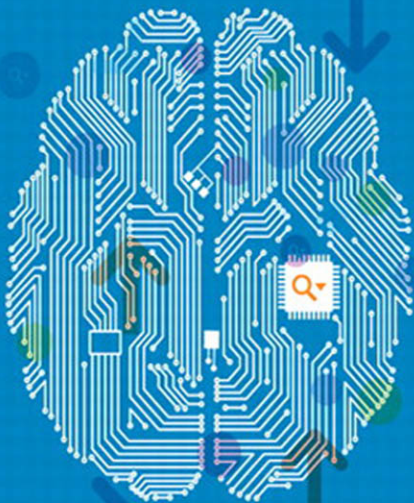


Google

Semantic Search



Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Techniques
That Get Your Company More Traffic, Increase
Brand Impact, and Amplify Your Online Presence

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David Amerland

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Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Techniques
That Get Your Company More Traffic, Increase Brand Impact,
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ISBN-13: 978-0-7897-5134-8

ISBN-10: 0-7897-5134-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013937136

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: July 2013

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About the Author

David Amerland's involvement with the Web goes back to the days when the number of websites in existence could fit in a printed 80-page directory and SEO consisted of keyword stuffing and pixel-wide hidden text.

Since those less enlightened days he has worked with blue-chip multinationals and individual entrepreneurs alike helping them craft SEO and social media marketing strategies that work with their internal cultures and deliver value to their target audience.

He writes for *Forbes*, *HP UK*, *Social Media Today*, and blogs on his own website, HelpmySEO.com. When he is not writing or surfing the Web he spends time giving speeches on how social media is changing everything.

Dedication

This book, like every other, is for N. For me she is meaning enough. But I would also like to add a second N, also female, with pointy ears and a tail. Her company during the small hours of the night, when I write best, made the world feel a lot friendlier. To you both, in different ways, I offer gratitude.

Acknowledgments

No book is ever the work of one man. This one is no exception. The comment on content quality and content management and its impact on semantic search, in Chapter 6, is courtesy of Sergey Adrianov, CEO of www.asmarthsolutions.ca, who was brave enough to allow me to use it. The chart on Google Search and its relationship to Google products and services, in the same chapter, is used with the kind permission of Bob Barker of Frontiercoaching (www.frontiercoaching.com) and Thomas Power, both of whom have thoughts and ideas on how the digital domain is evolving that frequently kept me up, thinking.

This is the first book I put to paper since Google+ became part of my life. As a result I owe a huge thanks to all those who I shared snippets of my thoughts with and who were kind enough to provide feedback or add their own ideas. Of a crowd that has now grown way too big to mention fully I need to single out Jeff Jockisch for helping me refine my insights on identity and trust, Gideon Rosenblatt whose Google+ Community provided the forum for some interesting ideas on the impact of Authorship on ranking in search, Mark Traphagen for indefatigably working to keep everyone on the straight and narrow on the subject of Authorship, Bill Slawski who, as an SEO, is the most singularly focused man I know on Google's patents and what they mean, Aaron Bradley whose knowledge of semantic search is exemplary, J.C. Kendall who exemplifies the kind of SEO ethic the industry can use more of, Dan Petrovic whose frequent SEO experiments clarified my own ideas, Lee Smallwood of NOD3X who generously provided data visualizations that drove the point home, and many others I have never met except online who have humbled me with their generosity, help, brilliance, and attention to detail. All of you, collectively, I cannot ever thank enough.

Thanks needs to go to Katherine Bull, senior acquisitions editor extraordinaire, who never pushed even when I knew she had to; to development editor, Amber Avines, whose first reading of this manuscript became invaluable; project editor, Andy Beaster, without whom I am sure files would have gone missing; and to the editing team at Pearson who made sure that my words made sense. Last but not least my thanks goes to AJ Kohn, SEO thinker and doer, for making sure that my flights of fancy when I wrote this book stayed grounded in reality. To him, I owe a very special thanks.

While all these eyes and minds went into creating the attributes of this book, its faults, such as they may be found, lie squarely with me.

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Introduction

Search is changing. This is not new of course. From a certain perspective it has been on a trajectory of change since day one. But the arc of that trajectory has acquired, now, a steeper angle and a greater velocity to match the Web.

In truth search can no more be considered independent of the Web than the Web can work without search. This symbiotic relationship brings forth all sorts of issues because it becomes part of a traditional push and pull where the Web, represented by those who actively work in it, wants to push all the wrong things, while search wants to pull in everything.

When everything is pulled into the Web the struggle changes from one of indexing information to one of classifying it correctly. Because the Web grows at such a prodigious rate, any kind of classification has to be machine driven and scalable, and there are only two possible ways this can happen: A, with human assistance, and, B, without.

And just like that we go from the realm of Markov chains and Boolean algorithms to the ever-shifting area of ethics and the willingness to do “right” or “wrong.” It is a given that the moment something can be deconstructed and the way it works can be understood, people try to optimize its efficiency by gaming it.

This is exactly what happened with search. As search half-enlisted human help in understanding how the data it was indexing should be classified, it created an entire industry based around the techniques necessary to game it.

As search engines fought back with ever more sophisticated ways of countermanding our attempts to game the algorithms and gain greater visibility on the Web, the push and pull between “us” and “them” intensified. Each cycle of search engine updates would bring “pain” in terms of lost visibility that would have to be countermanded by finding fresh ways to game search and so on, and on, and on.

Semantic search holds the premise, and the promise, that this way of carrying on has come to an end. The best way to think of semantic search is like a search light that picks up all the different data nodes of the Web and follows them around creating a picture of how they link up, who they belong to, who created them, what else they created, who they are, who they were, and what they do.

At its most basic level semantic search applies meaning to the connections between the different data nodes of the Web in ways that allow a clearer understanding of them than we have ever had to date. This is a game changer. The Web is made of data. Data is governed by the concepts of volume, velocity, variety, and veracity, and the moment we find a way to deal with these four concepts in an entirely satisfactory way we will have solved the problem of search.

At the moment we haven't. The new dynamic that is growing out of the application of semantic search revolves around these four concepts and the balance between any two of them is far from settled, never mind all four. The moment the question of how to index the massive volume of data that is being generated every minute is solved, the issue of how to classify it in a way that meets requirements of timing becomes critical. When the speed of classification and prioritization (velocity) is addressed, the wealth of variety of content is a problem.

When all three of these are in the bag and the problem of quality in the search results has finally been solved, the question of provenance and trust (veracity) raises its ugly head. And then, just like that, each of the other three concepts becomes problematic again; for how do you verify data that's flooding in at such a prodigious rate, rate it quickly, and successfully deal with all its variations?

The answer lies in incremental gains. Semantic search, unlike anything we had in the past, has ways of caching the attributes it calculates so that data nodes uncovered by its spotlight do not go back in darkness once the spotlight leaves them, waiting to be uncovered again.

This way it learns. Becomes smarter, faster, less fallible, more trustworthy. It also becomes harder to game.

This book is about semantic search—what it is, how it works, and what you can do now to benefit from it. I focused predominantly on Google in writing it for three reasons. First, Google has made significant inroads in semantic indexing in search. Second, the Google+ social network plays a key role in helping a website's online visibility and to discount it is to miss a huge opportunity in search. And third, Google is the world's dominant search engine, with 95% of the global mobile search market and more than 80% of the global desktop search market. Not focusing on it makes no business sense.

In many ways semantic search takes us back to the golden days of the Web when in terms of working online anything was possible as long as you had passion, belief in yourself, and energy to work at it.

That we are there again, I find exciting. I hope this book becomes your guide in your digital journey, but more than that I hope it becomes the springboard you need to make your work leave its mark on the world, digital or otherwise.

David Amerland,

Manchester, 2013

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What Is New in SEO?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is changing. Once a “dark art” you could outsource and forget or buy-in as needed every time you noticed your website traffic dropping or your competitors’ websites doing better than yours, it has now become an integral part of your business practices and is closely integrated in your business structure. Or, at least, I hope it will be soon after reading this book.

In this chapter we see what is different in SEO, what is the “new SEO” everyone is talking about, and what you can do to take advantage of the developing trends. More importantly we see what you should do to integrate SEO in the DNA of your business.

What Is the “New SEO”?

If you’ve been reading *Forbes*, *The Guardian* (in the UK), or *The Wall Street Journal* lately, you will have noticed the screaming headline: “SEO Is Dead” frequently followed or preceded in the editorial content by “How Google Killed SEO.”

Apart from the fact that neither of these headlines is true the degree of consternation they cause is indicative of two facts: First SEO now plays a central role in marketing, and second it is undergoing radical change. Both of these developments are good. The first because when SEO is done right it is indistinguishable from being a public service: It allows the right information to surface at the right time for those who want it (everyone’s happy). And the second because for too long the SEO industry was mired in the dark ages, hiding behind obtuse terminology and ill-defined concepts and beset by practices reminiscent of snake oil peddlers selling a cure-all to being found online.

In the SEO world that’s being left behind many activities revolved around two primary constants: keywords and links. Keywords were necessary to get a website to show on the search engine results pages (SERPs) in response to a search query. Links were needed to help that website rise in the search rankings.

This is a bit of an oversimplification of the Google ranking process. Google’s algorithm takes into account more than 200 separate signals before it ranks a website. However it is fair to say that without keywords content would not even surface in search; therefore your website would be invisible, and without inbound links it would not rank well. These two factors then became the primary drivers of SEO in the past.

They also became the focus of many of the practices that led to SEO abuses. Links, in particular, became subject to a number of sophisticated schemes to artificially boost the ranking of websites. Google’s Link Graph is a record of the link profile of every indexed website linking to others and being linked to in turn.

The power of links and linking to boost a website’s ranking in search was such that unwittingly it gave rise to an entire link economy. Whole online industries were built around the exchange and selling and buying of links, with professionals as well as amateurs engaging in the practice.

Things are changing. The days when almost anyone could claim to be able to sell you links that would drive your online business up in search rankings are practically gone. The few emails that I still get, with such offers, come from Hotmail addresses and have names like “SEOKing” and “Optimizer75.” Anyone taking these seriously and getting burned should not be in business anyway.

The paradox here is that the “new SEO” that is emerging is not new at all. As far back as there was an SEO industry to speak of Google advised optimizers to focus on quality, content, navigability, and an excellent end-user experience. This is

really not rocket science, and the search engine optimizers that came from a business background to begin with consistently put out the message that SEO and the way you do business are closely interlinked. They would say that the message of who you are and what you are about should be part of your search marketing strategy and that focusing solely on getting traffic to a website when the usability of it was less than optimum, was a waste of time and money.

Some of these SEOs were listened to. Many were not. The perception that search engines had nothing to do with business and search engine optimization was simply a quick-fix service that needed to be brought in to “fix” things was too ingrained in too many businesses to change. Search engine optimizers were not thought of as anything other than tech stuff.

To be fair there was an element of truth in that as well. SEO started out as a purely technical activity carried out principally on-page (i.e., on the website itself), and to an extent that technical nature has persisted. Its evolution, however, has been steadily adding layers to its toolbox so that just being “technical” is no longer enough.

In all this Google has engaged in a considerable amount of education of its public on what is considered ethical SEO. The company has published its Webmaster Guidelines (<http://goo.gl/kAd7G>), which are constantly updated, and it is engaged in an ongoing effort to help online businesses understand better what they must do to make search work for them.

Despite this, every Google search algorithm update that is designed to address abuses finds a large number of websites that suddenly suffer as a result.

It is a fact that Google’s successive algorithmic changes over the last seven years and its switch to semantic search have hit hard many online businesses that relied on either shady techniques that skirted or broke the Google approved guidelines or poor quality SEO work to rank. As a result the days of being able to “wing it” are long gone. Businesses that are serious about succeeding in the new Google-dominated online world have to take search seriously and create a process-driven business strategy around it.

If you want to know whether your business is one of those who either on the advice of your SEO agency or out of your own in-house SEO actions have been placed in a position of vulnerability to search updates, work through the following questions:

- Is the online marketing of your company or brand based entirely on keywords?
- Do you only use keywords to check your ranking in search?
- Do you use a link building strategy as the core of your company’s or brand’s SEO?

- Do you use keywords to assess the effectiveness of your ranking in search?
- Do your SEO-planning sessions revolve mostly around spreadsheets of keywords and where each one ranks in search?
- Do you regularly research where competitors get backlinks from and try to adjust your link building efforts to match them?
- Is a “first page position on Google’s search” the main thrust of your online marketing?
- Is “anchor text” in created links something that is considered crucial to your SEO activities?
- Are your SEO activities kept apart from everything else your company does, such as branding and marketing, for instance?
- Is your SEO strategy revised a lot less frequently than any other of your brand or company initiatives?

If you answered “yes” to any of these 10 questions you may want to start rethinking things a little. The sea change that’s underway questions whether there is even such a thing as an “SEO strategy” these days. Certainly there are SEO activities, but the “strategy” part should spring naturally from everything else your brand or company does.

It is in this total alignment of effort that the difference and the strength of the SEO of today is to be found.

The “new” SEO that works now focuses as much on the quality of the business offerings, the online visitor experience once they get to the company website, and the perceived reputation and authority of the business itself as much as it focuses on the traditionally technical aspects of search engine optimization.

As such it has now been divided into unofficial but increasingly differentiated types of SEO: technical and nontechnical. Technical SEO addresses specific onsite issues that prevent a website from being indexed by search engines. Indexing issues can be caused by the website structure, the coding of the underlying platform it runs on, excessive use of javascript, ajax programming that does not permit a search bot to follow navigational links, slow server responses, slow website loading times, and even top-heavy graphics that affect individual page loading speeds. Typically there can be as many website set-up indexing issues as there are websites.

Each one is unique in that respect and many of the indexing issues that crop up are the direct result of website use that has not been factored into the SEO equation or the website’s set up.

The good news is that a technical audit usually brings up all these issues, none of which are very difficult to fix. Technical SEO services, like this, can be one-off

services, or they can be brought in as required, though keeping a careful eye on traffic figures and running audits at regular intervals is just common sense, particularly as websites grow in content.

Nontechnical and on-going SEO work looks at the company's or brand's marketing strategy, the evolving nature of marketplace communication, content creation, social media outreach, and the way a company connects with its customers in the online environment.

If that sounds a little intrusive to a business it is because that's exactly what it is. In the new SEO world of today a business can no longer afford the luxury of considering what it does as being separate from search. Search is how its online customers navigate the Web, discover products and services, and research the products and services they need on their way to making a purchasing decision.

Google, which thrives on data, released in July 2011 a free eBook authored by Jim Lecinski, Google's vice president of products and sales in the United States. Lecinski details how the traditional "first moment of truth" when a customer first encounters a product on the shelf and the battle to win this customer begins has shifted to an earlier stage now called "zero moment of truth" (hence the title of the eBook) that starts with search.

The startling statistic that Lecinski reveals is that 70% of purchasing decisions start with search, looking for product details and online reviews. The eBook is packed full of data pulled from Google's own research, and it creates a sharp moment of clarity for businesses everywhere. The digital landscape that had been seen by many as a bolt-on to the traditional business model is now key to driving business forward.

Search is center stage in all this. SEO has suddenly become the key to success.

The journey then from "there" to "here" has been one of maturation. Businesses have gone from seeing search engine optimization as something you could call in and action as an afterthought, to seeing it as a service that is inseparable from marketing and now required to be part of the company's DNA.

It has not been an easy journey, and most of the challenges lie ahead. But the very fact that now we are talking about SEO being inside a company is a major win in itself.

How SEO Is Changing Business Practices

Because search engine optimization itself is changing, when applied correctly now it impacts many ways a business operates, changing it in the process. A concise look at what used to happen in the presemantic search days and how things are

shaping up now helps quantify some of the changes you should be thinking about in your company or brand.

Here's how SEO used to work in the past:

- You bought links because they increased the ranking of your website in Google's search.
- You told your SEO company you wanted a list of keywords for your industry to rank on search, preferably on Google's first page.
- You hired someone to write thousands of words with the keywords you were targeting, and you posted the content on your website so it would become more visible in search and aid in its ranking.
- You spammed social bookmarking sites with links to your keyword-rich content without any consideration for engagement or interaction.
- You thought that a good commercial website was one with a shopping cart.
- Your perception of a good customer experience was one that gave you a sale.

In the new SEO world the things that work and help a business take advantage of search and increase its ranking are

- Good quality content that delivers value to the end-user.
- Websites that offer an excellent online visitor experience in terms of ease of use, content, and navigability.
- Businesses that are being talked about on the Web, on blogs, and social networks.
- Businesses whose content is reshared on the Web across social networks.
- Businesses with a strong social component that actually engages their prospective customer in a way similar to a person.
- Businesses that stay current and generate consistently fresh content proving that they both have something to say and that they are part of the current online conversation.

Key to all this, driving all the activity, is content. Content marketing has become so vital to all aspects of search engine optimization in the semantic web that it underpins many of the activities that your business or brand needs to engage in. As a matter of fact in Chapter 6 we look in detail at the implications of this and the actionables associated with it.

To drive the point home let's consider a conventional brick-and-mortar business that sells an everyday necessity, such as baked bread. If you are a savvy marketer

who along with a bakery has a website (because you know you ought to), you will suddenly realize that your traditional business that sells baked bread now also needs to become a multimedia business that pumps out online content to sell baked bread.

From a certain perspective it seems to be antithetical with what a baked bread business needs to do and where it ought to be focusing its time and energy. After all, baking bread is not rocket science. The production algorithm (if we can call it that) requires flour, yeast, and water (at its most basic) and the judicious application of heat. The struggle is usually in keeping production costs low through control of wastage to maximize returns at the point of sale.

It's hard to see where multimedia content is going to help in the sale of baked bread. So let's look at the baked bread example a little more closely.

If our baker is any good at all as a businessperson he already knows that baked bread, alongside any other good you care to mention, has been commoditized. No matter how good you are at what you do there is always someone else who is either better, or nearer, or cheaper, or smaller, or bigger, or gives out lollipops with each baked bread loaf purchase.

This is the same virtually across the entire marketplace, and the point is that no matter what kind of business you are in these days you will have competition and a lot of it. If you are unable to differentiate yourself sufficiently from your competition, your business will go under. If you are unable to create an emotional connection with your customers, your business will fail.

That emotional connection online can only happen with the production of content—great quality content that communicates something important. The question for a modern business is not whether any of the above SEO steps should be followed but how they can all be followed consistently (and bear in mind that each of them is itself made up of a number of steps).

Marketing has changed from the twentieth century Jerome McCarthy model that gave us the 4Ps to guide us: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion to the twenty-first century digital world one expounded by global advertising and marketing firm Ogilvy & Mather as the 4Es: Experience, Exchange, Everyplace, and Evangelism.

In the digital marketplace Product now stands for Experience. Price has become Exchange, where the value of creating, packaging, and selling something is exchanged for the value of what it means to the customer to receive it, which also then determines the price. The notion of Place has been replaced by Everyplace because the potential market, as we have seen, is now fragmented. Promotion has been replaced by Evangelism. This reflects the changing relationship between businesses and their customers that enables both parties to profit from the relationship beyond the transactional value of the purchase price and the product bought.

In the baked bread example, if the entire experience of buying a loaf of baked bread from your particular bakery does not successfully engage my mind and reflect my lifestyle, I am unlikely to even consider it. If the exchange of value in buying the loaf of bread does not include how special you make me feel, how well you have communicated with me the artistry that goes into making the best baked bread in the world, and how my money helps keep an ancient tradition alive, then what I will most likely focus on is how much more expensive it is when compared to the sliced bread I buy from the grocery store.

If you cannot capture my attention as I go from my LinkedIn profile to Facebook then to Twitter then to some website and then to Google+, you are unlikely to benefit very long from my willingness to buy the more expensive baked bread you sell. I will forget to come to you, my attention will be diverted, the reason I buy baked bread will wane, and I will either buy from a competitor who simply happens to be nearer, or I will revert to the supermarket sliced loaf again.

What you will have succeeded in doing as a marketer then is either creating a customer by fostering the need in me to buy baked bread and then failing to capitalize on it as I went ahead and bought bread from any bakery or, worse, making me decide that baked bread is one of those luxuries I could forego because it is so much more expensive than supermarket bread.

Finally, if your baked bread does not fill me with a sense of wonder in the way it has been produced, how it has been presented, and the way it tastes, then I am unlikely to even remember to talk about it to my friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. You will have invested all that effort in your relationship with me for the return of a sale of a single loaf of bread. Something that constitutes a totally losing proposition.

So selling something “simple” like freshly baked bread has now been transformed from an activity that entailed the production of a product and a place to sell it at a reasonable price to an activity that needs to engage the heart and mind of its target customer in such a way that the effort and attention that goes into creating a single sale begins to scale on its own, which is what provides decent returns.

Clearly this is a new way of doing business. It requires a change from selling a product to a customer to selling an experience to a customer with whom you now have a shared relationship. This is called the relationship economy, and guiding this transition to the relationship economy is the ultimate relationship machine: semantic search. The way it does this is what we look at next.

Your Business in a Semantic Search World

I hope you can see how important relationships with its customer base have become to a business. It is not wrong to think that the traditional buying of a

product has now been replaced with an unwritten contract of shared values between a business and its customers. The relational exchange that takes place the moment money is exchanged for goods or services also involves an understanding that the business and its customers both stand for something more, something unique, something special even, and it is that that makes the entire relationship work for both.

To stick with the bakery of my example, here's how your successful baked bread business would look in a semantic world: On your fast-loading, mobile-device friendly website you would have fresh, daily content that would keep me coming back to learn about what's new in the baked bread world. There would be baked bread industry news and a blog where your passion for your business would be palpable. There might be special recipes for making my own bread whenever I want to, and there might even be speciality breads that I specifically have to remember to come in for.

On YouTube there would be videos telling me just how your bread is made from flour that's imported from a particular region of France, famous for its waters that help feed some of the ripest wheat on the planet. There would be a video of you getting up at 4:00 a.m. to make it to your bakery in time to put the first batch of bread in the oven. I would see you get that bread out of the oven and test it for perfection. All of this would add to the value of your work in my mind. I would not be buying just a loaf of bread from you. I would be buying a work of art. And because of that I would be willing to share that video and even your website content with my online circle of friends with whom I share my passions, including my love for baked bread.

On Facebook I would come across one of my Facebook friends talking about your baked bread because you recently ran a promotion there, and I would chime in, explaining that I am a big fan and have never considered going back to buying sliced bread since I switched to your product. Someone would tweet that on Twitter, and I would then re-tweet it because you have managed to make me an evangelist of your product through the passion and effort you put into baked bread.

On Google+ I would see a discussion going on that you started about the ethical sourcing of grain and the paying of a fair price to farmers. I would not join in, because it's out of my expertise, but I would feel proud to actually help create a fairer world with my money, and I would share your post with my friends explaining that we need more businesses like yours.

It's possible that all this attention would also get you some coverage from bloggers who cover the baked bread industry, and they would mention your business in their articles, perhaps even link to your website. Fairer pricing and the value we

place on the creation of goods is a hot topic, and the blogosphere is always actively looking for “heroes.”

Meanwhile all this activity is noticed by Google’s semantic search bot. It sees that when it comes to baked bread you pump out more content than anybody else, and it is original. What’s more it is reshared and commented on by many of those who come across it. Your content is associated with a fair price for wheat farmers and even the notion of a fairer world. Your website comes up in connection with both topics in mentions and online discussions. It also appears on Google search whenever equitable farming practices are mentioned. Both these subjects are now associated in Google’s serendipitous information retrieval with your website so that whenever someone looks for baked bread and your company name they also find the gem that is fair sourcing of grain. Their world expands; they become better informed. They realize that the money they spend as consumers buying a daily necessity has a far greater impact than just paying a good price. Some of them will share this with their friends, expanding your reach and fame.

One or two of those who come across articles about you happen to be in the media. They remember where they saw fair pricing for grain and which bakery was associated with it. You may get a call or two from a local TV station; a staff reporter may want to interview you for a short newspaper piece.

Google sees that your company name is consistently associated with the notion “change the world for the better.” It begins to serve your website to those who are researching the subject looking to find out more, some of whom are intrigued. They talk online extensively about how a small bakery has become a symbol for changing the world for the better. Some become your customers; others not local to you extol your product to those who are to become your customers. You begin to get offers for partnerships, and an entrepreneur or two approach you with the idea of a franchise run under the same principles as your local business.

In the meantime traffic on your website goes through the roof. You begin to experiment with selling bread online with orders placed days in advance and bread delivered locally within a certain, same-day radius. You launch an Android app to keep those on the move satisfied with content about bread and a fairer world. It is successful. You follow it up with an iPad app, and the Apple bloggers pick up the notion that “baked bread has come to the iPad” and write about it. After the first three months you extend the functionality of your app to include special offers, and, as a trial, you launch the ability to send someone a fresh loaf of bread anywhere in the United States. You cut a deal with a number of independent bakeries to fulfil orders where you can’t, and you reciprocate.

You have to think about hiring more staff and extending your baking hours. You may well need bigger premises and more outlets. Your baked bread business

has successfully leveraged the relationship economy through the connectivity of semantic search to

- Find new customers.
- Increase its reach.
- Grow its impact.
- Grow its market.
- Increase its visibility.
- Change the perception of the value of its product.
- Evolve the scope of its business relationship.

In the meantime your competitor, a more traditional baked bread business situated in the next neighborhood, is complaining. Business is slow. With so many choices in sliced supermarket bread no one wants to fork over money in these tough times to buy freshly baked bread. He is thinking of selling and closing down.

Sound far-fetched? Zappos shoes started out selling shoes online, a task many considered impossible. The dollarshaveclub became a constant on search for terms such as “razor blades online” and “razor blades via mail,” and its YouTube video was watched millions of times. Both of these disrupted their industry, doing what was thought to be impossible because they approached the Web with what I call true semantic search values in mind.

To win in a semantic search world you need more people than you have on your payroll. You need your customers. You need fans. You need evangelists. A marketing plan and a budget, the staples of twentieth century promotion, no longer cut it. A top-down, controlled advertising approach won't work either; you will not get the online interaction you need to amplify your presence.

Kevin Kelly, founder and former editor of *Wired*, made waves around the Web when in 2008 he wrote a blog post called “1,000 True Fans.” The proposition of it was that success on the Web does not necessarily entail having the “whole of America” following your efforts as long as you have 1,000 true fans.

Kelly's definition of a “true fan” is one who is passionate about what you do and is willing to give you the worth of a day's work (i.e., \$100) in the year. Kelly was talking about the eCommerce side of things, which back then was the most contested and contentious issue in terms of development and success, but his concept is totally applicable in the social media age of the semantic web.

Change the word “fan” to “customer,” add in social media and its ability to create immediacy, accessibility, and personalization, and the formula Kelly was talking about works in terms of amplifying your marketing message, your brand signal, and your sales pitch. Significantly, it is all done through content. The catch is that

your content must now explain your brand values, establish the common ground between yourself and your potential customers, and be convincing enough to turn those who do business with you into Kelly's version of "true fans"—brand evangelists who will extol your products and services of their own accord.

In a digital world where search has meaning, content needs to as well, and that requires your business to also be able to deliver real meaning in what it does that goes well past the product and its sales pitch. Put simply just saying "buy my stuff" is not going to work regardless of how loudly or often you say it.

How Semantic Search Is Creating New Economies

Having used the example of the fresh bread bakery to illustrate the insidious power of semantic search to pick up and amplify your online presence in ways that are frankly quite unexpected, it is fair to quantify, here, the different types of economies that are emerging because of semantic search. While an economy is usually defined as a production/consumption model within a country that's restricted to goods and services, the behavior of digital transactions that extend beyond that fit the description well enough for us to use.

The economies emerging in the digital world are ones of longer value chains. They have names like relationship economy, collaborative economy, co-creational economy, or participatory economy, and they all mean the same thing: The divide between you and your customers has disappeared.

Now everyone is on the same side. You should want your customers to have a fantastic experience dealing with you, one that reflects the kind of experience my imaginary freshly baked bread company example offers.

It is the same with semantic search. Search started out in a push-pull kind of relationship where anyone who had an online presence struggled to get noticed. They used to do whatever it took to get to the first page of Google, cut every corner they could to get ahead of their competitors on search. It is questionable whether that served their customer needs first and theirs second. But if the question was ever asked it was never considered too deeply. In the helter-skelter world of the early days of search the struggle was to be seen and make the visibility work. That was also sufficient to generate sales, or at least some sales.

Clearly that is no longer sufficient.

As semantic search unleashes fresh meaning on the Web it demands of business the same three criteria we discussed in Chapter 2: trust, reputation, authority. These three are gained in exactly the same order, and in my example of the imaginary bakery, they emerged in exactly that order through the activities its owner embarked upon.

As Figure 3.1 illustrates, the three cogs of trust, reputation, and authority also make up your brand machine.



Figure 3.1 *Trust, reputation, and authority are central components in the establishment of brand equity.*

Writing in the *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research* on the subject, reputation researchers Rehab Alnemr, Stefan Koenig, Torsten Eymann, and Christoph Meinel explained how the Internet is a distributed, decentralized environment where considerable risks are inherent in every transaction.

The absence of a central authority creates a currency out of perceived trust, which then acquires monetary value that translates into increased eCommerce and Internet services activity. This is a formalized way, perhaps, of saying that trust leads to reputation that leads to authority, and all three create your brand equity that makes you a trusted source of news and services, or a trusted place to buy something from.

Semantic search requires all three to work properly, and Google is putting in place precise mechanisms to establish them. In Chapter 4 we see just what these mechanisms are and how you can get a head start in creating them in your organization so that you benefit directly from the assessment semantic search is beginning to impose.

The New SEO Preparation Checklist

Brand equity is gold. It leads to a better amplified online presence, greater offline/online benefits, and real bottom line gains. Semantic search has mechanisms that measure trust, reputation, and authority through content creation and social interaction. Brands that are trusted enjoy a greater market share and better

relationships with their customers and suppliers. They have an easier ride when markets undergo tough times and are quicker to benefit when there is a boom. Above all, they enjoy that most ephemeral quality of all, one that is incredibly hard to get and all too easy to lose: customer loyalty.

Each of our checklists so far has been designed to help you define the tools, concepts, and practices that you have to put into effect to take advantage of the benefits offered by Google's semantic search.

The New SEO Preparation Checklist involves the following steps:

- Identify the kind of content that is prevalent in your business vertical. Match it across different social networks and online content sharing channels, such as specific industry blogs or channels that deliver a specific type of content, for example, YouTube for video or SoundCloud for podcasts.
- Explain how you “listen” to your potential customers. What social media monitoring tools do you employ to do so, and what criteria do you use to filter the content you capture and then assess it?
- Explain how you plan to discover where your customers are in the social Web. What techniques will you use, which social platforms will you look at, and what metrics are you going to employ to gauge interest, engagement, and interaction?
- Explain what you understand by the concept of the “online conversation.” How do you propose to initiate it and then how will you continue it?
- Explain how a realignment of values can help you remove any perceived barriers from what you do and what your customers want. Then detail how that realignment will be communicated to your potential customers.
- Explain how brand evangelists could help your business, and then detail three different ways you could attract, find, or convert potential customers to become brand evangelists.
- Explain the decision-making and approval content in your organization for content creation. Each time content is created you need to have some criteria in place that guarantees quality and professionalism. List what they are. Explain how they reflect the core values of your brand.
- Explain how you plan to monitor your company's or brand's performance in search beyond ranking for keywords. List the tools you will use, frequency of checking, and what decisions you made when you chose the criteria that will be used to judge success.

- Explain what brand equity means for your organization. Then detail how you assess the worth of brand equity, what choices you make, what criteria you have in place, and how they impact what you do.
- List everything you stand to gain if your brand equity increases in the future. Explain in detail the impact that greater brand equity will have upon your customer base, your marketing, your content production teams, and the bottom line.

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