SEO IS DEAD … AGAIN?!

Why Modern SEO Is More Than Just Keywords

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SYNCSHOW

Who We Are

We are an

ONLINE MARKETING PARTNER

for B2B manufacturers, transportation & logistics, and professional services firms COMMITTED TO GROWTH.

ABOUT JOHN DATERS

John Daters
Vice President of Technical & Creative Services at SyncShow

With more than 15 years of experience in digital marketing, John has worked in nearly every aspect of digital. He is responsible for directing the strategic oversight of designers, content creators, developers and all tactical experts within SyncShow's digital space to help meet client goals and needs.

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SEO IS DEAD … AGAIN?!

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OK, SEO ISN'T DEAD, BUT IT IS DIFFERENT...

And this isn't new. SEO is always reinventing itself.

Things that change:

- What can be indexed
- What can be shown
- How items are shown
- What data is available
- Search interfaces
- Results interfaces
- Connectivity between devices
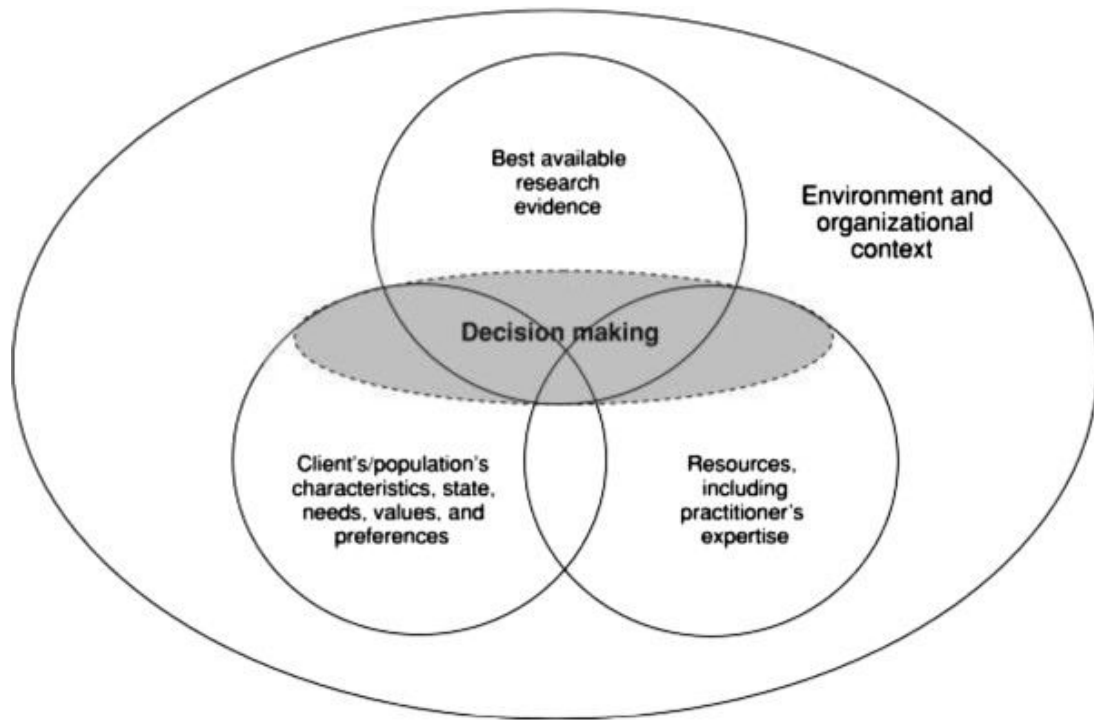- Predictive information
- Always more...

Whenever something changes in search, it is always interpreted as "SEO is dead" or at least no longer works.

Google Search Timeline
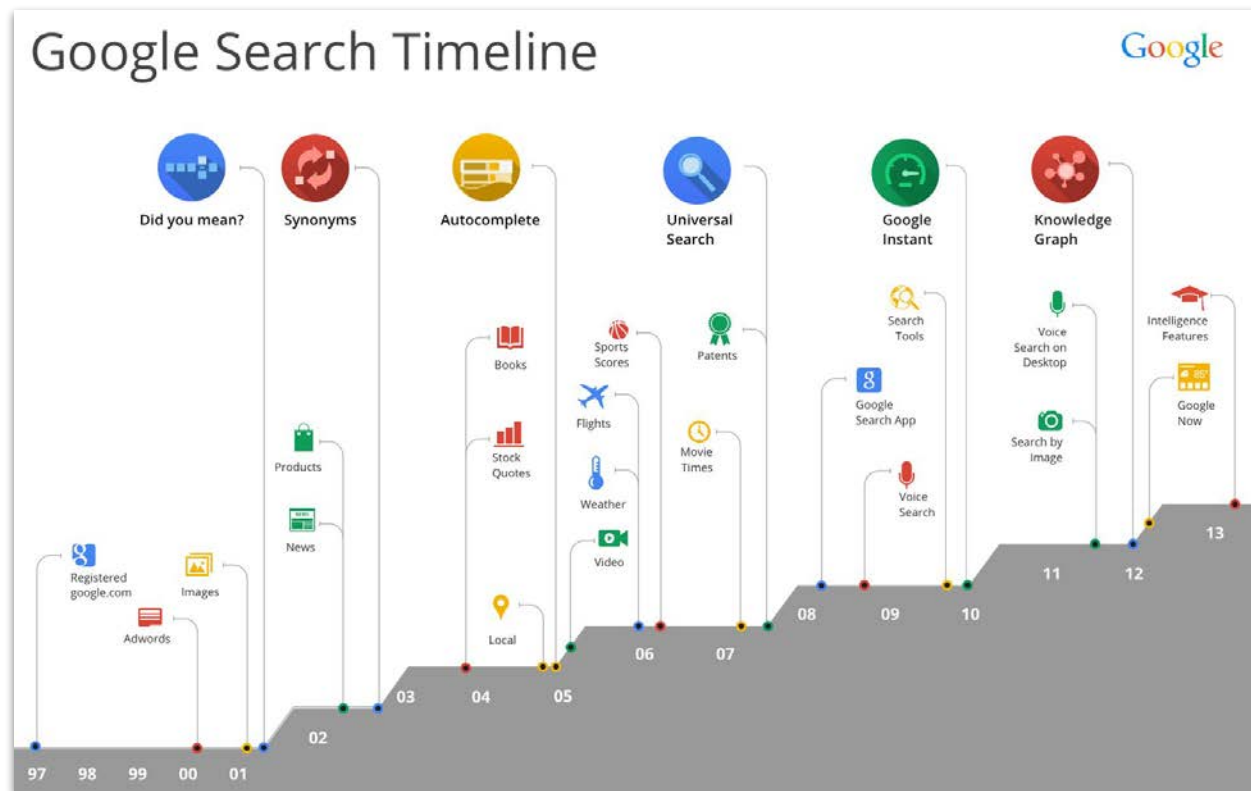
OK, SEO ISN'T DEAD, BUT IT IS DIFFERENT...

Things that DON'T change:

- Why people search
- What people want and expect from results
- The desires of a user
  - Alleviate pain
 - Create more happiness

QUICK LEVEL-SET:
LET'S DEFINE SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

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WHAT IS SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO) & ORGANIC SEARCH?

Organic Search: Non-paid query results generally returned by search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo!) or other devices (including voice-enabled devices).

SEO (Search Engine Optimization): The practice of optimizing digital content, websites and apps to increase the quantity and quality of traffic to your website through user searches.
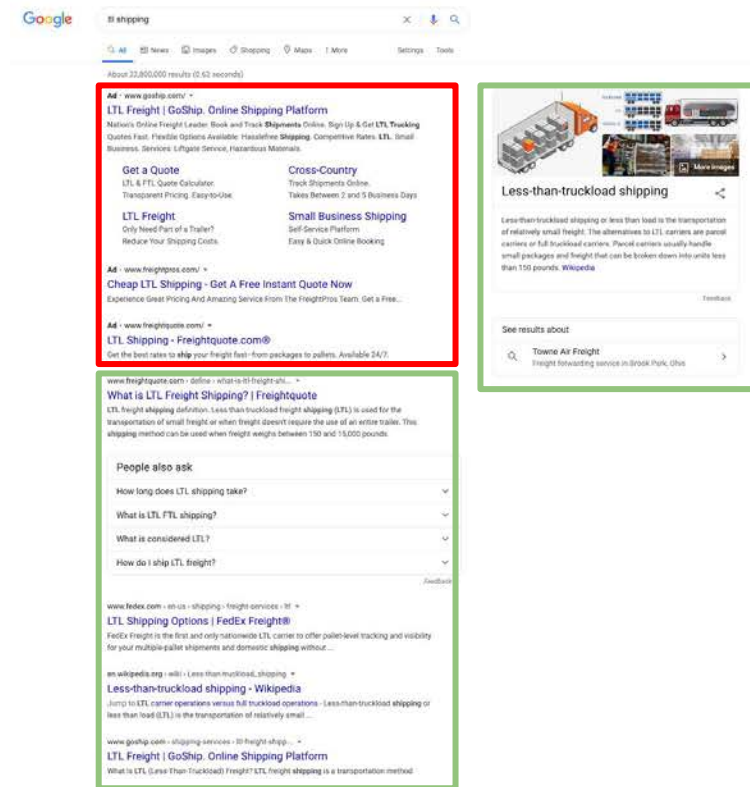
WHAT IS SEO BECOMING?

And What It Used To Be

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SEO IS CHANGING

SEO is no longer only tied to keywords...

In fact, SEO hasn't been solely tied to keywords for a number of years now.

Today's SEO can be broken into three overarching disciplines:

- On-Site: Keywords, Content Quality, Content Relevance
- Off-Site: Linkback Authority, Third-Party Listing Coverage
- Technical: Site Speed, Site Hierarchy, General Technical Setup

All three elements have morphed over the years, making "good" SEO tactical implementation an ever-moving target.

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SEO IS CHANGING

Google has been adding elements to its search results page, and how people interact with search has changed.

- How people interact with organic search has changed: From keyboard-only to voice and visual search

- Devices returning results have changed: Alexa, Google Home, Siri and others

- "Traditional" search results have changed: Rich snippets, Knowledge Graph, Quick Answers, Local Map Pack, carousels and more

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ORGANIC SEARCH IS NO LONGER JUST KEYBOARD BASED

Types of Organic Search Requests

- Desktop Typed
- Mobile Typed
- Screen-Supported Voice ("OK, Google"; "Hey Siri")
- Screenless Voice (Alexa, Google Home, Cortana)
- Predictive Typing (Autocomplete Search Queries)
- More
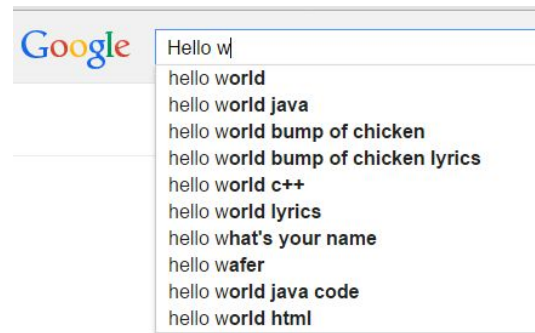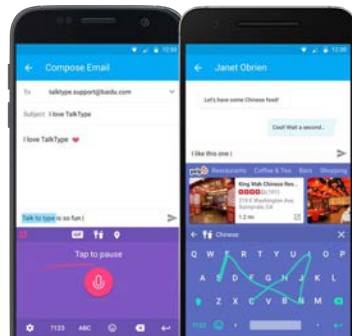
SCREEN-BASED RESULTS HAVE CHANGED, EVOLVED OR MIGRATED OFF-SCREEN

Types of Organic Search Responses

- 10 Blue Links (Traditional Search Results)
- Audio-Only Answer Dictation (Alexa Responses)
- Audio-Dictation With On-Screen Results ("OK, Google" Responses)
- Carousels
- Quick Answers
- Knowledge Graph
- Featured Snippets
- Local Map Packs
- Social Feeds
- Article/News Feeds
- Image Results
- Video Results
- More
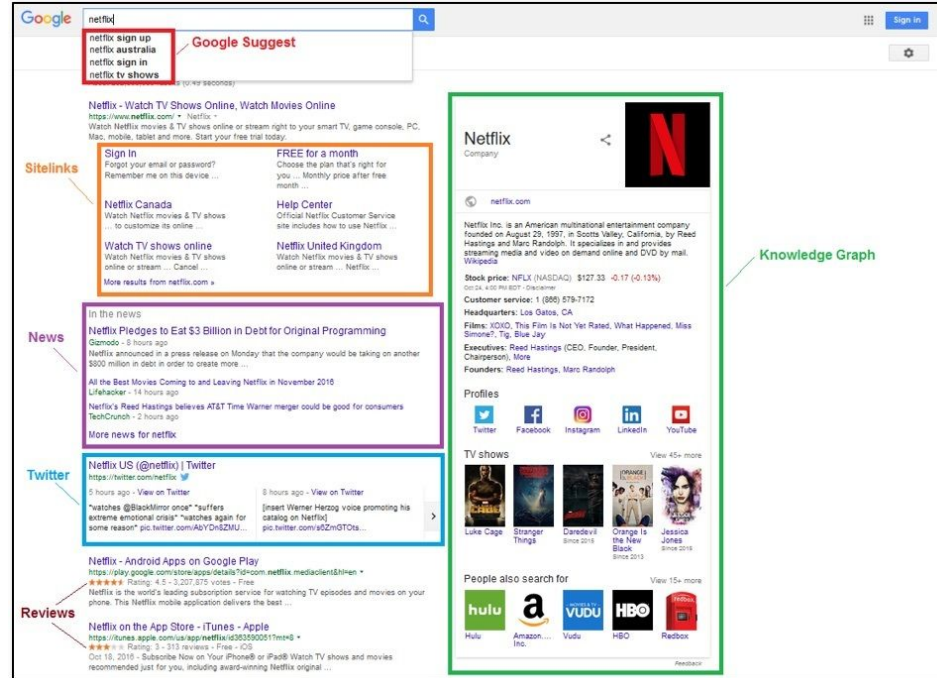
WHAT HASN'T CHANGED: USER INTENT

Search Engine Optimization, at its core, has always been about user intent.

There are still three general, overarching types of searches:

1. **Informational Search Queries**
   a. Top of Funnel/Middle of Funnel - Awareness
2. **Navigational Search Queries**
   a. Middle of Funnel - Consideration
3. **Transactional Search Queries**
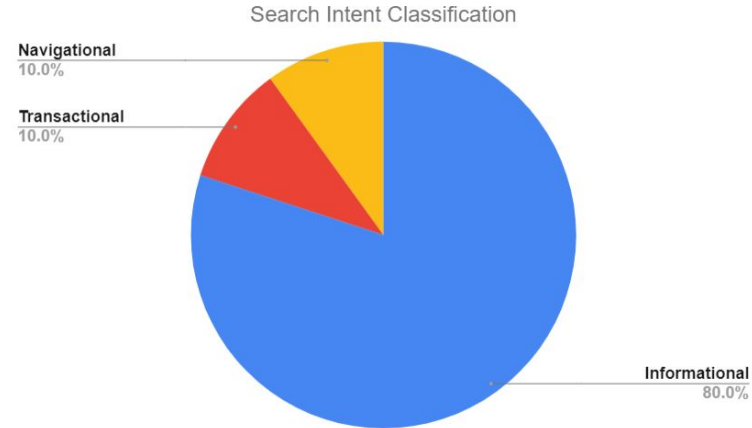   a. Bottom of Funnel - Conversion/Purchase

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USER INTENT: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SEARCH

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USER INTENT

Three Types of Search

1. **Informational Search Queries**
   a. Top of Funnel/Middle of Funnel - Awareness
2. **Navigational Search Queries**
   a. Middle of Funnel - Consideration
3. **Transactional Search Queries**
   a. Bottom of Funnel - Conversion/Purchase

Search Intent Classification

Navigational
10.0%

Transactional
10.0%

Informational
80.0%

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INFORMATIONAL SEARCH QUERIES

What Is an Informational Search Query?

Informational searches generally cover broad topics (ex: "shipping options," "trucks" or "how to ship heavy loads") for which there may be thousands of relevant results. When someone enters an informational search query, they're looking for general information. **Users are generally not looking for a specific site, and they may or may not be looking to make a commercial transaction.** They usually want to answer a question or learn how to do something. **This is often where comparative shopping begins.**

INFORMATIONAL SEARCH QUERIES

How Does This Impact Your Brand/Service/Product?

Informational queries are normally top-of-the-funnel ("Awareness" level) searches. Few transactions or leads are generated from informational searches. But, **optimizing for informational searches places you in the conversation and starts to position you as a memorable name and trusted source.** If you can directly answer pertinent questions, all the better. Would you rather buy from an expert or someone you've never heard of?

Of note: Informational search queries can quickly lead to buying decisions and/or transactional searches. See the "who can ship ltl in Seattle" search.

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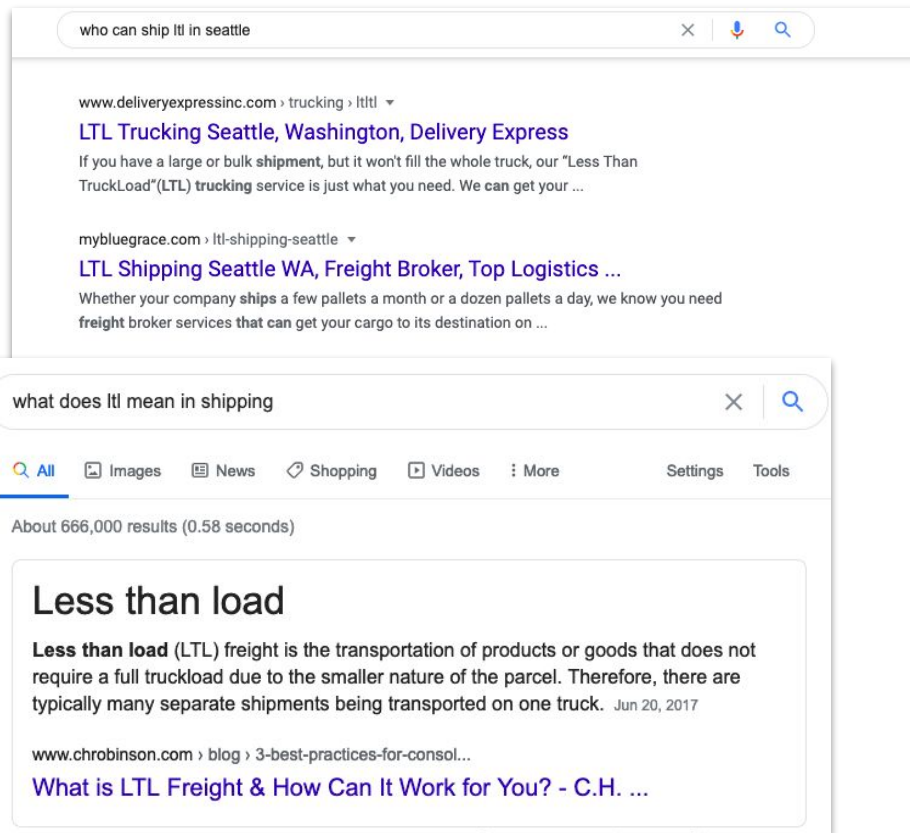
NAVIGATIONAL SEARCH QUERIES

What Is a Navigational Search Query?

A navigational search query is when a user's intent is to find a particular website or product/service. For example, a user might enter "Matson Shipping" into Google's search bar to find the Matson site rather than entering the URL into a browser's navigation bar or using a bookmark. **This type of search is generally reserved for well-regarded brands with brand loyalty.**
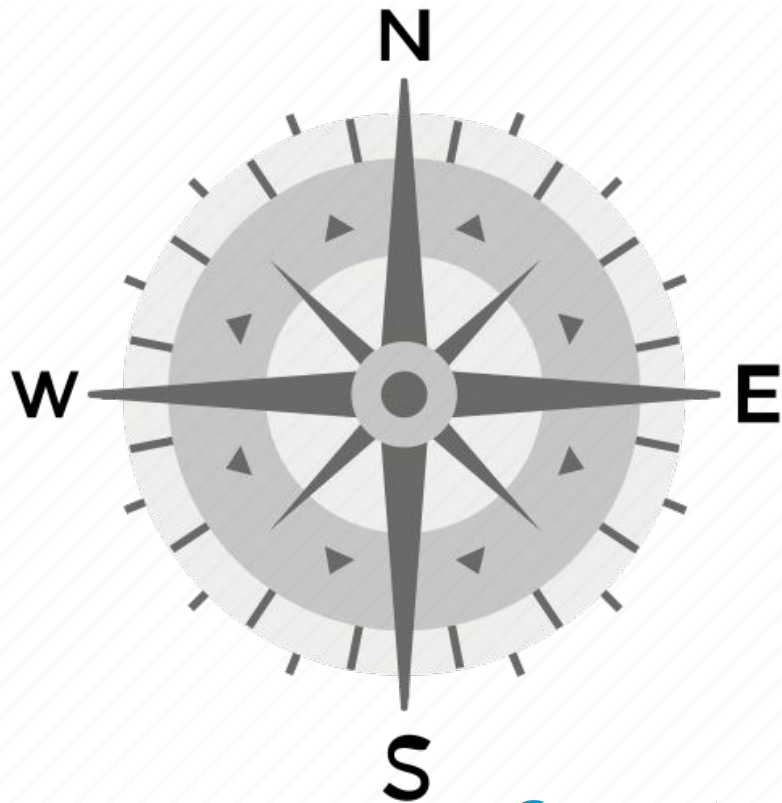
NAVIGATIONAL SEARCH QUERIES

How Does This Impact Your Brand/Service/Product?

This type of search relies on the success of pre-built brand recognition. This can be from previous touchpoints with a user, a blitz of marketing tactics (radio, TV, trade shows, digital advertising, etc.) or immediate return on awareness (handed someone a business card, got off a call with a prospect). **Generally, the searches are either returning based on brand loyalty or are vetting you as a known resource to ensure solution/product fit.**

While navigational queries have very clear intent and the user has an exact site in mind, there are ways to overcome this if you're not the searched brand. Among them is buying paid search ad space with keywords targeting competitor brand names.

TRANSACTIONAL SEARCH QUERIES

What Is a Transactional Search Query?

A transactional search query generally signifies the bottom of the marketing funnel - **a user is ready - or nearly ready - to engage.**

Search examples can include exact brand and product names ("Old Dominion freight tracking service") or be generic ("next day ltl shipping"). Sometimes they can include action-oriented keywords, like "sign up," "buy" and "purchase," but not always and not often.

Remember: Informational searches can quickly lead to transactional searches or be interpreted as transactional as well.

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TRANSACTIONAL SEARCH QUERIES

How Does This Impact Your Brand/Service/Product?

In this stage of user intent, the user is ready, or nearly ready, to take action. **Many of the search results that show up with this search type are specific product or services pages directly relevant to the search.** We often see brands cut back on specialized pages because they don't see heavy traffic. What they don't see, however, is the quality of the traffic visiting.

Informational search queries can do double duty here. A blog about "overnight heavy freight shipping options" may start as an informational piece, but with the right CTAs and copy elements, it can be turned into a micro-moment "buy now" transactional result. **The key is user intent and meeting them where they are when they're ready.**

"USERS" ARE NO LONGER ONLY HUMANS

Here's the Rub: A human at the other end of a search device is not necessarily your only audience…

Machine learning and predictive search have taken us beyond a 1:1 human interaction and moved us to optimizing for artificial intelligence.

Humans no longer search alone. Our queries are predetermined or at least "pre-seeded."

AI & human
cooperation

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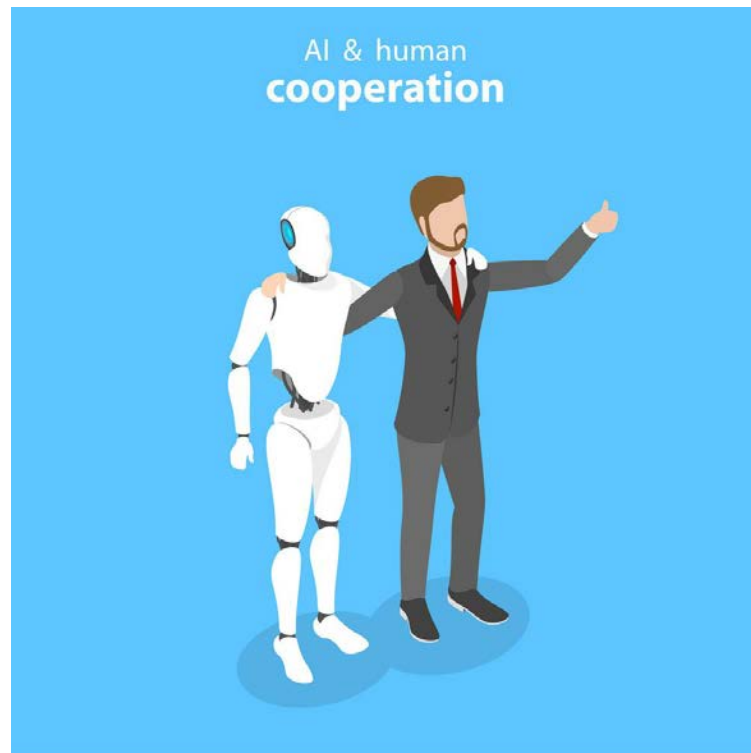
MACHINE LEARNING AND AUTOMATED SEARCH FILTERS BASED ON USER HISTORY

HOW MACHINE LEARNING HAS CHANGED SEO

Machine learning/AI has changed search results in very tangible ways. **While most of the behind-the-scenes changes from AI are hidden, we see their effects daily.**

Examples of Interface and Data Points Used in Machine Learning Impacts on Organic Search Results

- Predictive Typing
- Past-Search Queries
- Location-Based Queries
- Multichannel User Habits (searches, sites visited, apps downloaded, location visited, proximity and frequency of visits to other people, etc.)
- Demographics/Interest-Based (gender, religious views, political affiliations, job titles, family composition, salary, job sector, etc.)

PREDICTIVE SEARCH/PREVIOUS SEARCH
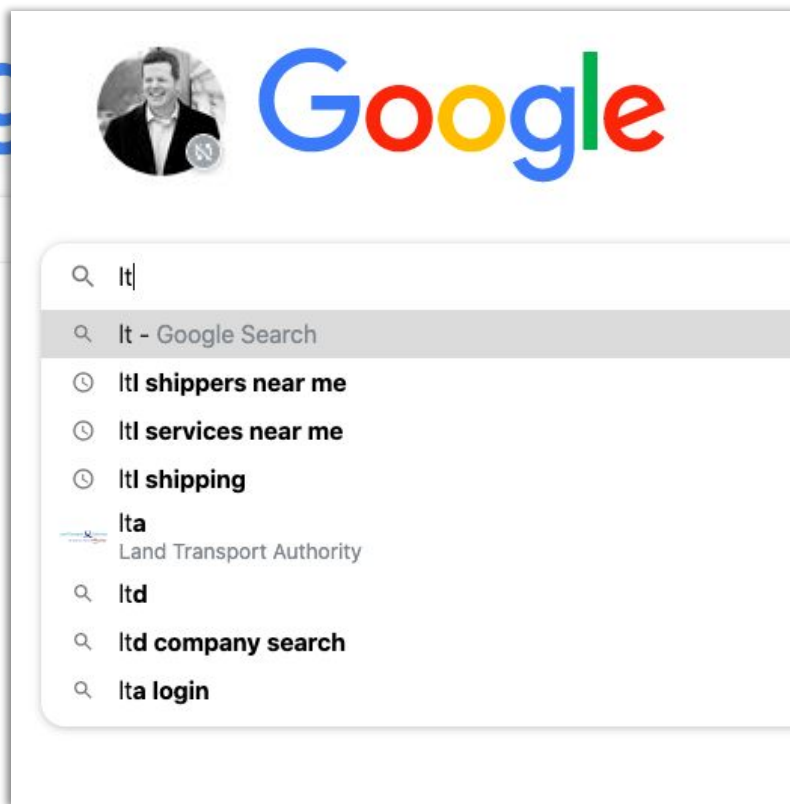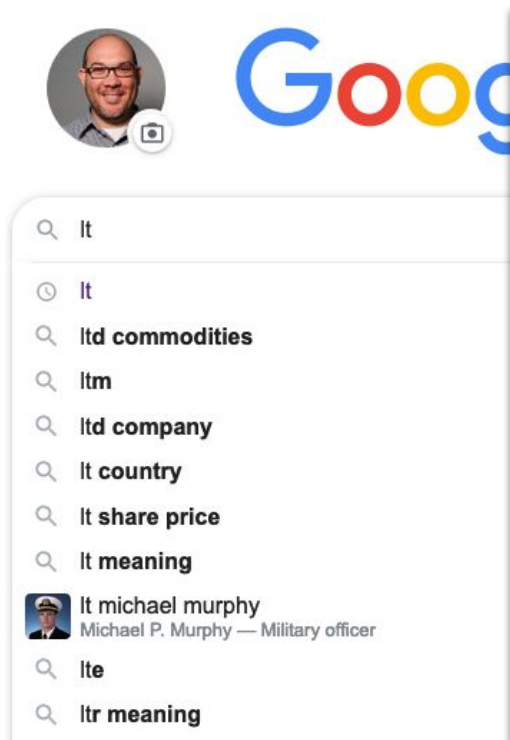
Two identical searches that begin with "LT" return two different results.

- ● Predictive Text
- ● Historical Items
- ● Final Results

Two identical searches that begin with "LT" return two different results.

Predictive Text
Historical Items
Final Results

PREDICTIVE SEARCH/PREVIOUS SEARCH

Why do we see different results?

- Predictive Text
    - Based on previous searches and what Google knows of me and my assumed intentions

- Historical Items
    - Based solely on recent searches

- Final Results
    - Based on previous searches and what Google knows of me and what is popular for others like me
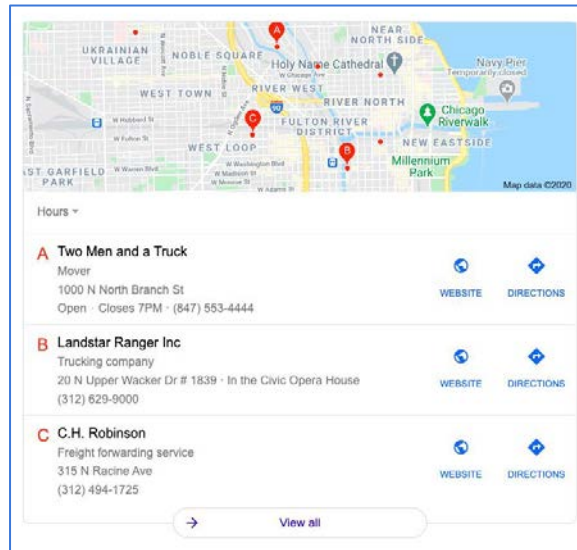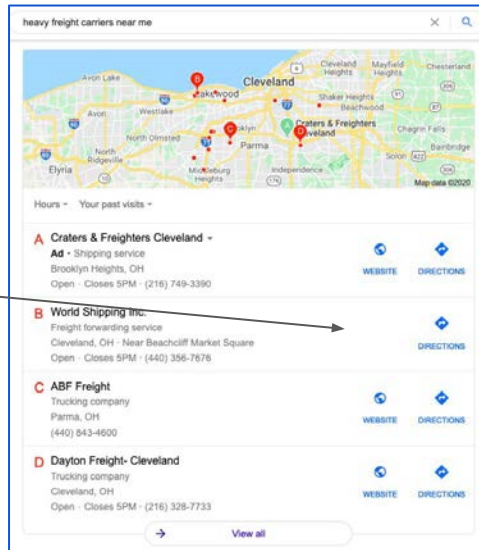
LOCATION-BASED INFORMATION

Google knows where you're searching from in real time and changes results accordingly.

Same search, different cities: Cleveland and Chicago

Search: "heavy freight carriers near me"
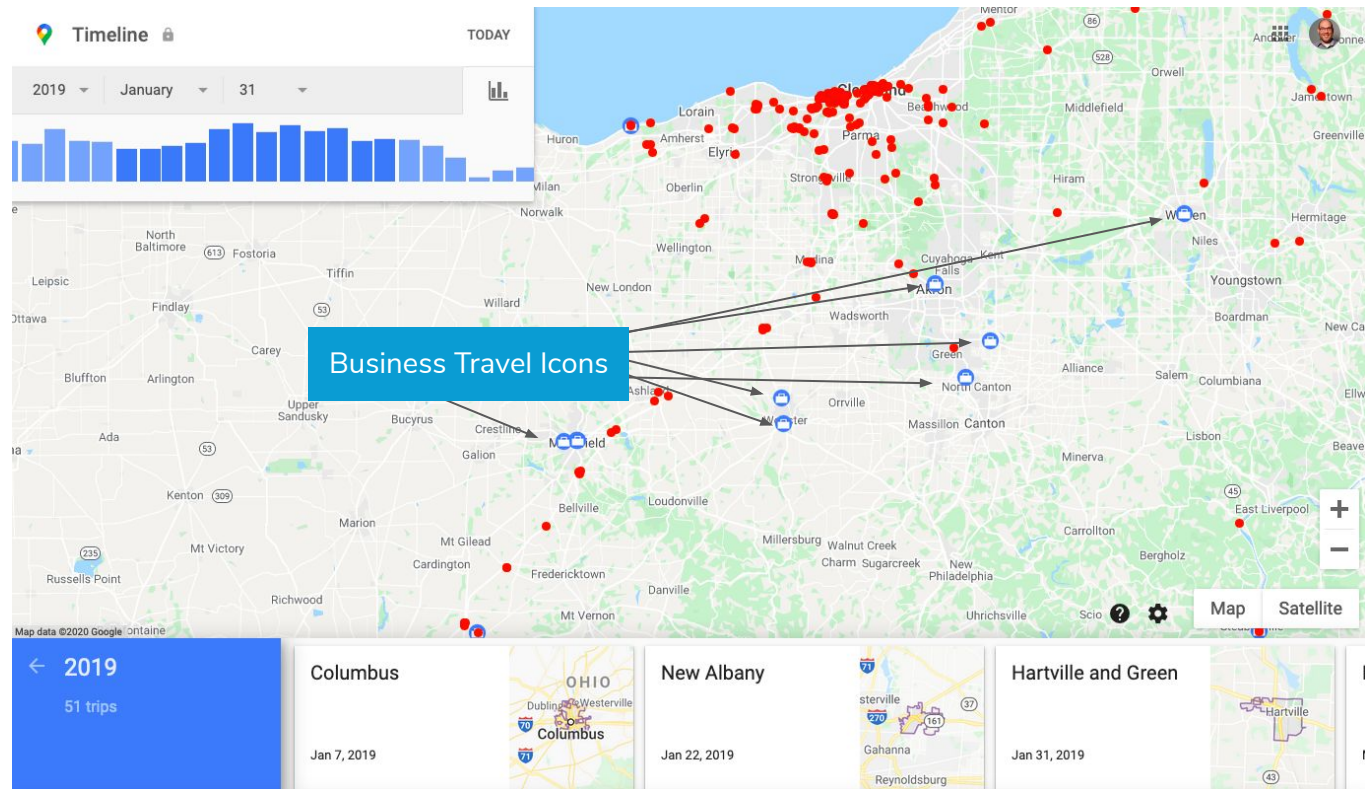

Lost click?

LOCATION-BASED INFORMATION

But location-based search goes way beyond active search location.

Google also knows where I've been historically.

And Google is now guessing at the reason behind the visit. Note the business travel icons.

Google is using historical travel and activity in those locations to serve my future search results.
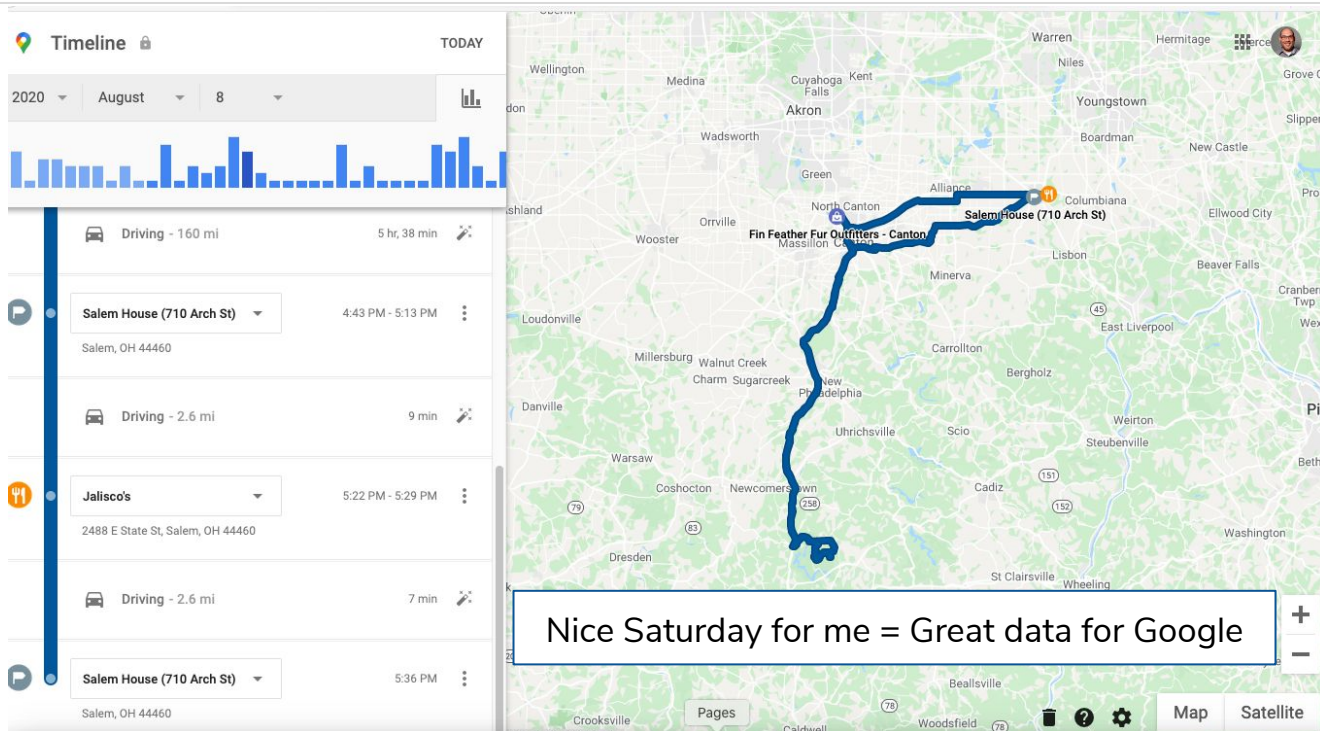
LOCATION-BASED INFORMATION
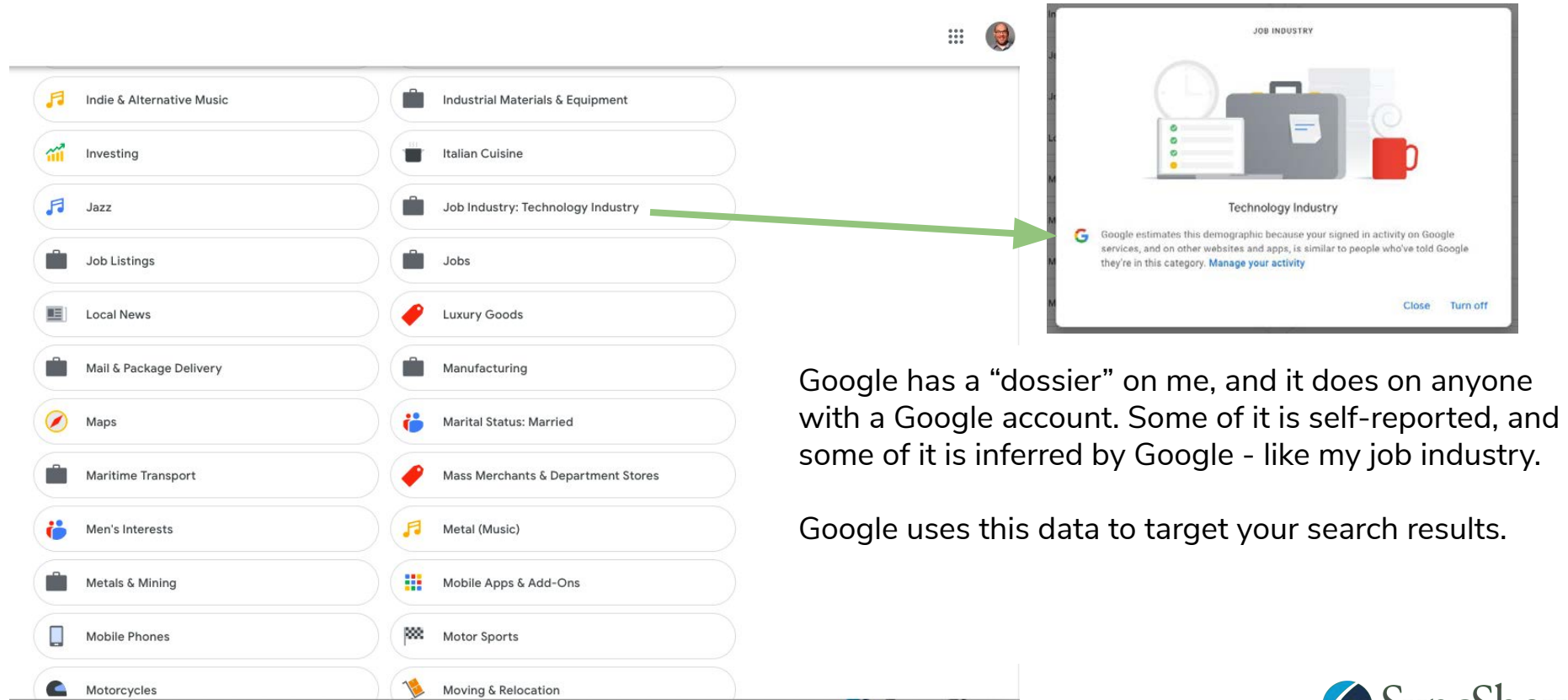
Here's a closer look at one trip that involved multiple stops in a single day.

Google Knows I:
- Shopped at an outdoorsman store
- Visited a lake 160 miles away
- Drove back and picked up dinner (not dined in, note the timestamp) at a Mexican restaurant (fork/knife icon)
- Drove home (flag icon)

Nice Saturday for me = Great data for Google

DEMOGRAPHIC/INTEREST-BASED/MULTI-CHANNEL INFORMATION

Google has a "dossier" on me, and it does on anyone with a Google account. Some of it is self-reported, and some of it is inferred by Google - like my job industry.

Google uses this data to target your search results.

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MUCH OF OUR SEARCH IS PREDETERMINED

A user doesn't come to a search engine with a clean slate, they bring history along with them.

Before a single letter is typed, Google is looking to anticipate your need as a user.

To be successful as a website owner, you have to know how Google works, what a user wants and how to build content around both.

Once you get a user to interact with your brand, you're in their "system," and the more they interact with you, the more relevant you become to them, both online and in the real world.

CONTENT CREATORS NEED TO KNOW THEIR AUDIENCE (USERS AND SEARCH ENGINES)

For any of this to work, content needs to hit home with its message, intent and audience targeting

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CREATE CONTENT FOR YOUR AUDIENCE AND GOOGLE WILL REWARD YOU

Google knows a lot about its users - we'll talk about this shortly - but it needs your help connecting your company to its users.

If you don't know your audience, Google will not effectively surface your content to them.

The best way to "tell" Google who you want to target is by crafting content that speaks to their needs.

The first step in identifying your ideal audience is research, which leads to persona building, then targeted content creation aligned to the marketing funnel and user intent.

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What Are Buyer Personas?

Buyer personas are fictional, generalized representations of your ideal customers. They help you understand your customers (and prospective customers) better and make it easier for you to tailor content to the specific needs, behaviors and concerns of different groups.

Begin By Researching Your Audience

Buyer personas are created through research, surveys and interviews of your target audience. That includes a mix of customers, prospects and those outside of your contact database who might align with your target audience.

Here are just some ways to gather the information you need to develop personas:

- Interview customers either in person or over the phone to discover what they like about your product or service.
- Look through your contacts database to uncover trends about how certain leads or customers find and consume your content.
- When creating forms to use on your website, use form fields that capture important persona information.
- Take into consideration your sales team's feedback on the leads they are interacting with most.

Build Your Personas

The strongest buyer personas are based on market research, as well as on insights you gather from your actual customer base (through surveys, interviews, etc.). Depending on your business, you could have as few as one or two personas, or as many as 10 or 20. (Note: If you're new to personas, start small! You can always develop more personas later if needed.)

BACKGROUND
Job? Career path? Family?

2

- Head of Human Resources
- Worked at the same company for 10 years; worked her way up from HR Associate
- Married with 2 children (10 and 8)

DEMOGRAPHICS
Male or female? Age? Income? Location?

3

- Skews female
- Age 30-45
- Dual HH income: $140,000
- Suburban

IDENTIFIERS
Demeanor? Communication preferences?

4

- Calm demeanor
- Probably has an assistant screening calls
- Asks to receive collateral mailed/printed

GOALS
Primary goal? Secondary goal?

5

- Keep employees happy and turnover low
- Support legal and finance teams

CHALLENGES
Primary challenge? Secondary challenge?

6

- Getting everything done with a small staff
- Rolling out changes to the entire company

WHAT CAN WE DO
... to help our persona achieve their goals?
... to help our persona overcome their challenges?

7

- Make it easy to manage all employee data in one place
- Integrate with legal and finance teams' systems

REAL QUOTES
About goals, challenges, etc.

(8)

- "It's been difficult getting company-wide adoption of new technologies in the past."
- "I don't have time to train new employees on a million different databases and platforms."
- "I've had to deal with so many painful integrations with other departments' databases and software."

COMMON OBJECTIONS
Why wouldn't they buy your product/service?

(9)

- I'm worried I'll lose data transitioning to a new system.
- I don't want to have to train the entire company on how to use a new system.

MARKETING MESSAGING
How should you describe your solution to your persona?

10

- Integrated HR Database Management
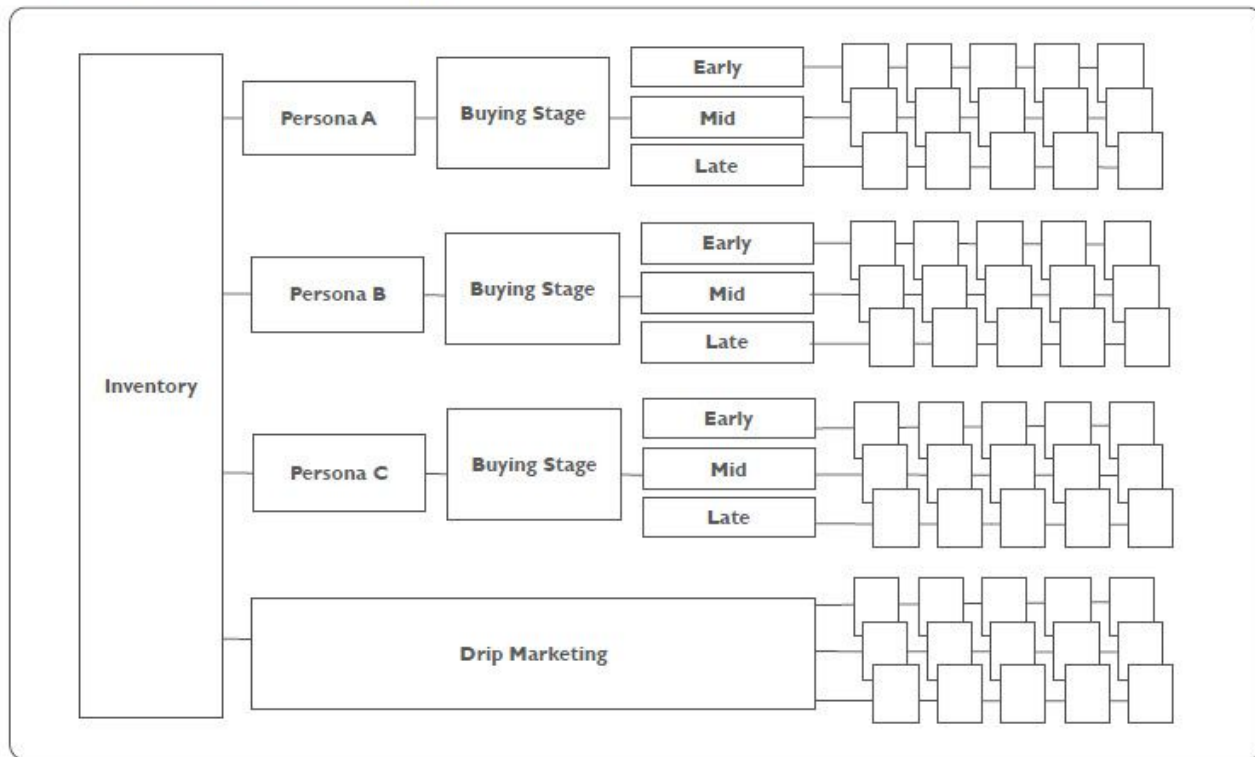
ELEVATOR PITCH
Sell your persona on your solution!

11

- We give you an intuitive database that integrates with your existing software and platforms, and lifetime training to help new employees get up to speed quickly.

MAP OUT AND CREATE YOUR CONTENT

CONTENT INVENTORY: Content Mapping Diagram / Content Audit

MAP OUT YOUR CONTENT

Tie each persona to their search intent along the buyer's funnel and match the content type to meet the user's needs.

| Target Persona: The B2B Corporate Marketer				
Buying Cycle Stage	**Prospect Question**	**Topic**	**Format**	**Call to Action**
Awareness	How can I market my product successfully to business leaders?	5 B2B sales problems that content marketing solves	Blog post	Download the e-book: The Essential Guide to B2B Content Marketing
	Add as many questions/answers as necessary to meet prospects' needs			
Consideration	What results have other companies achieved with content marketing?	How CFM helped increased sales by 62% using content marketing	Case study	Contact Carolyn Frith Marketing at 610-340-0622 for a free 30-minute consultation.
	What does it take to be successful with content marketing?	The Essential Guide to B2B Content Marketing	E-book	
	Add as many questions/answers as necessary to meet prospects' needs			
Decision	How can I build a strong case to convince upper management?	Compendium of ROI stats from industry research	Infographic or PowerPoint presentation	
	Add as many questions/answers as necessary to meet prospects' needs			
Loyalty	Did we make the right decision?	Your metrics	Provide program measurements	

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SEO GETS TECHNICAL

Google is complex, and even the most expertly written word needs a technical boost to be effective

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TECHNICAL SEO IS NECESSARY FOR GOOGLE TO PROPERLY UNDERSTAND YOUR CONTENT

Because Google is presenting search results in so many novel ways, it's becoming exponentially more important to set up and code your website in a way that Google understands.

At the end of the day, Google is a math problem, and it needs "variables" to be properly identified in order to solve a problem. In this case, the problem it's trying to solve is returning an answer to the user's query.
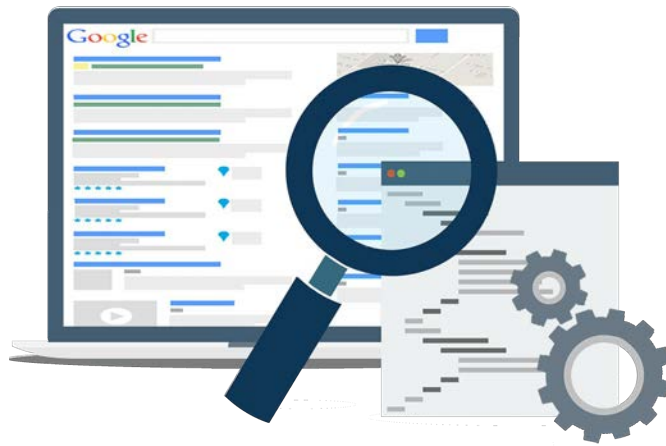
SEO GETS TECHNICAL

Content is critical, but if Google can't find it, can't identify its purpose or can't properly index it, all your work will be useless.

Technical SEO is multifaceted but it helps tie content types and keywords to search results.

On-Page SEO
- High-Quality Page Content
- Meta Tags
- Header Tags
- Image Alt-Text
- Structured Markup
- Page URLs
- Internal Linking
- Mobile Responsiveness

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