

What Does Google's Hummingbird Mean For SEO?

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A search engine uses algorithms (a series of formulas) for trawling through the millions of available web pages to find the ones most useful and relevant to a search. Google are constantly evaluating and updating their algorithms to make them more sophisticated. Gone are the days when websites were filled with useless and irrelevant key words in order to reach the top of the rankings. Websites are now penalised for spamming or trying to manipulate the rankings in such a way. Poor quality content is out. Good quality content is in.

The latest Google algorithm (known as Hummingbird) works to further enhance this concept. It is partly driven by the changes in the way people now search the internet. For example, with the availability of phones that use voice commands, individuals can 'speak' a question directly into their device in order to search the internet. Those using voice commands are more likely to ask (for example) 'where can I find a good Italian restaurant near X?' Than simply 'Italian restaurants'.

Hummingbird aims to match the entire phrase and the concept behind it, as oppose to picking out the words 'Italian' and 'restaurant' and then matching the search to anything that contains those words.

Is this a good thing?

Long tail keywords, as these longer search terms are known, can be very revealing. They tell you the specifics of what your customers need and want and so they are extremely important in terms of sales. You can assume that a user who types in a specific long tail keyword already knows what they are looking for and so will be further down the sales route. For example, the search term 'hotels, New York' could throw up a potentially endless list. However, narrowing this down to 'family hotels in New York' gives a more specific list of hotels that offer suitable facilities and accommodation aimed at parents with children.

What does this mean for SEO?

Good quality content is essential, but you should aim to include concepts and phrasing in your content, rather than individual keywords. Think about what people will be most likely to ask when searching. A good way to relate this to your own business is to think about the questions that your customers ask when they phone you. Can you put together an FAQ based on this? Adding this to your website, along with a Q & A blog, will increase your sites eligibility for ranking.

Thinking about other ways in which people might search, can you include content based on this? For example, pieces providing information, such as 'how to...' Or 'where can I...' Or content which includes phrases such as 'why' or 'what'. Also, providing information about your industry, including current debates, research or expert interviews can all help your site's visibility through searches.

A good website is important for your business. It goes without saying that you should aim to include information about your company, your products or services and how you can support your customers. But don't ignore the importance of providing information and resources as well. This is an area where you can target your keywords and showcase yourself as an authority in your field. Offer creative, interesting and engaging content. Make sure it's useful and more importantly that it is available for sharing. Links to social media sites will further increase your visibility and allow you to reach out to your target audience, as will back links to your content from other websites or blogs.

SEO has evolved and will continue to do so. It is no longer about trying to outwit the search engines in order to increase rankings. The new Hummingbird algorithm only serves to reinforce this. These changes are positive. They highlight the fact that people require good quality, useful information when they search the internet. And that is essentially what SEO is all about.