NEXT-GENERATION

SEO STRATEGIES

That Will Future-Proof Your Content

Featuring Insights From The Wizard of Moz,

Rand Fishkin

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● Introduction

CONTENT MARKETING EXPERTS often advise their clients and colleagues to create content for the benefit of people, not for search engines. If content is suitably relevant and of a high quality, search algorithms will discover them organically, rank them highly, and serve them up at the top of the search engine results page, ready for the curious consumer to explore.

It seems like sound, reasonable advice; and those who follow it are almost certainly going to enjoy a measure of content marketing success. But will this practice be enough to sustain that level of performance success over the long term?

Maybe not.

As "Wizard of Moz" Rand Fishkin reminded us during his popular SEO presentation at Content Marketing World 2015, search engines are constantly evolving their algorithms to enhance their ability to serve consumers' needs. And while current systems are highly proficient at classifying the terms of a search query, calculating its likely intent, and ranking potential results in terms of their relevance, the search engine of tomorrow will likely use more advanced methods of mapping (and manipulating) the mechanics of meaning.

What does all this mean for marketers? And, more importantly, what should you be doing now to prepare your content for the rise of sentient SEO?

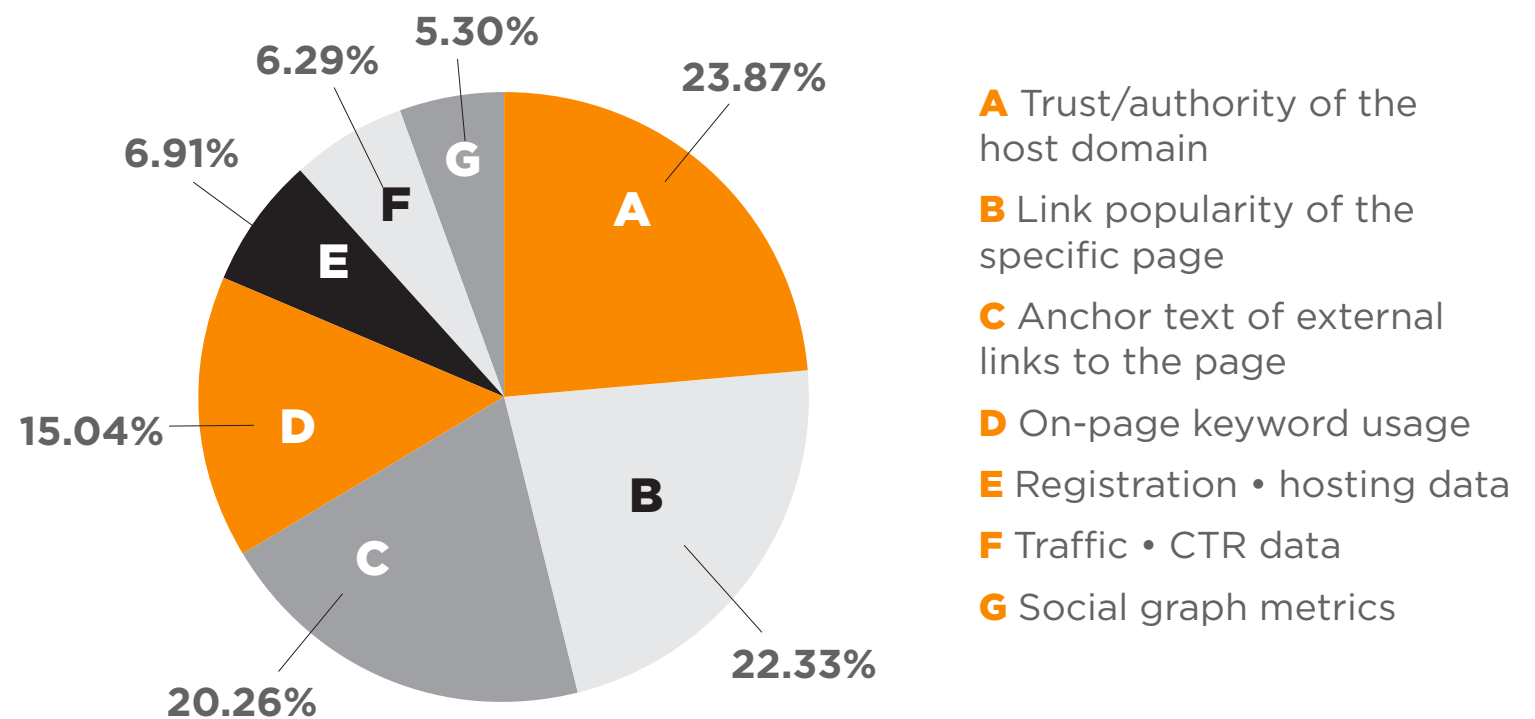Read on for explanations and advice from the Wizard himself…

The SEO techniques that you've come to know and respect all revolve around the almighty algorithm. The search engine's quality team (at Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.) determines what criteria to include in its ranking system and builds a mathematical formula that its bots will use to find and display the content that best fits the query.

While most would agree that today's search algorithms have benefited content creators and consumers alike, it's a somewhat arbitrary process that leaves content marketers at the mercy of the search engines.

Search companies like Google are free to change the rules of the game at any time and for any reason they want. And they often do just that — particularly if it produces a business advantage for them and their clients. By holding the possibility of losing valuable search traffic over your heads, they leave you little choice but to comply with the rules of every Panda, Penguin, or other zoo animal Google decides to float your way.

Components of Google's ranking algorithm via Moz.com

5.30%
6.29%
6.91%
15.04%
20.26%
22.33%
23.87%

A Trust/authority of the host domain

B Link popularity of the specific page

C Anchor text of external links to the page

D On-page keyword usage

E Registration • hosting data

F Traffic • CTR data

G Social graph metrics

They decided links > content

Yet, an interesting thing happened as the engines followed this (somewhat Orwellian?) path to search salvation: Their systems began to deconstruct the elements of human meaning, enabling them to better understand the intent behind a user's search and weight the inputs accordingly.

Consider these changes in Google's search criteria over the past few years:

- They now look at semantics, rather than just keywords.

- They predict when users want diverse results vs. lists of related results.

- They recognize when users want recent results, rather than historical information.

- They identify entities of knowledge (e.g., knowing what searches relate to Sting, the musician, as opposed to sting, the sensation of pain), and connect them to particular topics and keywords.
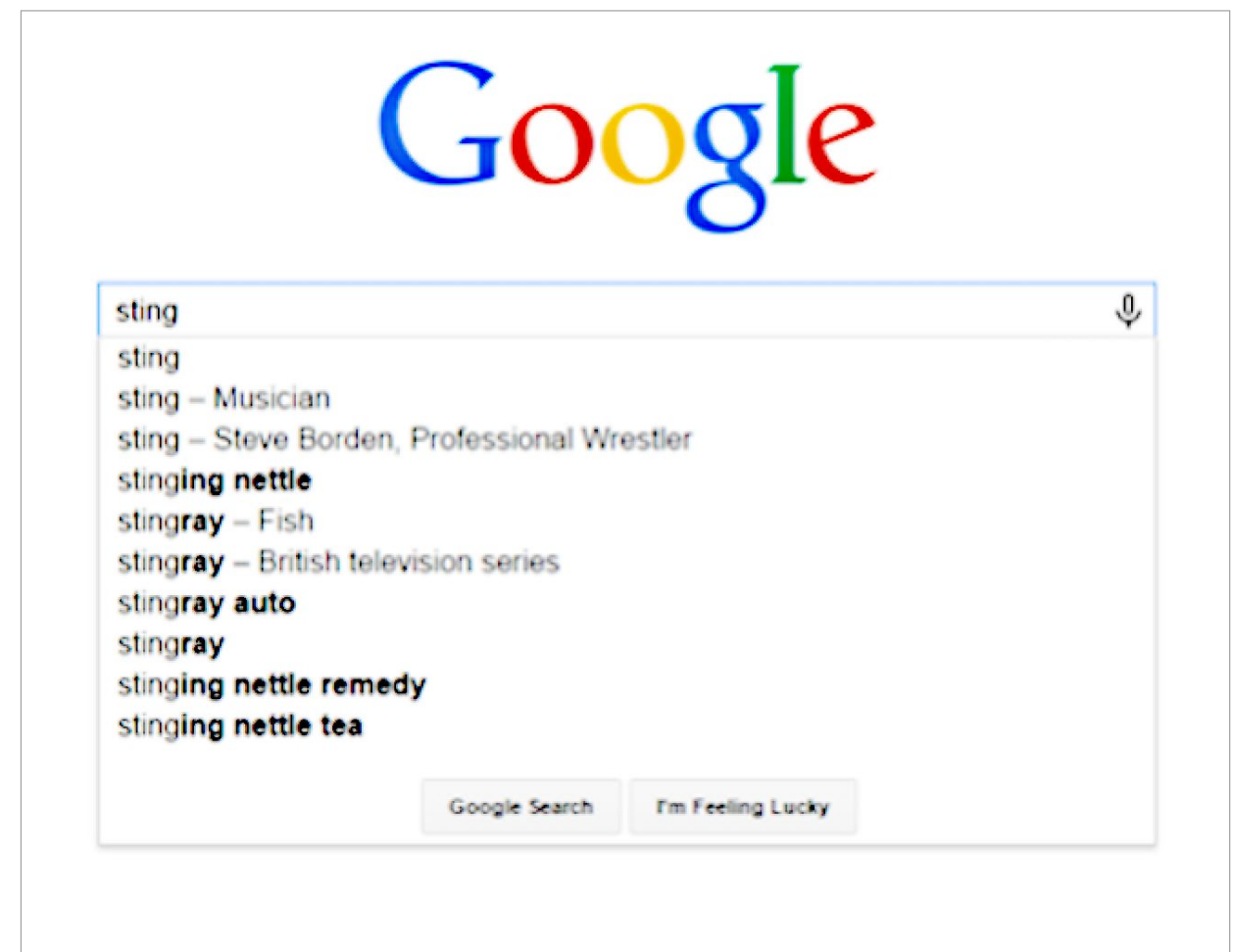
By recognizing and classifying meta-information in this way, search bots are learning to distinguish the content that is most likely to satisfy a user's query and can adjust the results they serve up in response.

Did you catch that? The algorithms are LEARNING. Without human intervention!

As these "deep learning" processes become more standard in search, Google's team would no longer have to feed its ranking factors into the algorithm: The machines would determine what's most relevant all on their own, based on actions that have been taken on that content in the past.
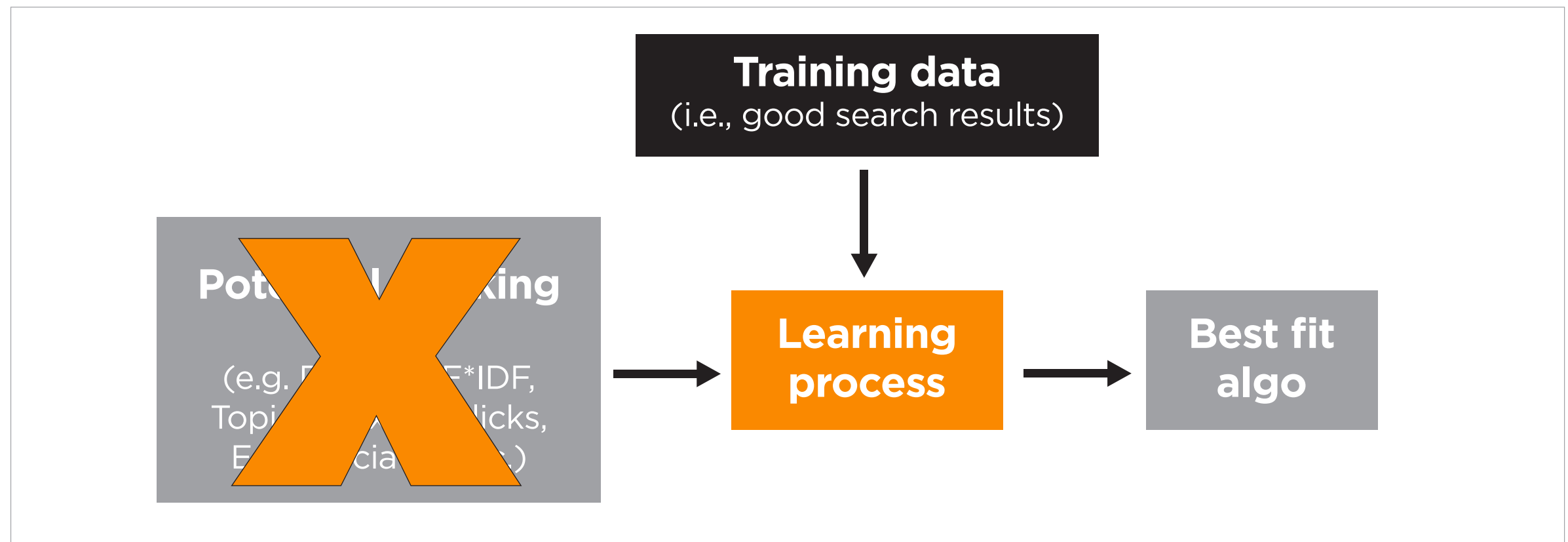
Imagine a search engine so sophisticated that it can anticipate the complex task a user is ultimately looking to complete, rather than ranking content based on things like keyword volume or how fast a site page loads.

Think this is too far in the future to worry about now? Don't be so sure. In fact, there are some definitive signs that search engines are already starting to factor new elements into their equations. And, as Rand pointed out in his discussion, **the best SEOs have always optimized to where Google is headed — not necessarily where it is now.**
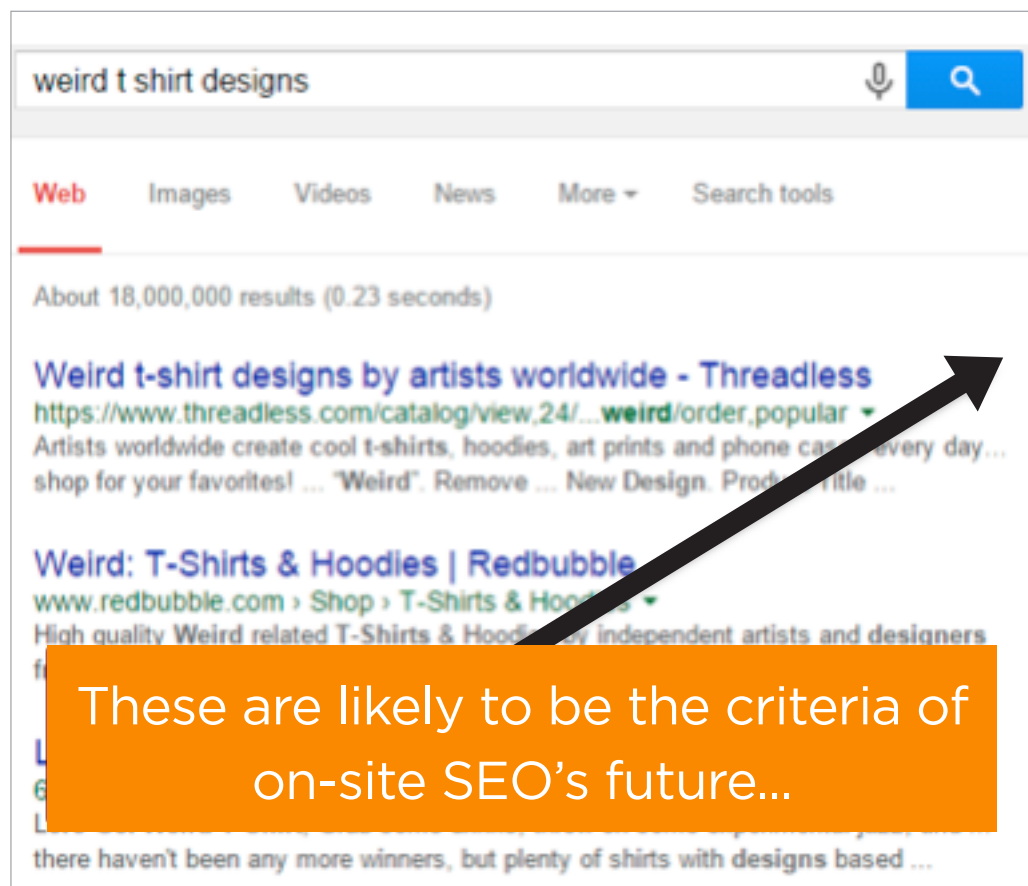
☑ **High CTR for this position?**

☑ **Good engagement?**

☒ **High amplification rate?**

☑ **Low bounce rate?**

☒ **Strong pages/visit after landing on this URL?**

☒ **People return to the site after an initial search visit**

These are likely to be the criteria of on-site SEO's future...

As we move closer to realizing the promise of deep learning, search engine optimization is only going to grow more complicated. As a content marketer, you'll still need to optimize for standard ranking factors like keywords, user experience, and content quality and uniqueness. But if you want to have a shot at hitting the top of the SERP, you will also need to take a whole new set of user signals into consideration.

Classic on-site CEO
(ranking inputs)

Keyword targeting

Quality & uniqueness

Crawl/bot friendly

Snippet optimization

UX/multi-device

New on-site SEO
(searcher inputs)

Relative CTR

Short click vs. long-click

Content gap fulfillment

Amplification & loyalty

Task completion success

Let's take a closer look at these new(ish) inputs, and how they are likely to factor in when it comes to optimizing your content's search performance.
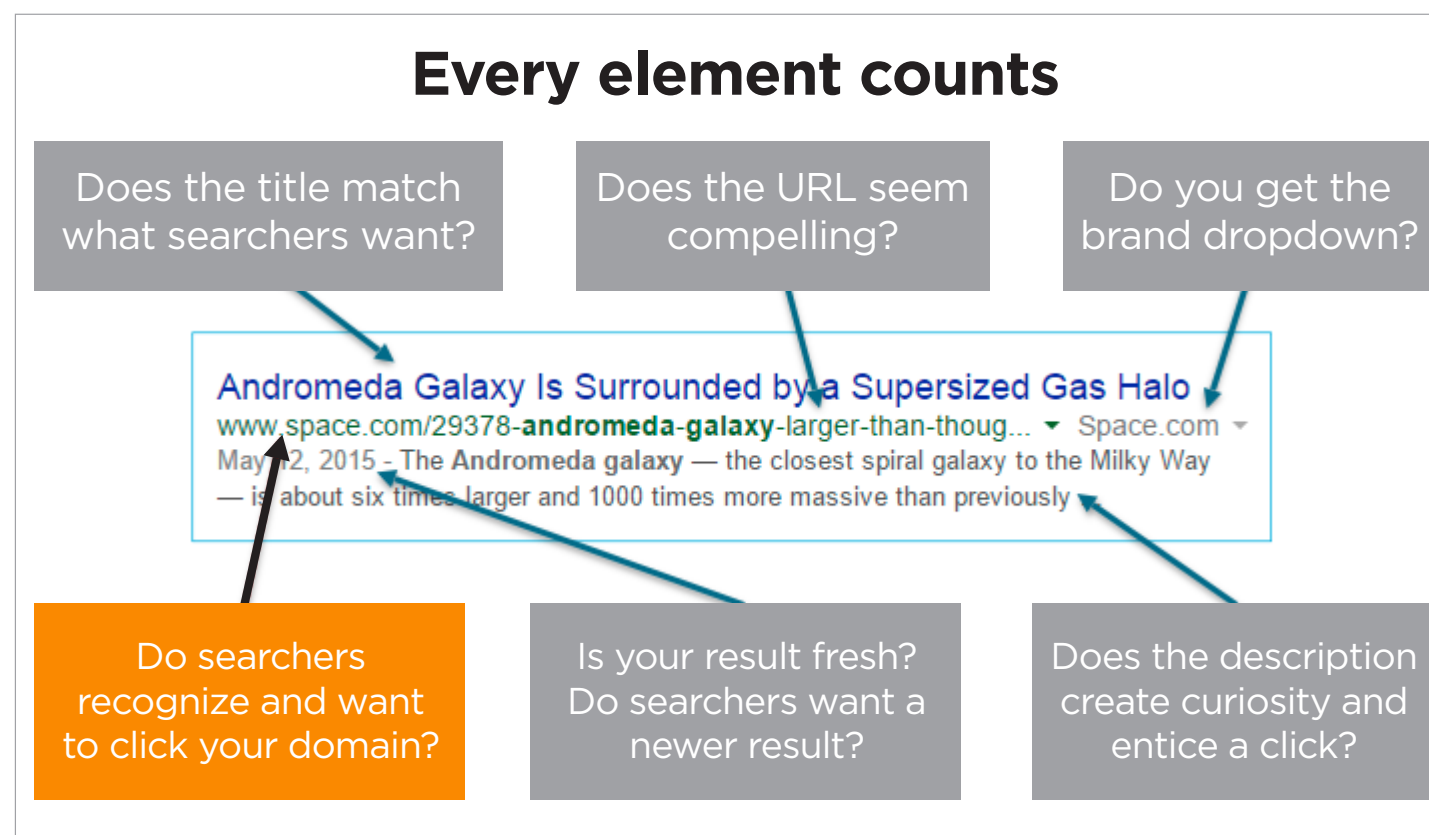
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Chances are you are tracking the click-through rate (CTR) of your own content as a way to measure its performance. Similarly, tomorrow's search engines will be able to correlate the CTR of a piece of content with its comparative relevance to a user's query and use this data to determine its position on the SERP listing.

● **Future-proof your SEO:** Greater search intelligence means that every element of your content will play a part in whether or not a user clicks it on the SERP.

To increase your clicks, try these suggestions from Rand:

- Use branding techniques to drive up CTR.

- Tie your content to current events and trends, to take advantage of their increased search volume.

- Google often tests new results briefly on page 1 of the SERP, so you may want to consider republishing popular content to give it a short-term CTR boost.

Every element counts

Does the title match what searchers want?

Does the URL seem compelling?

Do you get the brand dropdown?

Andromeda Galaxy Is Surrounded by a Supersized Gas Halo
www.space.com/29378-**andromeda**-**galaxy**-larger-than-thoug... ▼ Space.com ▼
May 12, 2015 - The **Andromeda** galaxy — the closest spiral galaxy to the Milky Way — is about six times larger and 1000 times more massive than previously

Do searchers recognize and want to click your domain?

Is your result fresh? Do searchers want a newer result?

Does the description create curiosity and entice a click?

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In the near future, it will be essential to beat your competition on factors like engagement if you want to hit the top spots on a SERP. Content that causes users to "pogo stick," or jump right back to the results page after clicking, won't retain its search value nearly as well as content that achieves the "long click" — where users find valid reasons to stick around for awhile.

● **Future-proof your SEO:** What factors will increase the staying power of the content you create? Here's a checklist of Rand's suggestions for earning the long click:

An SEO's checklist for better engagement:

☐ **Content that fulfills the searcher's conscious and unconscious needs**

☐ **Speed, speed, and more speed**

☐ **Delivers the best UX on every browser**

☐ **Compels visitors to go deeper into your site**

☐ **Avoids features that annoy or dissuade visitors**

It's great if a search result has what it takes to answer a specific query. But it will be even better if your content shows signs that it will provide a more complete understanding of the topic at hand or offer the information users are likely to want next, as they continue along on their path of discovery.

● **Future-proof your SEO:** Your content should include signals that "smart" search algorithms can interpret as having what it takes to satisfy a searcher's informational needs. Here are two suggestions:

1. Thoroughly research your topic, your competition, and your target audience, and consider what terms/phrases may be needed on the page — beyond just the primary keyword itself. For example, if a searcher queries "best fitness tracker," including the names of the major brands (Fitbit, Microsoft Band, Apple, Jawbone, Garmin, etc.) in your content might be critical.

2. Ensure that your overall page experience is top-notch and make sure it answers the searcher's query in a way that makes them likely to return to and share your content, instead of clicking the back button and selecting another option on the SERP.

If your content doesn't fill the gaps in searcher's needs...

Natural language processing - Wikipedia, the free ...
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_language_processing ▾ Wikipedia ▾
Natural language processing (NLP) is a field of computer science, artificial intelligence, and computational linguistics concerned with the interactions between computers and human (natural) languages. As such, NLP is related to the area of human–computer interaction.
Outline of natural language ... - Natural language understanding - Stemming

Natural Language Processing - Stanford University | Coursera
https://www.coursera.org/course/nlp ▾ Coursera ▾
This course covers a broad range of topics in natural language processing, including word and sentence tokenization, text classification and sentiment analysis, spelling correction, information extraction, parsing, meaning extraction, and question answering. We will also introduce the underlying theory from probability ...
Coursera nlp course - Dan Jurafsky - Christopher Manning

Natural Language Processing - Columbia University ...
https://www.coursera.org/course/nlangp ▾ Coursera ▾
Natural Language Processing from Columbia University. Take free online classes from 120+ top universities and educational organizations. We partner with ...

Natural Language Processing - Microsoft Research
research.microsoft.com/en-us/groups/nlp/ ▾ Microsoft Research ▾
The Redmond-based Natural Language Processing group is focused on developing efficient algorithms to process texts and to make their information ...

e.g., for this query, Google might seek content that includes topics like "text classification," "tokenization," "parsing," and "question answering"

those rankings go to pages/sites that do.

Search engines probably don't care about the actual number of shares and links your content receives; in fact, Google has stated, flat out, that it doesn't use social signals directly in its ranking algorithms (at least, not at the current time).

There are many reasons why this isn't likely to change any time soon (for one thing, it's easy to share content even if you haven't read it). But what Rand believes the next-gen engines will start to emphasize is the engagement that is relative to these shares — in other words, how quickly your content's share rates are accelerating (or decelerating) over time, and how often those shares are resulting in loyalty and return visits.

● **Future-proof your SEO:** Rand contends that content marketers would be wise to track two new KPIs when evaluating the role social media and influencers play in the SEO equation.

1. Shares and links per 1,000 visits:
Knowing what makes your audience — and their influencers — share your content will be essential to understanding whether it will satisfy the user's query. Check with social sharing trackers, like TrueSocialMetrics or Hootsuite, to gather the data you'll need for this calculation.
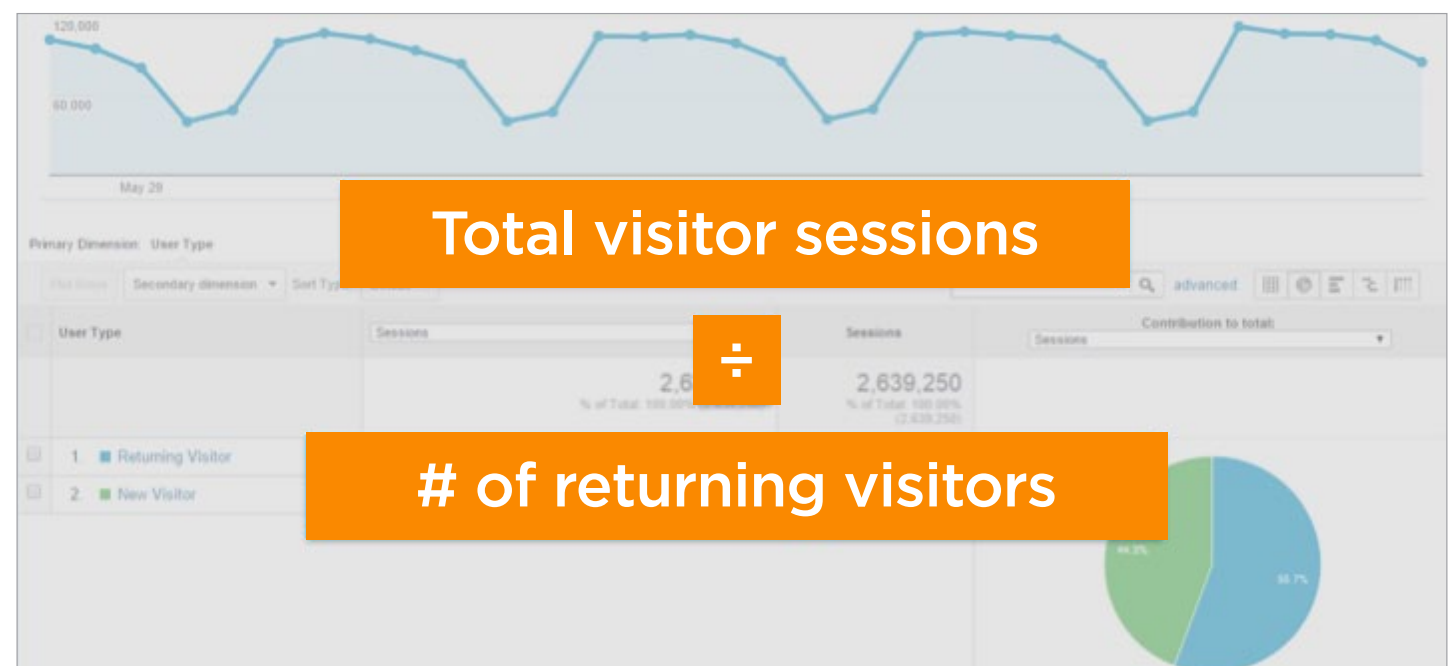
2. Return visitor ratio over time:
This metric indicates the possible reasons why a user returns to your site — as well as what might be preventing them from doing so.

Unique visits

÷

Shares + links

Total visitor sessions

÷

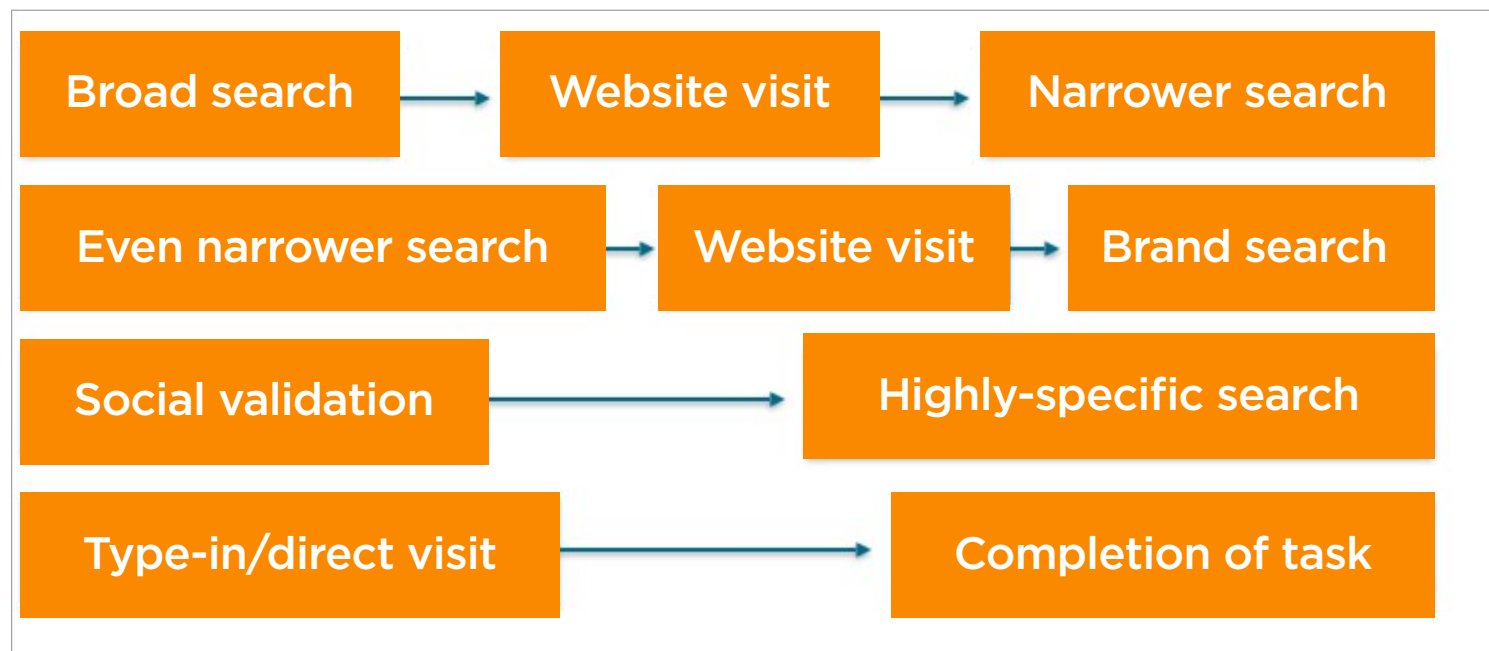# of returning visitors

Via Moz's 1Metric
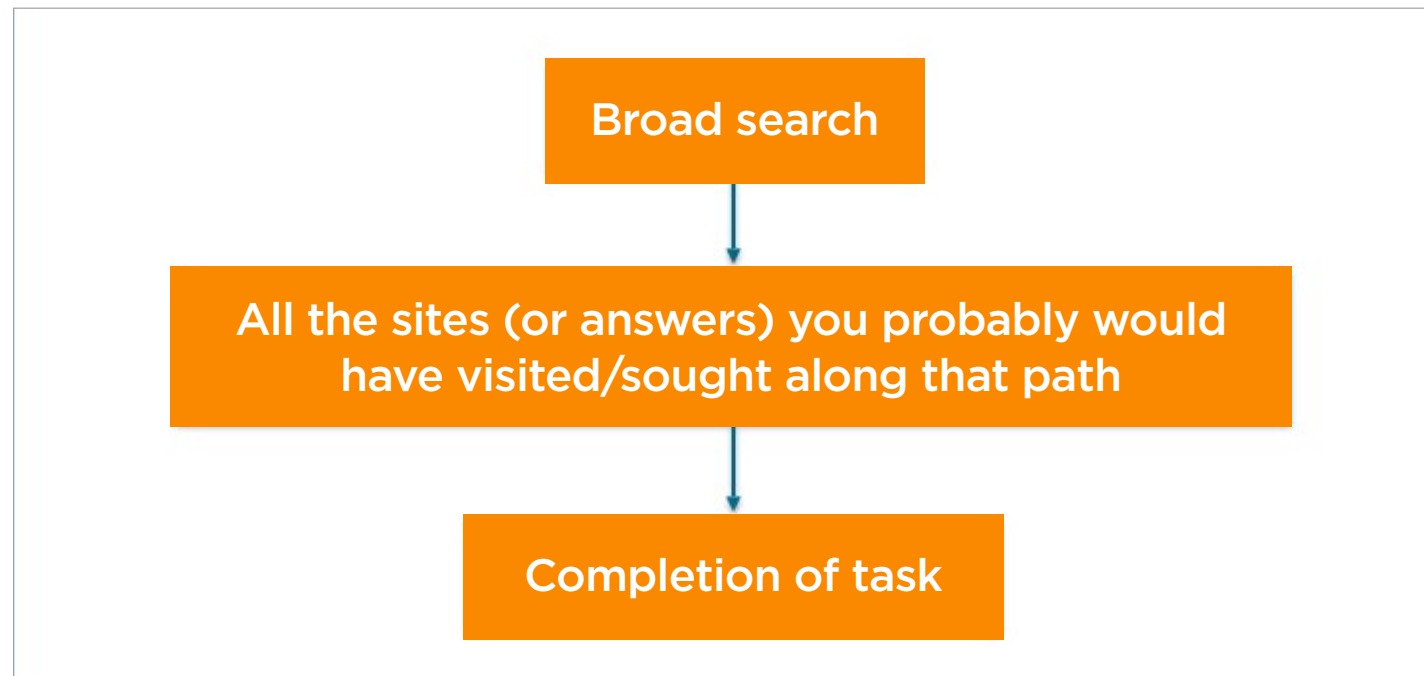
5 TASK COMPLETION SUCCESS

If content helps readers reach their goals more quickly and confidently than they would have managed otherwise, it's considered successful.

Similarly, search engines are also seeking to streamline and accelerate the path to a successful search outcome. Rand believes that in order for search to evolve, the Googles of tomorrow will look to provide a comprehensive set of the results searchers might need to complete their desired task — rather than just satisfying each singular search query, one step at a time.

In other words, Google's goal is to take a complex, multi-phase search path like this:

Broad search	→	Website visit	→	Narrower search
Even narrower search	→	Website visit	→	Brand search
Social validation	→	Highly-specific search		
Type-in/direct visit	→	Completion of task		

... and streamline it to this:

> **Broad search**
>
> ↓
>
> **All the sites (or answers) you probably would have visited/sought along that path**
>
> ↓
>
> **Completion of task**

● **Future-proof your SEO:** Rand predicts that getting next-gen search engines to recognize that your content can take searchers all the way to the goal line will require you to optimize your efforts for both the search engine's judgment and that of your current site visitors and customers.

To better understand consumers' needs, consider conducting surveys and usability studies — these are great ways to gather information about what searchers (or potential searchers) are actively seeking out, what they want to find on a page, and what tasks they might be up to that your content will need to

Conclusion ●

SEO has long been about ranking content based on criteria established by those who build the search algorithms. But with the advent of deep learning, marketers will soon need to consider a whole new set of searcher signals in their efforts to optimize the performance of their content.

● **To learn even more from Rand**, catch his presentation, "The Worst Advice Marketing Ever Gave" at Content Marketing World 2016. Register with code SM100 to save $100 off main event and all-access passes!

● **Don't miss the latest SEO advice**, along with insights from Content Marketing World speakers and other experts in the CMI community. Subscribe to our weekly newsletter.

About Rand Fishkin

Rand Fishkin uses the ludicrous title, Wizard of Moz. He co-authored/co-founded the Art of SEO, Inbound.org, and Moz (he clearly likes doing stuff with other people). Rand's an addict of all things content, search, & social on the web, from his multiple blogs to Twitter, Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn, and FourSquare. In his minuscule spare time, Rand enjoys the company of his amazing wife, Geraldine, whose serendipitous travel blog chronicles their journeys.

About Content Marketing Institute

Content Marketing Institute is the leading global content marketing education and training organization, teaching enterprise brands how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. CMI's Content Marketing World event, the largest content marketing-focused event, is held every September in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, and the Intelligent Content Conference event is held every spring. CMI publishes the bimonthly magazine *Chief Content Officer*, and provides strategic consulting and content marketing research for some of the best-known brands in the world. CMI is a 2012-2015 Inc. 500/5000 company. Watch this video to learn more about CMI.