as I get irritated by the lemming-like chatter, I do still applaud Google for giving the algorithm updates names like 'Panda' & 'Penguin' - thereby giving people something to easily obsess about and keeping their business talked about. The key, as with the pioneers of Bletchley Park, is not to whinge that the output has once again changed but to work to understand the numerical logic behind the change.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Funniest_Joke_in_the_World

Accepting that business logic, which you'll never get to see, is encoded into the Google algorithm appears to be a mental stretch for many but even when people in business do accept that all you'll ever get to see is its output this, however, still doesn't prevent people I speak to from pining for a quick and simple explanation of what Google 'does'; so, for those of you wanting a description or a refresher of "how Google works", here it is:

1.   Google sends out software robots to analyse the content of web pages and the link structure of the Web. Google summarises what it finds about each page and website as a list of keywords which it stores along with the webpage address (its URL) in a database we call its Index.

2.   Once Google has built its list of web page keywords it will then set about calculating just how "good" each web page is by giving each page a score we call its Rank. The rules (Google's own model of the Web) form the framework within which a number of algorithms work which are used to calculate the rank taking well in excess of 200 factors into account.

3.   When Customers enter a search query into Google, Google takes the search query and compares it against the keywords it has stored in its index and returns the results as pages of links to the webpages it has matched with the high ranking websites listed first.

A good (high ranking) website is one that is calculated to be: Reliable, Authoritative, Popular and Fresh.

Algorithmically, this might look a little like this:

Rank = ((Reliability + Authority) * (Popularity + Freshness))

When, as is the case with the aforementioned Panda & Penguin updates, Google change the significance or weighting of any of the factors to the right of the equals sign then not only will this change the Rank of a page but will also affect it's level of visibility.

The most critically important things which a Search Commander needs to learn from this illustration are that:

I.   This algorithmic function is fully executed before any search is ever made by a Customer;

II.   Google already knows which website is best for any given search;

III. Customer searches are merely input variables for querying the vast look-up database that is Google's own index;

IV.   Search results aren't live data returned in real-time - the search query doesn't trigger an algorithm to go out onto the web looking for websites;

V.   Customers' search keywords are a simple input variable that supplies Google the 'Relevancy' it needs in order to look-up its index and return ranked results. Relevancy contextualises the search and provides a 'meaning'.

VI.   The words that make up your Customers' search queries are but one of the many input variables which allow Google to mine the output of its algorithms

and filter-out irrelevant results to return, in direct response to search queries, a list of hyperlinks to good websites ranked by what it believes to be the best (the most trustworthy) first.

For many, trying to picture and then to own a sense of what Google's "heavenly" algorithm may be like appears to be a stretch yet those who fully apply themselves will find themselves becoming Search Commanders in their own right and the 6th sense they develop (their own internal model of Google) will become highly prized and commercially valuable. Investing the time to learn and to come to know the demigod-like Google and its model of the Web is the primary barrier that all who struggle with SEO come up against. It is well documented that there are well over 200 factors which come into play when calculating the rank of one page amongst billions and the sheer breadth of this self-assigned task, for many, appears hard to grapple and so far beyond their reach. So, let's try and bring it closer by simplifying the concept of Google's model of the web by considering a commonplace business service, that of credit rating.

The credit rating of individuals, businesses or nations is calculated upon the state of their known and published finances. A healthy balance sheet will create a healthy credit rating. In business, the rating is calculated by known and trusted key management ratios such as: liquidity, debtor days, gearing, return on capital employed etc. So, when you consider that it's possible to mathematically extrapolate and assign a credit rating (a rankable score of credibility and trustworthiness) based upon a set of accounts then it's easy to see how Google can develop a set of measures to assign a trust rating (a rank) to any given web page.

As with SEO, to achieve a good credit rating there is no one thing (no silver bullet) that neither you nor anyone else can use to improve a credit rating and (here's the crunch) a good credit rating can be achieved without knowing 'precisely' how a credit rating agency calculates the score; to achieve a good credit rating all a business needs to do is to follow and promote good business practice. Similarly, to achieve a good Google ranking you don't need to know 'precisely' how Google calculates your ranking; all you simply need to do is to follow best practice.

'It all comes down to trust.'

In an incredibly short space of time the Google brand has reached an unparalleled level of trust simply by finding & ranking websites - to millions on the Internet Google makes sense of the Web; Google is the first page of the Web. Trust, as we all know, is very much a two way thing; we trust Google to deliver the best websites so before ranking a website Google needs to be able to trust it. In calculating whether a website is good and trustworthy or not there are four key website dynamics that come into play which are: Accessibility, Content, Links & Traffic. In terms of best practice, consider the following:

◉   Accessibility: Let Google crawl all of your content, be open, honest, transparent and don't think you can fool Google.

◉   Content: Good search engine copy is simply good copy, nothing more, nothing less; write primarily with your Customer in mind.

◉   Links: A link from someone else's website to yours is, in essence, a vote - the weight/value of that vote depends upon the importance of the website from

which the link originates. The more votes your website has the more authority it may be deemed to have.

◉ Traffic: A busy and active website is clearly more popular and deserving of interest than a website with few visits.

SUN TZU SAID [5.5]:

"In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory."

Consider Accessibility and Content as being 'direct' (onsite) methods with Links and Traffic being 'indirect' (offsite) methods. The victorious Search Commander will know that SEO is not just about Content (of which a subset is keywords), Accessibility, Links or Traffic but, instead, how all four dynamics combine. If you need to change the way Google perceives your website then changing one or all of these four dynamics will give you the best chance of improving your ranking. Just how much you need to change one or more of these dynamics depends upon the competitiveness of the opposition.

The victorious Search Commander not only needs to know how to think like Google (a robot) and give it what it likes but also needs to know how to think like a Customer (a human) and give them what they want.

The Search landscape is defined by the search keywords your Customers use. Search relies upon our use of words yet, despite their intelligence, many business owners have come to think of SEO as a 'black art' and simply fail to appreciate that they will only be found by their Customers if the words they use on their website to describe their business, its products and its services match what's in Customers' heads.

A critical factor that the Search Commander must accept is that, before your Customers even think about searching, Google's robots have already crawled, assessed, defined, indexed and ranked all the good websites and are engaged in an ongoing monitoring of this situation. Google knows which website is best for any given search BEFORE any search query is executed.

By entering a search query into Google your Customers are offering a glimpse into their thought processes; the words they type or speak are an attempt to express the thoughts, feelings and preferences that reside inside their brains. Their search queries (the words they use and the life experiences they possess which have caused them to navigate the Web in their own language) offered-up to Google are theirs alone, never yours.

The victorious Search Commander knows what their Customers will be thinking before they search. The victorious Search Commander will translate these thoughts into search queries or, if you prefer, 'keyword phrases' and will not only document these keywords but will also map them onto webpages and the commercial products and services they exist to represent; they will develop an appreciation of

why these keywords are being used and will, furthermore, encourage the adoption of these keywords into the corporate vocabulary.

SUN TSU SAID (1.12.3):
"With whom lie the advantages derived from Heaven and Earth?"

Think of the demigod-like Google and its algorithms as "Heaven" - something that you cannot change, cannot fully comprehend but, through perseverance and doing the right things may, over time, come to know and eventually gain the acceptance of.

Think of your Customers' words and thoughts as "Earth" - an ever changing yet mappable landscape, subject to time and tide.

To move forward and develop a true business focus on SEO you must now appoint and resource a Search Commander; someone with the freedom to think like a Customer, the patience to think like a robot, the authority to lead without question and the ability to do this better and more quickly than your competitors. The MD/ CEO need not necessarily be The Search Commander but, however, must be instrumental in the creation of the role and offer their full weight and backing.

SUN TSU SAID (3.17.2):
1. He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.

2. He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces.

3. He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks.

4. He will win who, prepared himself, waits to take the enemy unprepared.

5. He will win who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sovereign.

These are The 5 Constants of The Art of War. What follows is The Art of Search.

</extract>

THE SEO MANAGEMENT STRATEGY
2,500 YEARS IN THE MAKING.