



Social Listening in Practice

SEO &

Content Strategy



1.0 SEO & Content: A Lasting Strategy

It's often easy to forget how influential and powerful today's search engines are. Over the past two decades, we have become increasingly reliant on Google to find answers, research ideas and guide our decisions.

Search engines have no easy task – their aim is to interpret our wildly varying queries and present us with the most important and relevant resources available. Essentially, it is the search engine that determines what is valuable information to the online world. That endeavor is enormously influential on today's businesses.

For those less convinced by this assertion, consider that over 80% of consumers research online before purchasing products in-store¹ and that direct online sales account for 7.5% or \$1,184.8 billion worth of total US sales.² As that trend progresses, the role of SEO will only grow more important.

Yet SEO is no easy task either. Marketers are asked to know both the relevant questions people are asking search engines as well as the factors search engines deem valuable. They must understand the users without ever meeting them and the search engines without knowing the algorithm.

Over the past decade, many experts have targeted the algorithm, employing SEO strategies, such as link building schemes, to convince Google to rank their content highly. Yet because Google constantly updates their algorithm to combat these practices, we believe that view is mostly shortsighted.

Instead, businesses should seek innovative ways to provide genuine value to their audience. Considering Google as a human interpreter rather than an algorithm, they should ask how they can activate Google and their readers to support their content, whether that's through backlinks, social shares, engagement or other promotion. To do so, businesses will need to better learn understand audiences.

In this regard, social media, rich with naturally occurring opinions and feedback, proves to be a surprisingly effective resource for identifying how people communicate, spreading awareness around content and evaluating content's performance. In the long run, these strategies will ensure a strong backlog of content and a high search engine rank that survives the constant onslaught of Google updates.



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¹ PricewaterhouseCoopers. *Understanding how US online shoppers are reshaping the retail experience*. 2012.

² US Census Bureau. *Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales 4th Quarter 2015*. February, 2016.

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2.0 The Current State of SEO

For well over a decade, Google's algorithm, which manages over 60% of online searches, has essentially directed the course of SEO practices.³ In recent years, a few major updates to Google's algorithm have fundamentally changed the current school of thought around SEO.

In 2011, the Panda update aimed to lower the ranking of sites with 'low quality', 'thin' and 'duplicate' content, while promoting the ranking of 'high quality' sites. In doing so, Google sent a clear message that quality content could not be ignored or manipulated. Of course, the update led to a quick rise in content marketing as an SEO tactic.

The second major update occurred in April, 2012. The Penguin update punished sites that attempted to artificially manipulate Google's search ranking through link building schemes. The update stymied sites that were deemed to have built artificial links, a previously successful strategy. The release ensured that link would need to be earned, not bought.

The 2013 Hummingbird release completely overhauled the entire Google algorithm, providing faster and more precise query results based on semantic search. Emphasizing user intent over individual search terms, the update forced the SEO industry to focus on the subject of content rather than keywords.

Of course, Google also introduces 500-600 updates a year alongside these major ones.⁴ However the cycle is a familiar one: Google aims to return the most relevant, high quality content based on user's intent, a few sites uncover ways to temporarily "game" the algorithm, and Google eventually identifies the scheme and adjusts their algorithm accordingly.

For websites, undergoing a sharp decline in search traffic can be devastating. The key takeaway from this cycle is that in the long run, focusing on quality content that is relevant to the audience is increasingly important as Google's algorithm improves.

In summary, an effective SEO strategy will now include:

- A strong understanding of your audience, including how they search, what content they share and what they talk about.
- The creation of high quality content that will be shared by your audience and gain natural links.
- Brand building techniques such as influencer marketing and PR to increase your brand awareness and amplify your content marketing.

³ comScore. April, 2015, Search Engine Rankings. April, 2015.

⁴ Moz. Google Algorithm Change History. <<https://moz.com/google-algorithm-change>>

3.0 The Effect of Social Shares on Ranking

Before the days of Twitter and Facebook, the world of organic search focused primarily around keyword optimization and link building. While these factors are still important, there are now over 200 factors that affect rankings.

As social media adoption continues to grow, search engines have adapted their algorithms to take data from social sites into account when deciding where to rank a website. There is some debate in the SEO industry as to how much of a factor these signals are.

In 2010, Matt Cutts confirmed [in a video](#) that Google takes Social Signals into account – this means that retweets, likes and shares are likely to work toward your SEO strategy.⁵ Then, in a [2014 video](#) he qualified that further, stating that some pages are inaccessible to Google's crawlers, and that the algorithm is unable to weight links depending on number of followers or likes.⁶

There are several tests and studies that show a link between social signals and improved rankings.⁷ The underlying principle is that the more exposure content gets, the more opportunities there will be to attract links from both social and non-social sites.

This reinforces the need for great content on your site - useful content is more likely to be shared by social users, generating those Likes and RTs, and further driving traffic and rankings.

And of course, even if Twitter, Facebook or Instagram don't drive large volumes of traffic or sales for your business, you should still be leveraging these networks to generate conversation about your brand, product or service.

⁵ Matt Cutts. *Does Google use data from social sites in ranking?* YouTube. 2010.

⁶ Matt Cutts. *Are pages from social media sites ranked differently?* YouTube. 2014.

⁷ QuickSprout. *How Social Signals Impact Search Engine Rankings.* 2014.

4.0 Social for Content Strategy

4.1 Social for Keyword Research

When Google moved to secure search in 2011, publishers lost the ability to see the search terms used to reach their websites. As such, most analytics reports will now display “not provided” as the leading keyword.

Keyword ?	Acquisition		
	Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?
	199,525 % of Total: 61.66% (323,607)	74.24% Avg for View: 71.65% (3.61%)	148,123 % of Total: 63.88% (231,870)
1. (not provided)	192,355 (96.41%)	73.91%	142,172 (95.98%)
2. brandwatch	550 (0.28%)	58.00%	319 (0.22%)
3. troll	192 (0.10%)	94.79%	182 (0.12%)
4. (not set)	156 (0.08%)	70.51%	110 (0.07%)

This presented a new challenge for content creators and SEO experts. Being unable to know which keywords drive traffic to a site makes it difficult to expand the content into relevant, related terms which will increase search traffic.

Consequently a lack of useful keyword analytics is one of the major roadblocks to an effective SEO strategy – social keywords may provide the solution.

Listening to online conversations about your brand, products and services can help you to understand how consumers are talking about your niche online and therefore what they might be searching for to discover your products.

The beauty of using a listening platform is that you're able to uncover natural conversations about products or brands in real-time. That is, how people discuss your products online, the specific language they use, the questions they are asking and the key conversation drivers. This can all help to inform keyword selection, both for organic search, PPC, and content planning.

Now compare this to social data gathered in Brandwatch. We created a simple query for "fake tan" or "self tan" mentions. A quick glance at a topics cloud immediately shows some opportunities for search:

Keyword (by relevance) ↓	Avg. monthly searches ?	Competition ?	Suggested bid ?
tanning lotion	18,100	High	£0.83
best self tanner	22,200	High	£0.63
self tanner	12,100	High	£1.24
best tanning lotion	8,100	High	£1.00
best self tanning lotion	3,600	High	£0.60
best self tanners	4,400	High	£0.84
spray tan	60,500	Medium	£1.40

In Brandwatch's topic cloud, the smell associated with fake tanning products is a significant conversation driver, with users having differing views on the topic:







Mentions Found for "smell of fake tan"

Add to Dashboard | View v | Export v | X

Mentions 1 - 20 of 675

Q "smell of fake" Go Sort by Newest v

01	 frenchy @SAM_FR3NCH 30 Jun RT @rebekahhiggins: Feels so good to be reunited with @SAM_FR3NCH the welcoming smell of fake tan has made me feel at home
	Conversation Drivers: Smell Tags: Retweets
02	 tillie @tilliemaxted 30 Jun the smell of fake tan is so unpleasant, why do I have to be so deathly pale lol
	Conversation Drivers: Smell
03	 Saffron @saffronxrose 29 Jun Getting so use to the smell of fake tan I actually like it
	Conversation Drivers: Smell
04	 alison hendrix @super_cunt 29 Jun why do I smell of fake tan I'm gagging

Thanks to a quick search on social, we now know this is a busy topic that users are already naturally interested in and discussing online. It would make sense to create some content around this topic using relevant long-tail keywords, and to also consider promoting that content via PPC advertising as well as through social channels.

4.2 Social Media Signals for Trending Content

One effective strategy for earning search traffic is to produce content around trending topics. Google Fellow Amit Singhal describes how specific Google searches will strongly favor content that is fresh.⁸

- Recent hot topics or events: "occupy oakland protest" "the dress"
- Regularly recurring events: "NBA scores" "dancing with the stars" "exxon earnings"
- Frequently updated content: "best slr cameras" "subaru impreza reviews"

Listening to real-time conversations around a specific industry, product or topic allows businesses to react quickly to emerging trends with relevant fresh content.

For trend alerts, social media intelligence is far more responsive than current keyword tools, which are slow to update – this makes social intelligence a powerful tool for trend hijacking and long-tail keyword identification.

This approach means your content strategy can join and even lead the trending conversation, not follow the trends after they happen. The amount of searches undertaken at the start of a trend will provide a real boost if you can publish content in a timely matter.

⁸ Moz. *Freshness Factor: 10 Illustrations on How Fresh Content Can Influence Rankings*. 2011.

4.3 Uncovering Content Opportunities:

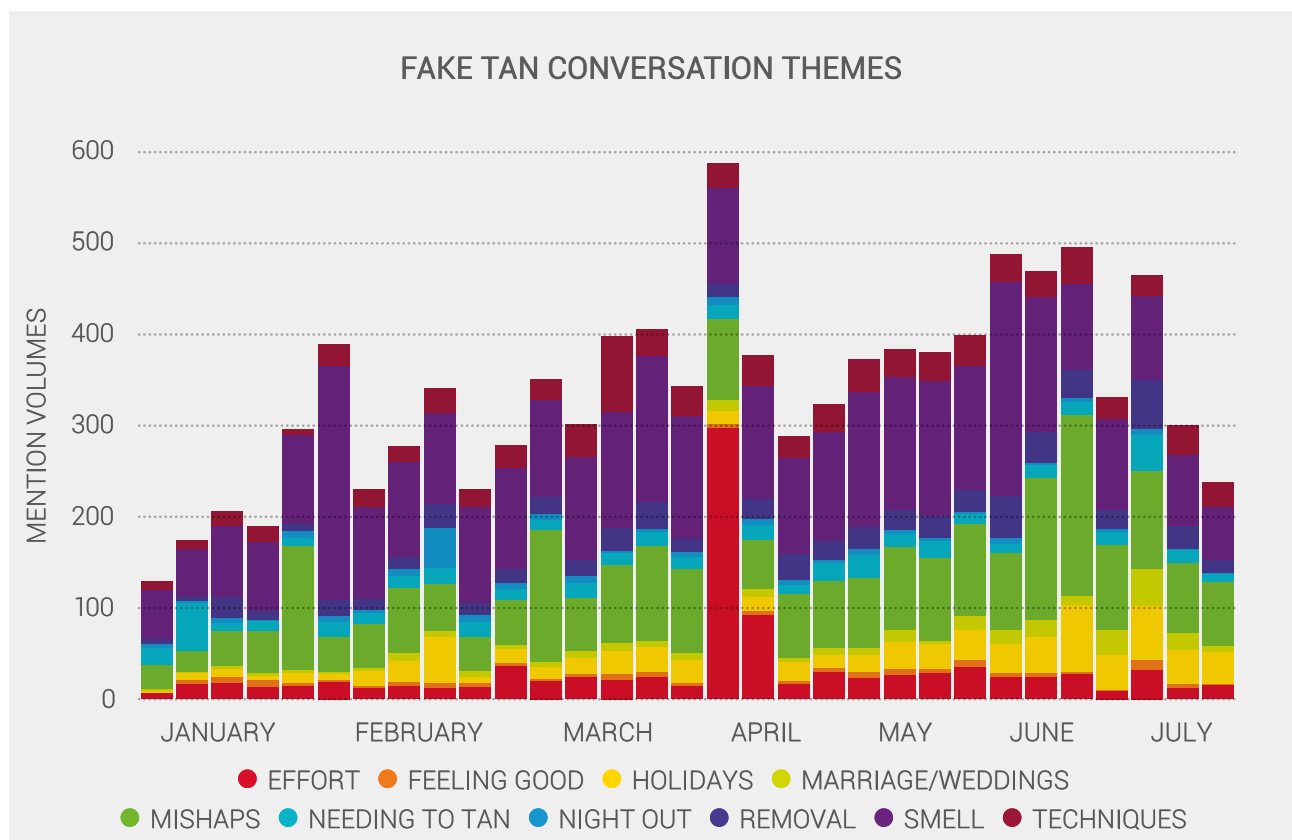
Social media intelligence can provide valuable insight on what ideas or themes are currently important within any conversation. For content writers, that means a better understanding of what content will resonate with the audiences of any niche business.

Using our self tanning Query as an example, several recurring themes emerge:

- Holidays/Ibiza
- Difficulty in applying self tan to your back
- The smell of self tan
- Tanning mishaps
- The effort required to apply self tan
- The ability of a self tan to help you feel good about yourself, feel happy, improve your mood
- Getting ready for a night out
- How to effectively remove self tan
- The idea of "needing to" use self tan
- People discussing self tan in association with getting married and their wedding day

In order to analyze this in more detail, we have created a Category for each different type of conversation. This enables us to chart these conversations out over time.

On the next page we can see this broken out from January – July 2015:



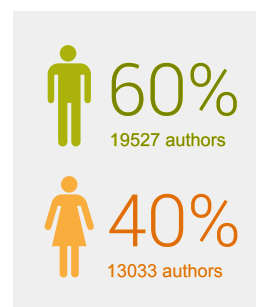
We can see that smell continues to be the dominant theme of discussion, but interestingly we can also see a couple of spikes in wedding/marriage-related conversation in January and April/May, with a smaller peak in mid July.

Through a simple listening approach we have quickly identified an opportunity to create some targeted content around self-tanning for brides-to-be, along with a clear indication of when to release this content for best success.

4.4 Knowing the Audience

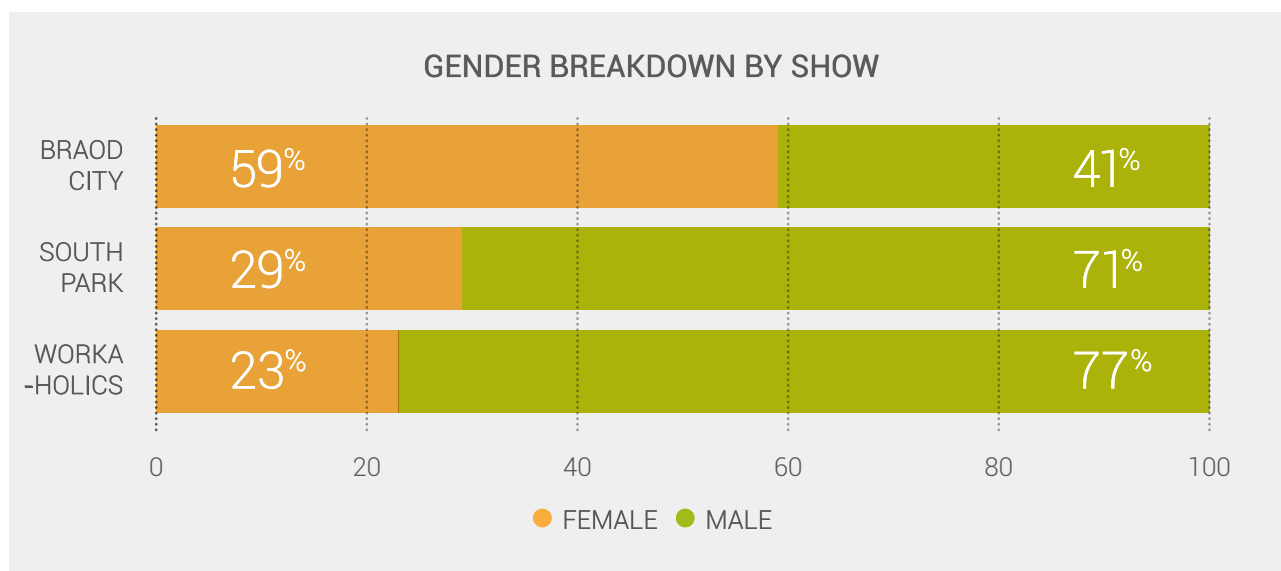
A better understanding of who the people are that discuss your brand or products online can provide the means to tailor content messaging to a specific audience. Social intelligence tools like Brandwatch can uncover audience insights on locality, profession, interest, and gender to help you identify the different groups within your total customer base.

For example, an analysis of the conversation surrounding Comedy Central reveals that their audience is predominantly male.



Furthermore, in the context of television networks in general, which is 62% female, Comedy Central is an even more male-centric brand online. That information may help content writers identify who their audience is.

However, for brands to better understand how they're attracting certain demographics, they'll want to understand more specifically what content is resonating. The following figure reveals how much content surrounding three Comedy Central shows are discussed by males and females.



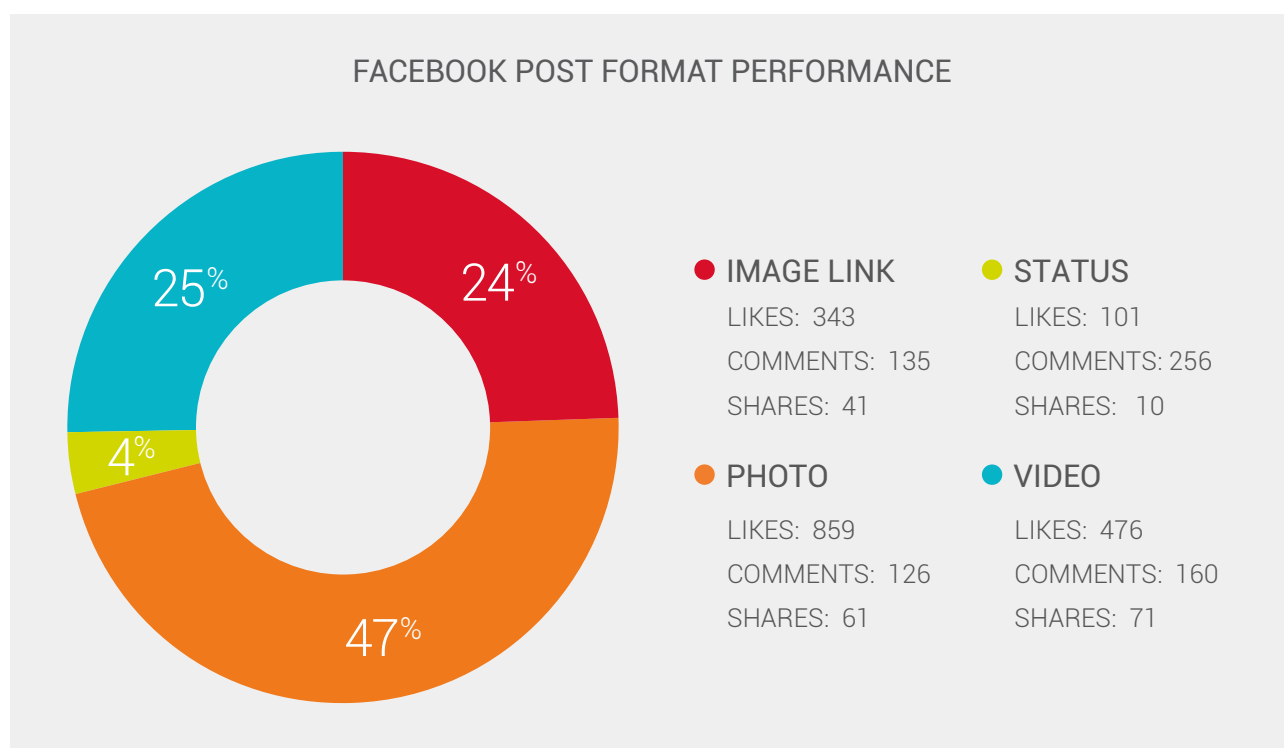
With that analysis, brands can identify not only who their audience is, but also what types of content they're interested in and how they can amplify their presence among certain demographic groups. Similar analyses for audience interest, profession and location can provide even more in-depth insights.

4.5 Identifying Successful Content

When people like, share or retweet social content, they are essentially stating that the content is valuable to them in some way – marketers might think of these as “social votes.” In this light, it’s unsurprising that such social votes would contribute to Google’s ranking.

More importantly, social votes help content creators understand what is resonating best with an audience. Additionally, by examining the content created by both your brand and competitors, you can gain insight on what content interests your shared audience – that feedback can then inform the direction of future content.

For example, within the telecommunications industry, Facebook status updates, which are usually the worst performing type of Facebook post, actually draw the highest number of comments.



A closer analysis will reveal that the success of status updates is due to two reasons. Firstly, many brands use statuses to report malfunctions, which generally draws questions, complaints and other responses from audiences. Secondly, DirecTV frequently uses statuses as polls, which drove an average of 324.9 comments per status.



DIRECTV/

February 26 at 5:02pm



Who is the youngest person to win an acting Oscar?

- A. Anna Paquin - The Piano
- 2. Tatum O'Neal - Paper Moon
- C. Patty Duke - The Miracle Worker

Watch Oscar nominated films tonight on DIRECTV CINEMA:

<http://goo.gl/i46qfz>

LIKES/REACTIONS 41

These analyses can help content creators identify what types or topics of content are successful within their specific audience.

5.0 Amplification: Influencer Outreach







While creating excellent content is central to a successful SEO strategy, that content is useless unless it attracts readers. Of course, there is a catch-22, as a high Google ranking is key to attracting readers.

One effective way of breaking into new audiences is through influencer outreach. Social intelligence reveals not only what is resonating with an audience but also who is leading the conversation and generating that interest.

Getting influencers to engage with your content will give it an important boost, introducing it to the influencer's wider audience. However, identifying and connecting with influencers that access a relevant audience can be difficult for many businesses.

The first step will of course be identifying relevant influencers. Social listening can uncover the influential individuals within a specific conversation or audience. A simple way of uncovering influencers is to explore accounts with high follower counts or websites with high MozRank that are participating in your industry's conversation.

For example, the figure below shows which Twitter accounts mentioning Uniqlo have the highest number of followers.

Uniqlo Twitter Audience		UNIQLO UK, UniqloUSA		Last 31 days			
AUTHOR			CHANNEL ACTIVITY				
ACCOUNT NAME	FOLLOWERS	IMPACT	REPLIES	RETWEETS	@MENTIONS	CHANNEL	
 @HuffingtonPost	6,770,363	29	0	0	1	UniqloUSA	
 @BritishVogue	3,207,166	30	0	0	8	UNIQLO UK	
 @wwd	2,852,405	23	0	0	4	UniqloUSA	
 @TeenVogue	2,565,591	28	0	0	1	UniqloUSA	
 @chicagobulls	2,527,456	32	0	0	5	UniqloUSA	
 @marieclaire	2,127,844	28	0	0	1	UniqloUSA	

Yet discovering people who not only have a large following, but who are specifically influential within your industry or target audience is foundational to a successful influencer marketing campaign.

As well as identifying these influencers on social media, blogs, and forums, you can listen to what they are saying. In order to begin to build a mutually beneficial relationship, you need to show an understanding and appreciation of the individual when contacting them.

In addition, listening to influencers will keep you updated on the content and topics that thought leaders are sharing and engaging with, providing further topics for content creation.

6.0 Acquiring Links for SEO

6.1 Acquiring Links on Relevant Sites

Listening to where your audience are talking will help you find new communities to promote your content to and hopefully allow you to build high quality and relevant backlinks.

In the past, guest blogging was a common SEO tactic used to acquire links on external sites. In 2014 Google's Matt Cutts revealed that the practice had become too spammy and as a consequence the practice was being penalized by the search engine.⁹

As a result, many sites are reluctant to offer guest posting opportunities, and if they do agree to a post will often insist on nofollow links. This means that SEOs have to get more creative when attempting to build links. Discovering relevant sites that would naturally link to your content should be mutually beneficial for both parties.

To improve the likelihood of success, and to ensure that your content is a good fit, research of the site's topic and audience is important. In addition, knowing more about the decision maker you are going to contact is also good practice.

When you reach out to a site, this research will demonstrate that you have a genuine reason for contacting them and are not sending spammy requests to numerous sites. Social listening can help you better understand the nuances of these communities. If you have been following a community or site owner on various social channels, your outreach message can be tailored to highlight why you think your content is a good fit.

In our self tanning example, we can see that the top site for discussion of self tan in relation to weddings is a forum called youandyourwedding.co.uk:



Forums Fake Tan Research Jul 01, 2015 - Jul 31, 2015									
SITE NAME	MENTIONS				IMPACT	SITE RANKING			
	MENTIONS	POS	NEG	NEU	TOTAL	MOZRANK	BACKLINKS		
www.youandyourwedding.co.uk	48	16	3	29	31	5.55	29762		
forums.moneysavingexpert.com	33	7	5	21	32	5.99	1417		
forums.digitalspy.co.uk	24	1	5	18	24	5.07	21657		
www.mumsnet.com	21	2	3	16	29	6.21	16018		
www.thedibb.co.uk	11	0	1	10	20	4.26	600		
www.salongeek.com	3	1	0	2	19	4.56	262		

⁹ Matt Cutts. *The decay and fall of guest blogging for SEO*. 2014.



A dive into the mentions shows us a really targeted group of people discussing the pros and cons of using self tan on their wedding day, even asking for brand recommendations:

Mentions Found on [www.youandyourwedding.c...](#) 📌 Add to Dashboard | View ▾ | 📄 Export ▾ 🔍 ✕



Mentions 1 - 20 of 48 Sort by Newest ▾

01   **youandyourwedding.co.uk** (Forum) Posts: 0 - Views: 0 - mozRank: 5.55 25 Jul
ITS HERE!!!!!!!!!! - Wedding Forum | You & Your Wedding
"...of the month. Fitting on 18th June. Well excited!! Any advice anyone? **My** advise to myself is to be all buffed scrubed and **fake tanned** up to try **my** dress on so I feel great! Its easy to forget what a vulnerable plonker you feel in a cubicle with someone dressing you! What is your dress Shelle belle?..."

Conversation Drivers: Feeling Good

02   **youandyourwedding.co.uk** (Forum) Posts: 0 - Views: 0 - mozRank: 5.55 24 Jul
Tan and leg waxing - when, how, what?!?!? - Wedding Forum | You & Your Wedding
"I get married Sat 30th June. I am wanting to have **my** legs and bikini (yikes!) waxed but I am also wanting to do a **self tan**. When should I get my waxing done and then when should I do the tanning bit? My other thoughts are that I don't know whether to do one of those summer body tans like Dove, Johnsons etc (where you build it up over a few days..."

Conversation Drivers: Marriage/Weddings

03   **youandyourwedding.co.uk** (Forum) Posts: 0 - Views: 0 - mozRank: 5.55 23 Jul
How to be tanned and stay tanned????????? - Wedding Forum | You & Your Wedding

By doing some research on the site and the concerns of this niche group you can decide whether your content will be relevant and helpful. If it is, a tailored message that demonstrates the value your content and can add to the discussion will hopefully be enough to gain trust and earn a backlink.

6.2 Building Links on Existing Mentions

Marketers can also gain links by identifying existing mentions in news sites, forums, and blogs and requesting that authors backlink the mentions. Such links will immediately direct traffic from the outside website but will also promote Google's ranking.

Recall that while Google's updates have altered the weighting of backlinks as a ranking factor, they are still one of the most important aspects of SEO. As has been the case since Google first rolled out Pagerank, a link from a website with high domain authority will be worth a lot more than a niche blog with a small audience, as it is a signal that a trusted website rates your content highly.

In our example query for tanning brand Fake Bake, we identified a story on The Telegraph newspaper website about winter tanning, which mentioned Fake Bake but did not link out to the brand's website:

Winter tanning how-to Snippet

." Swap a post-shave for a pre-shave: In the winter, when skin is naturally more sensitive, do make sure you wax or shave 24 hours before tanning. As Sandra McClumpha, CEO of Fake Bake explains, "this prevents any irritation and 'trapping' of colour in hair follicles." Swap the one scrub for a double whammy: "In winter, when skin can be...
undefined
Engage

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/beauty/skin/winter-tanning-tips/>

09 Oct 2015 Author Unknown United Kingdom News Show Metrics

Tan-Luxe Face Oil

Swap a post-shave for a pre-shave: In the winter, when skin is naturally more sensitive, do make sure you wax or shave 24 hours before tanning. As Sandra McClumpha, CEO of Fake Bake explains, "this prevents any irritation and 'trapping' of colour in hair follicles."

Pos Neu Neg
Checked?
CATEGORIES
Conversation ...
Removal, ...
TAGS
WORKFLOW
Assignment
(None)
Priority
(None)
Status

By reaching out to authors and websites you can build the backlinks to your content and help improve your rankings along, in addition to increasing referral traffic from the link.

Discovering existing mentions such as this and reaching out is one of the most cost effective ways of improving your link profile. It is a simple process that can reap good rewards from minimal effort. A polite email is all it takes to reach out to the author, which takes little time and no money.

As the author is already aware of your brand, and considers it worthy of referencing, the request is generally understood as a friendly nudge. And as they deem your brand of interest to their audience it is likely that Google will consider it a relevant link as well. It's relevance means that Google understands that the link is likely to have happened naturally. Naturally occurring links are what Google wants, rather than fake or spam links.

7.0 Auditing an SEO & Content Strategy

If your efforts have succeeded, Google Analytics will of course see a rise in the amount of organic search traffic coming to your site. Assuming your SEO strategy is multifaceted and social is just one part of the plan, it may be difficult to completely attribute any rise in traffic to your social strategy.

Increased engagement on social should lead to increased traffic from social sources, easily attributed in Google Analytics. Similarly, identifying influencers and bloggers to seed your content will drive referral traffic from those specific sites.

Using a tool like Brandwatch as well as Google Analytics means you can understand in much greater detail how well your efforts on social have worked.

You can discover which sites have linked to your content. This is then further broken down by number of mentions, sentiment, the impact of that website (including MozRank and number of backlinks), plus the number of monthly visitors to that site. You can also discover how many links to your website you have earned, even if a link shortener has been used.

Looking at Twitter channels you can discover which Tweets have been most impactful, with retweets, replies, followers and impressions for each tweet. Facebook channels offer similar functionality, showing impact, likes, shares and comments.

Combining this data with organic traffic from Google Analytics will allow you to discover the impact of your social SEO strategy, and refine your methods accordingly to continually improve the results.

8.0 Summary

Regardless of your business sector or the size of your organization, good SEO practice is vital to improving your reach and visibility.

Social signals, and the increased promotion available through these channels can give your SEO a vital boost, and content research can uncover new avenues that resonate with your audience.

SEO Strategy Checklist:

- Social Signals can drive traffic and increase Google rankings
- Social intelligence can uncover industry-relevant conversation topics to inform content creation
- Monitoring conversation can power fresh content with real-time updates on trending topics
- Industry and competitor social content can reveal what topics or ideas are popular or successful within an industry
- Understanding your audience will help writers develop more targeted content
- Relevant influencers can help promote content and provide a better understanding of what content leaders share
- Tracking mentions of your brand or content can help create backlink opportunities
- Social listening can help track and refine SEO and content strategies

Thank you

About Brandwatch

Brandwatch is the world's leading social intelligence company. Brandwatch Analytics and Vizia products fuel smarter decision making around the world.

The Brandwatch Analytics platform gathers millions of online conversations every day and provides users with the tools to analyze them, empowering the world's most admired brands and agencies to make insightful, data-driven business decisions. Vizia distributes visually-engaging insights to the physical places where the action happens.

The Brandwatch platform, ranked highest in customer satisfaction by G2Crowd in the Winter 2016 social media monitoring report, is used by over 1,200 brands and agencies, including Cisco, Whirlpool, British Airways, Sony Music, and Dell. Brandwatch continues on its impressive business trajectory, with more than 50 percent of revenues now from North America

Brandwatch. Now you know

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