

Five Buzzworthy SEO Trends You Must Know About for 2016

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Get ready for a new year of changes to **Google's** algorithms—and your SEO strategy.

The following five trends, distilled from a [guide](#) published on the Link-Assistant.com blog, will undoubtedly be buzzed about next year.

1. Dark Traffic

It's not news that an immense amount of traffic is flowing to websites from **social** media and messaging apps. But, thanks to a quirk of **Google** analytics, you can't necessarily tell that's the case.

When **Google** Analytics can't tell the source of a website visitor, that visit is recorded as direct traffic, even when it's highly unlikely that someone typed that URL into the browser bar. This so-called dark traffic may account for an increasingly large share of your overall visits, making tracking of your **marketing** activities more complicated: You've worked hard to increase your organic, **social** and mobile traffic, yet you can't be sure what's working.

For now, the only way to get a handle on your dark traffic is to create a direct traffic report in **Google** Analytics and then filter out the traffic to pages that really are likely to attract visitors directly, such as your homepage and the front pages of important content sections.

Doing that will enable to segment dark traffic from the genuine direct traffic, allowing you to better estimate the amount of dark traffic to your website.

2. Rich Answers

Rich answers are the direct answers to search queries and show up at the top of search engine results pages (SERPs), and their frequency is increasing, [according to](#) a study by Stone Temple Consulting. The firm tracked a set of queries that were likely to result in a rich answer, and found a 38% increase in rich answers in the first six months of 2015.

If your SEO strategy depends on non-proprietary content (weather, currency exchange rates,

etc.), the increase in rich answers could tank your traffic. However, if you have high-quality, proprietary, unique content that can help **Google** answer searchers' common questions, rich answers are an opportunity for you.

Google uses external data (i.e., not its own) for 75% of its rich answers, Stone Temple found. So, for your content to appear in rich answers, do some long-tail keyword research to find commonly asked questions in your niche. Then, create content that includes the question with a solid answer.

Your content should also give additional information that makes it worthwhile for someone to click through, even if the answer to the query appears on the SERP.

3. Double-Algorithm Theory

Google has been mum on whether user behavior is a ranking factor, although some [experiments](#) have shown that it is. **Google** is moving toward a user-centric approach to delivering search results in an attempt to better meet searchers' needs.

Rand Fishkin, founder of Moz.com, [says](#) search marketers must combine classic **Google**-oriented SEO and with new, searcher-oriented SEO. That double-algorithm theory means you should focus on four factors relating to search behaviors that could influence ranking:

- **Clickthrough rates:** High rates are an obvious sign that searchers find a result interesting.
- **Engagement:** Dwelling on the page is a sign the content answers the search query.
- **Well-rounded content:** **Google**'s new machine-learning capability can tell whether a page has enough information to satisfy the query.
- **Social signals:** Pages with high sharing tend to outrank those with more backlinks but less sharing.

4. More Competition From Google

In an attempt to more quickly satisfy searchers, **Google** has been adding SERP elements, including paid ads, local packs, carousel results, knowledge graphs, and rich snippets. That's a lot on a page. A study by Mediavive tracked searchers' eye movements across SERPs and their eventual clicks. Although it found that the way searchers interact with SERPs varies quite a bit from query to query, those new page elements tend to draw attention—and clicks—away from organic search results.

Accordingly, keyword search volume itself is no longer a reliable predictor of traffic to your website, because competition from those other SERP elements could lower the traffic potential.

Though too many competing SERP elements could lower the traffic potential, there's opportunity to greatly increase your traffic—if you can get your content into one or more of those elements. If your business is local, you may make your way into that local pack. Or to make a

page eligible for a rich snippet, add structured data, such as product information, recipes, reviews, events, and software applications. Be sure to use technically correct markup to indicate such content.

5. Keywords Morph Into Collections

Google has gotten smarter, and that's a good thing for searchers. When someone searches for "trousers," the search engine now knows to include results for "pants." But that's just for starters. Because **Google**'s algorithms now better recognize [the meaning behind a query](#), it may give the same answer to a various queries that use different keywords but are asking the same question.

So, now, instead of researching individual keywords, you need to identify groups of related terms and their synonyms. Then, you must create pages that are relevant not only to the core term but also to the wider group of related terms.

This trend can make your website content more interesting: Instead of awkward text stuffed with a repetitive keyword, you can be more creative and use synonyms—as long as you stick to the point.

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As you can see, these concepts might be buzzworthy, but they're not empty hype. Understanding how each affects your SEO efforts will let you freshen up your strategy to stay highly competitive in the year to come.

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