How to Optimize for Voice Search: 4 Simple SEO Strategies


Voice search is not a fad. It has comfortably crossed the threshold of early adopters.

It has gained mileage because it is more convenient for a user to speak with an assistant than to type. The results of voice queries are also faster.

Here are a few statistics to prove that voice search is here to stay:

- Voice labs found that there were a total of 33 million voice-first devices in circulation.
- In a survey of SEO trends for 2017 and beyond, voice search stood at the third spot.
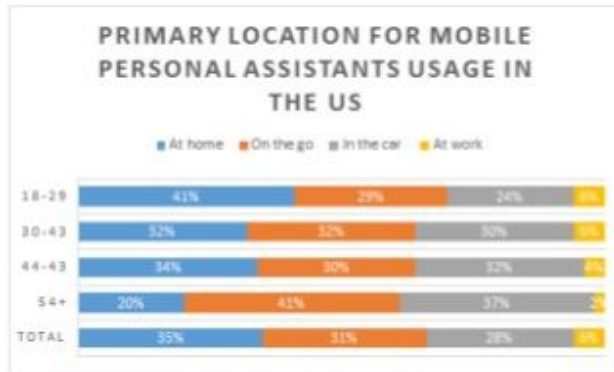- In his keynote, Google CEO Sundar Pichai announced that one-fifth of the queries on Google are voice searches.

Teenagers are savvy users of voice search, but Thrive Analytics found that people in all age groups use mobile personal assistants.

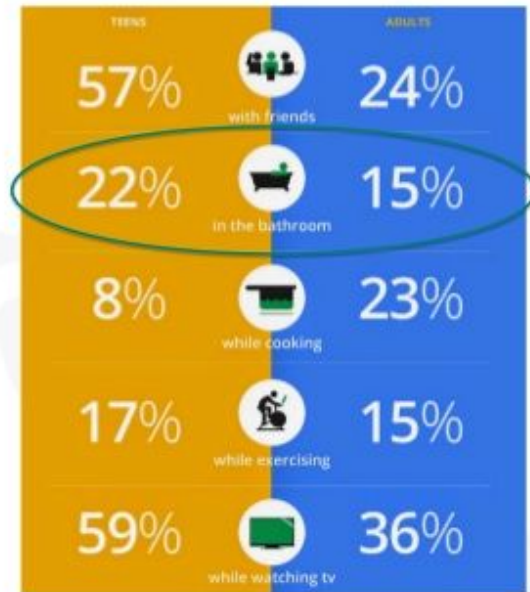## US smartphone users who use mobile personal assistants

Age	Percentage
18-29	71%
30-43	59%
44-53	39%
54+	38%
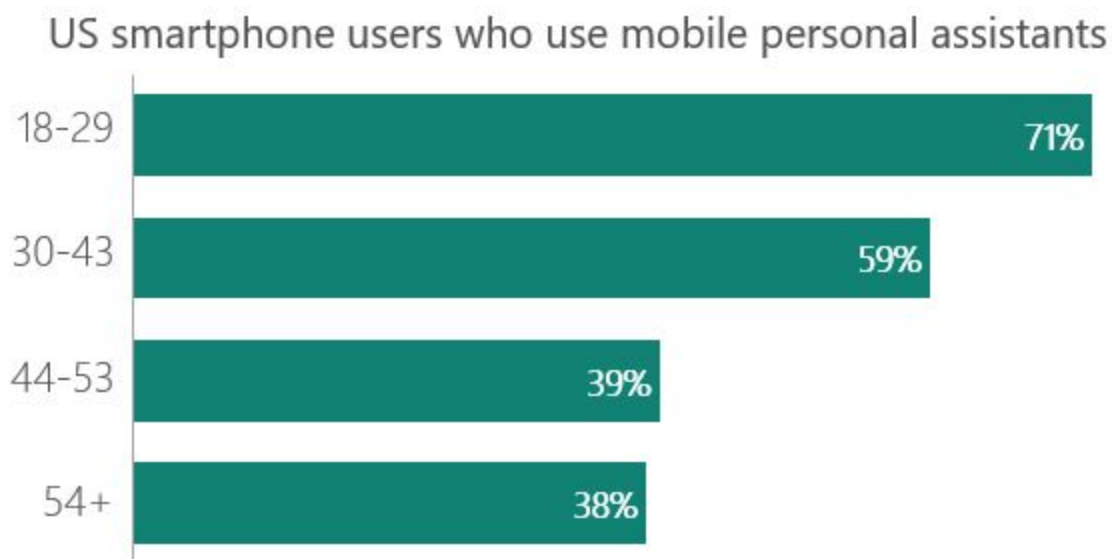
When and where are these people using voice search?

They use it on the go, with friends, and even in the bathroom.

When are we using it?

PRIMARY LOCATION FOR MOBILE PERSONAL ASSISTANTS USAGE IN THE US

	At home	On the go	In the car	At work
18-29	41%	29%	24%	6%
30-43	32%	32%	30%	6%
44-43	34%	30%	32%	4%
54+	20%	41%	37%	2%
TOTAL	35%	31%	28%	6%

Thrive Analytics "Is the Personal Assistant the Successor to Search?" 9 Oct 2014

TEENS		ADULTS
57%	with friends	24%
22%	in the bathroom	15%
8%	while cooking	23%
17%	while exercising	15%
59%	while watching tv	36%

#SMX #32A @PurnaVirji

With the increase in the use of digital assistants, optimizing for voice search is critical to your SEO success.

In this article, I will show you how to optimize your content and website for this search trend. Let's begin by understanding how it ties back to Google's algorithm.
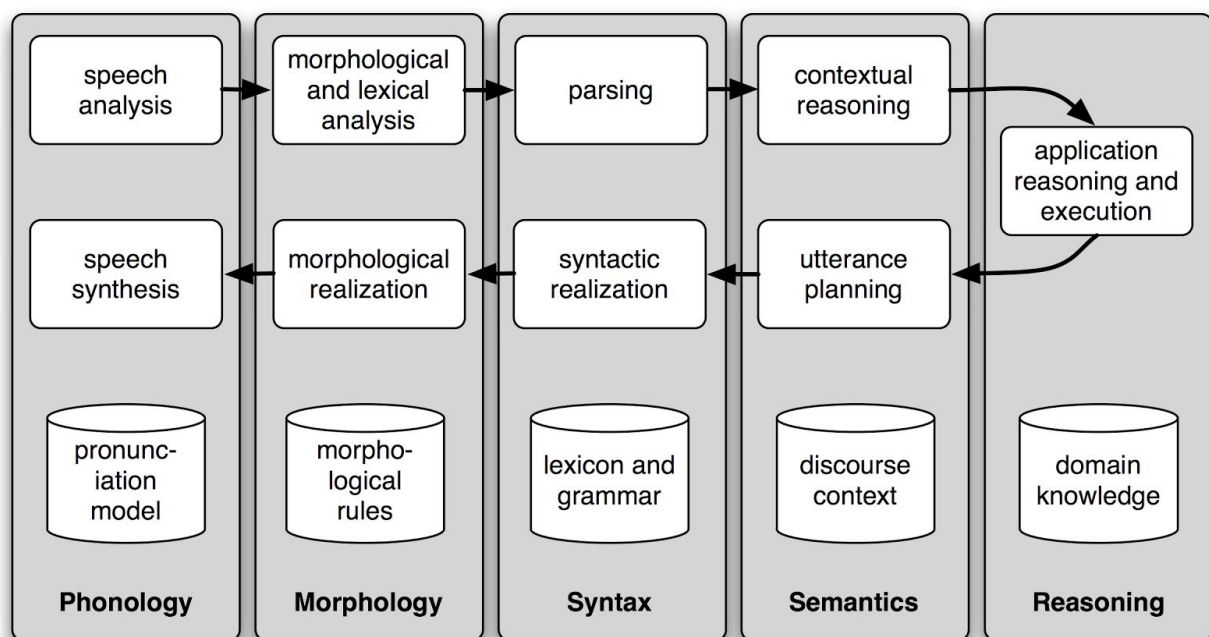
The Hummingbird update

In 2013, Google launched a major algorithmic update — the Google Hummingbird. It started considering the user intent and contextual meaning of queries.

Marketers had to refine their strategy. They went from stuffing keywords in articles to addressing the pain points of their target audience.

Voice technology is another step in the direction of improving the user experience with semantics.

It relies on Natural Language Processing (NLP) to recognize voice texture, interests, and behavior.

Phonology	Morphology	Syntax	Semantics	Reasoning
speech analysis	morphological and lexical analysis	parsing	contextual reasoning	application reasoning and execution
speech synthesis	morphological realization	syntactic realization	utterance planning	
pronunc-iation model	morpho-logical rules	lexicon and grammar	discourse context	domain knowledge

With time, Google "learns" your language, accent, and other patterns in the way you speak.

Now, it focuses on the semantics and the wider contextual relevance of the user's query.

Let us test Google's semantic capabilities with a few voice searches on its app on iPhone 6s.

Let's start with a search for comedian and actor T.J. Miller.

who is TJ Miller

ALL   IMAGES   MAPS   NEWS   VIE

T. J. Miller
American actor

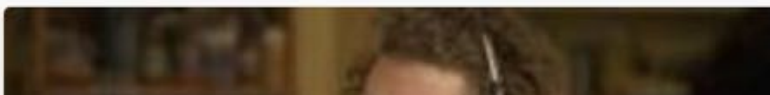OVERVIEW   MOVIES AND TV SHOWS   ALBUMS

Todd Joseph "T. J." Miller is an American actor, stand-up comedian, producer, and writer. From 2014 to 2017, he starred as Erlich Bachman in the HBO sitcom Silicon Valley. Wikipedia

Height: 1.88 m

Spouse: Kate Gorney (m. 2015)

Videos from the web

Nice. I'm satisfied with the information provided in the overview.

Now, let's find out if Google can use this initial search query to maintain context.

I asked the name of T.J. Miller's character on the TV show "Silicon Valley."

what was the name of this char..

ALL   IMAGES   MAPS   NEWS   VIE

As you can see from the screenshot, Google returns an ad by DIRECTV NOW and a link to the HBO NOW app.

I will not call that a good user experience — the question I asked was specific and related to my first query.

When I scroll below the fold, a snippet appears that shows names of all the characters on the show.

Silicon Valley

American comedy series

Erlich Bachman
T. J. Miller

Gilfoyle
Martin Starr

Richard Hendriks
Thomas Middledit...

See all

Silicon Valley (TV Series 2014–) - Full Cast & Crew - IMDb

m.imdb.com › title › fullcredits

Silicon Valley (TV Series 2014–) cast and crew credits, including actors, actresses, directors, writers

It seems like Google still has to cover ground with fictional characters.

Let's see how it fares with real people. Here are the results for my query, "Who is Neil Patel?"

who is Neil Patel

ALL   IMAGES   MAPS   NEWS   VI

"**Neil Patel** is co-founder of Crazy Egg, Hello Bar and KISSmetrics. He helps companies like Amazon, NBC, GM, HP and Viacom grow their revenue."

Neil Patel - Articles, Businesses and Biography - Entrepreneur
https://www.entrepreneur.com › author

Hard press on local results or link titles to see

Now that Google has context, I performed a sequential search: "What is his age?"

Google automatically substituted the query with my name and returned relevant results:

what is Neil Patel age 🎤 ▢

ALL   IMAGES   MAPS   NEWS   VII

Learn more about Neil Patel - Quick Sprout
https://www.quicksprout.com › about

Neil Patel is the co-founder of Crazy Egg, Hello Bar and KISSmetrics. He helps ... I was born on April 24, 1985, in London, England. From the ...

Neil Patel Story - Bio, Facts, Networth, Family, Auto, Home | Famous ...
https://successstory.com › people › neil-p...

Have you ever imagined how the traffic of TechCrunch increased by 30% within a period of just 2 months? Neil Patel is the name behind this ...

Who is Neil Patel?
neilpatel.com › about

Mar 11, 2016 - Neil Patel is an author, entrepreneur,

It does not return a direct answer, but it shows my [About page](#), which mentions my birth date. The meta description displays it as well.

On this occasion, voice search fared decently.

As Google continues improving its algorithm, we can expect the user experience to become more intuitive and smooth.

3 characteristics of voice search

Let's begin preparing for voice search by analyzing the data on how people are using it right now.

1. Voice queries contain conversational words and are longer.

When we use a computer, we use short phrases to find information because it saves physical effort.

On mobile, the searches are a conversation with a virtual assistant.

Artificial intelligence powers voice search engines, and it becomes smarter with every conversation.

When you search for restaurants via typing on your phone or computer, you might write "best restaurants in San Diego." This is computer language.

If you use voice search, you will probably ask a question, like "Which restaurant serves dinner now?"

Both the above queries contain five words. Purna Virji, though, found that speech searches tend to be longer through the tail.
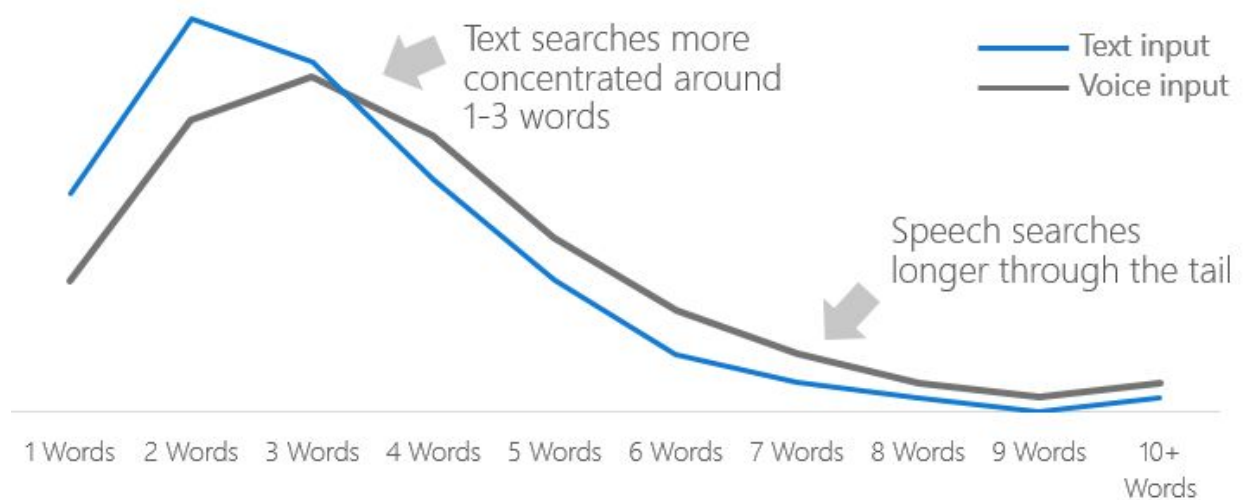
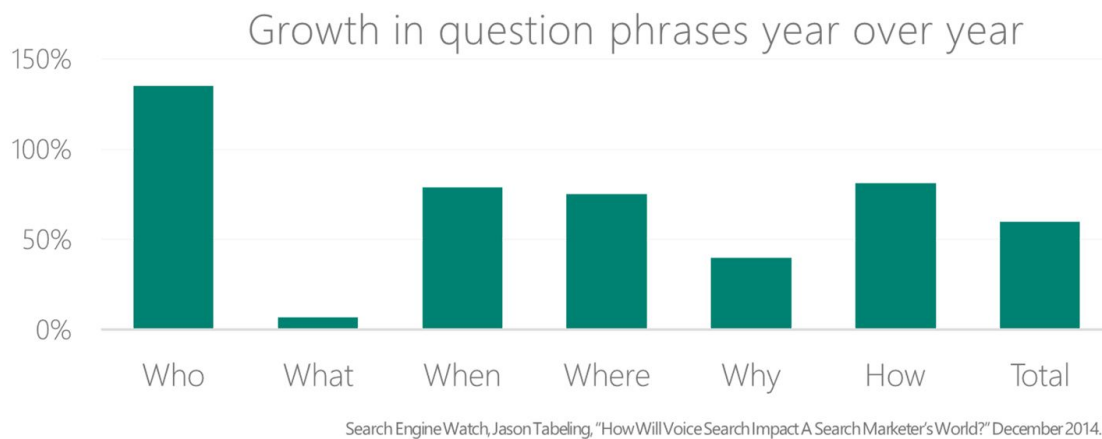

Don't make the mistake of equating voice search optimization to using long-tail keywords in your content. Voice search is more likely to contain question phrases.

Keyword research tools generally won't find phrases that people speak while using mobile assistants.

Such phrases have also seen growth year on year.

Question phrases are more likely to be voice search

Growth in question phrases year over year

Search Engine Watch, Jason Tabeling, "How Will Voice Search Impact A Search Marketer's World?" December 2014.

How can you leverage this characteristic?

You need to think how your audience speaks about your business, products, and services.

As I mentioned, most long-tail keyword tools will return text-based queries. They will pull LSI keywords and alphabetical variations.

For voice search optimization, I recommend starting your research with a tool called Answer the Public.

When you enter a keyword, it returns a bunch of questions.

Here are the results I got for the keyword 'flights.'

These natural language phrases are full of insights. You can get an idea of the consumer's mindset and tie it back to your marketing funnel.

Other tools you might want to check out for picking natural language phrases are Question Samurai and StoryBase.

You can interpret a user's intent based on the kind of question phrase they use.

'What' and 'Who' questions signal that a user is in the research phase. If they are asking 'Where' questions, they are almost ready to buy.

Do you want another strategy to find the questions your customers use?

Log in to your Google Analytics account and check out the keywords people use to find your content.

Soon, you can expect separate voice search reporting in your analytics report.

2. 22% of voice queries are for local content.

The Internet Trends Report 2016 found that 22% of people use voice search for finding local information. It makes sense because people use mobile phones on the go.

Hound Voice Search & Assistant App = 6-8 Queries Across 4 Categories per User per Day

Seeing 6-8 queries per active user per day among 100+ domains across 4 categories...
Users most care about speed / accuracy / ability to follow up / ability to understand complex queries...

Voice Query Breakdown – Observed Data on Hound App, USA, 2016

- Local Information 22%
- Fun & Entertainment 21%
- General Information 30%
- Personal Assistant 27%

Google disclosed that "near me" searches have grown more than 130% YoY. People extensively use the search query for "things to do near me."

Needless to say, it is a mobile-driven phenomenon. Voice search makes these "near me" searches faster and easier for the user.

How can you leverage this characteristic?

Did you know that 50% of local mobile searches by a consumer lead to a store visit in a day?

Given that users have local intent when searching on their mobile phones, you need to get the keywords right.

You can gain a lot more business by carefully incorporating the following keywords into your SEO strategy:

- The phrases people use to describe the neighborhood around your location
- "Near me" in your title tags, meta description, internal links, and anchor text
- Landmarks around your business location
- The titles of local institutions that are relevant to your business

3. Users want immediate results.

The top use of voice queries remains rooted in personal assistance. Both teens and adults mainly use voice search for making calls and asking directions.

Teens
43% Call someone
38% Ask for directions
31% Help with homework

Adults
40% Ask for directions
39% Dictate texts
31% Call someone
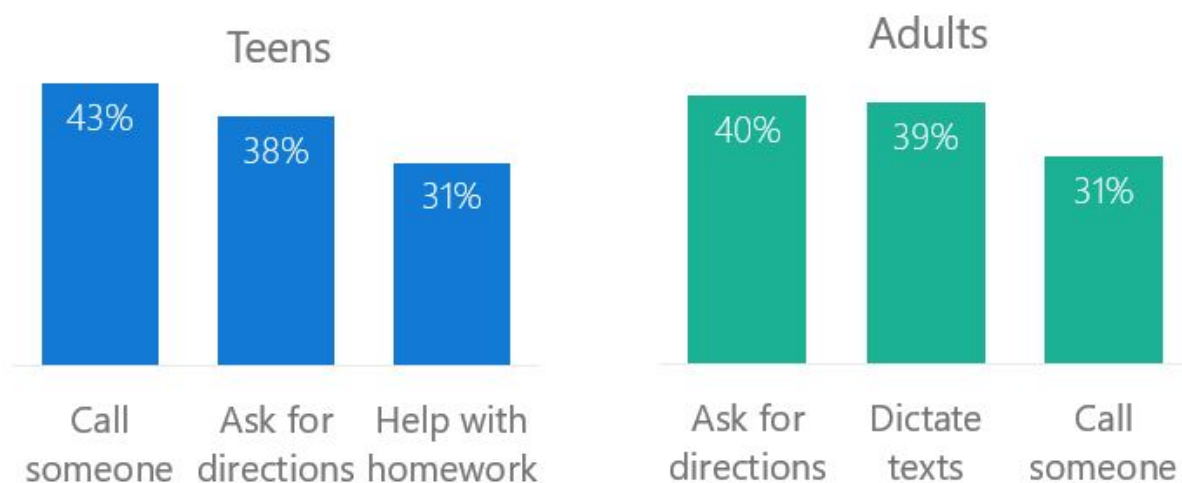
Even when finding general and local information, don't expect users to visit your website.

They have a clear intent when looking for services by a local business.

Suppose a user wants a haircut. He performs a voice search for salons.

Google returns the nearest salons with their addresses, distance from the user's location, timings, and reviews.

salon 🎤 ⬜

Top rated

Sushma's Hair & Beauty Salon

5.0 ★★★★★ (1) • 476 ft

📞

Beauty Parlour • Shop No.5/6, Juhu Taj Building, Parul...

Open until 7:30 PM

CALL

Kromakay

4.8 ★★★★★ (19) • 0.1 mi

📞

Beauty Parlour • 1 & 2 Amber Building, Near HSBC Ban...

Open until 7:00 PM

CALL

VS SALON & SPA

4.8 ★★★★★ (4) • 0.1 mi

📞

Beauty Parlour • Shenaz,Ground Floor,Samarth Ramda...

Open until 7:30 PM

CALL

⌄

More salon

Salon: in-depth news, politics, business,

On the basis of the ratings and their preferences, the user can choose a salon and directly click on the "Call" button to book an appointment.

In the case of informational and entertainment-related queries, users still want an immediate answer.

Ideally, your relevant content should appear as a snippet above the fold.

Remember how information about me appeared along with an image for the query, "Who is Neil Patel?"

who is Neil Patel

ALL   IMAGES   MAPS   NEWS   VII

"**Neil Patel** is co-founder of Crazy Egg, Hello Bar and KISSmetrics. He helps companies like Amazon, NBC, GM, HP and Viacom grow their revenue."

Neil Patel - Articles, Businesses and Biography - Entrepreneur
https://www.entrepreneur.com › author

Hard press on local results or link titles to see

How can you leverage this characteristic?

Your business listing should have a healthy number of positive reviews. Also, update your office hours, contact details, physical address, and the like.

We will discuss optimizing your business listing in more detail later.

There's no guaranteed way of getting your page as a featured snippet.

Still, you should attempt to get a berth at the coveted #0 spot by answering your user's questions.

For more details, I recommend reading my article on how to get your content featured in [Google SERP's Featured Snippet](#).

With the above characteristics in mind, let's start with the first SEO strategy to optimize for voice search.

Strategy #1: Use structured data

Do you write content solely for your audience?

That is a great place to start.

Search engines also look at a bunch of factors besides content to determine a page's relevance and position in their search results.

Professional SEOs leverage these additional factors to further optimize their content for search engines.

Schema markup, also known as structured data, is one such factor. It does not affect the rankings directly, but it can give you an edge over your competitors.

Essentially, it is metadata — data about the information on your site. It goes into your site's source code.

The visitors do not see it, but microdata helps search engines to organize and classify your content. It is an underutilized strategy because it requires work.

Do you want an example?

The following markup classifies your contact details page as containing contact information.

```
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "http://schema.org",
  "@type": "Organization",
  "url": "http://www.your-company-site.com",
  "contactPoint": [{
    "@type": "ContactPoint",
    "telephone": "+1-401-555-1212",
    "contactType": "customer service"
  }]
}
</script>
```

You can also use schema to enable search enhancements and get a visually appealing result on search engine results page (SERP).

For example, look below at the recipe page result with star ratings, details about the number of calories, and cooking time.

Grandma's
Holiday Apple
Pie

4/5 ★★★★☆
35 reviews

250 calories

1 hr 30 min

Here's the structured data that labels every ingredient in the recipe.

Equivalent structured data (trimmed for brevity)

```json
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "http://schema.org/",
  "@type": "Recipe",
  "name": "Grandma's Holiday Apple Pie",
  "author": "Elaine Smith",
  "image": "http://images.edge-generalmills.com/56459281-6fe6-4d9d-984f-385c9488d824.jpg",
  "description": "A classic apple pie.",
  "aggregateRating": {
    "@type": "AggregateRating",
    "ratingValue": "4",
    "reviewCount": "276",
    "bestRating": "5",
    "worstRating": "1"
  },
  "prepTime": "PT30M",
  "totalTime": "PT1H",
  "recipeYield": "8",
  "nutrition": {
    "@type": "NutritionInformation",
    "servingSize": "1 medium slice",
    "calories": "230 calories",
    "fatContent": "1 g",
    "carbohydrateContent": "43 g",
  },
  "recipeIngredient": [
    "1 box refrigerated pie crusts, softened as directed on box",
    "6 cups thinly sliced, peeled apples (6 medium)",
    "..."
  ],
  "recipeInstructions": [
    "1...",
    "2..."
  ]
}
```

Now, let me guess your next question: How is microdata relevant to voice search?

When users search for local businesses, they often look for operational hours, contact information, address, directions from highways, and the like.

You can use microdata to ensure that search engines classify this information.

Let's search for the population of Dubai.

Google quickly retrieved the figure from the World Bank website because of a markup.

Additionally, I recommend that you submit a detailed sitemap to Google.

Lastly, ensure that your structured data pages are not blocked using robots.txt and other control methods.

Businesses can experience a [drop in traffic and disappearance from rankings](#) due to a minor change in the robots.txt directives.

If you want a step-by-step guide on implementing schema markup, I have [got you covered here](#). You can test your structured data using the [Structured Data Testing tool](#).

Strategy #2: Claim your Google My Business listing

As we saw earlier, voice search sees a high number of hyper-local queries.

Want an easy way to help your customers find you?

Share your business information in your site's footer in simple text format.

That is where users are accustomed to seeing it.

[The Salon California](#) does a good job on their website by sharing relevant information in their site's footer.
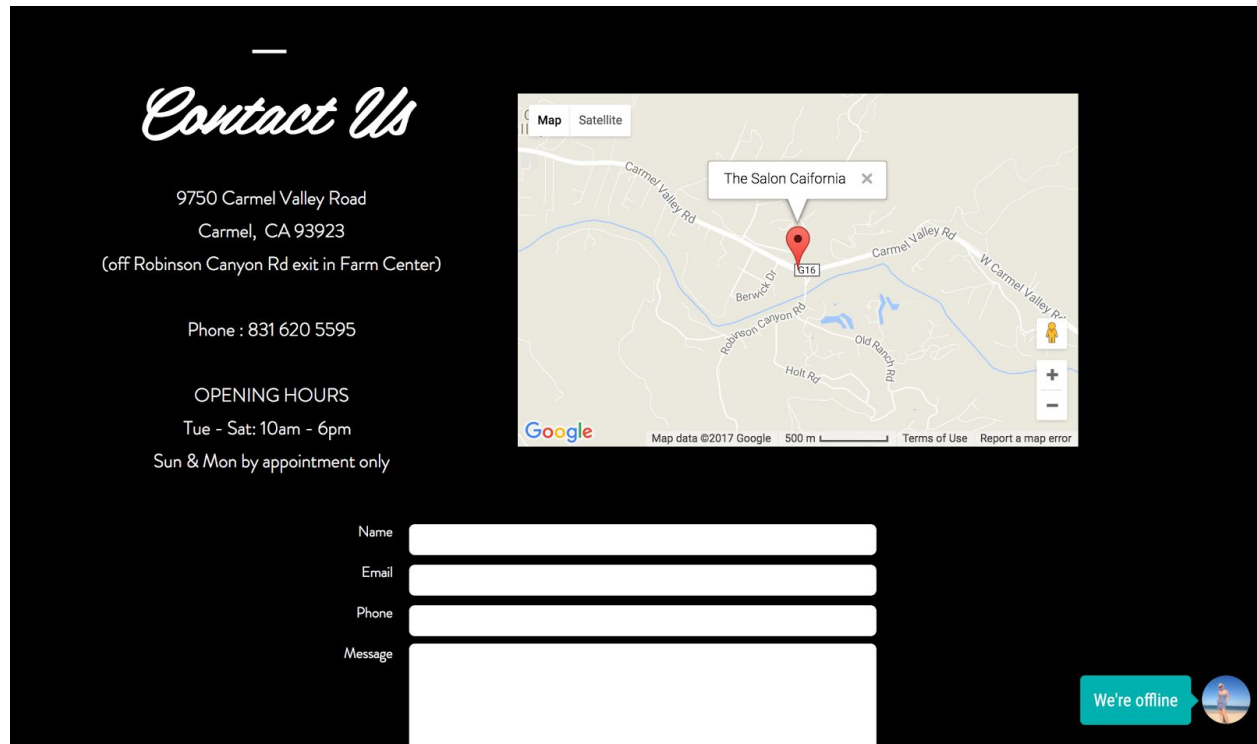
There are two ways in which a user might search for local businesses.

1. "Pizza delivery in Detroit" — In such cases, if you have optimized your site for local keywords, then you have a chance to appear higher in search results.

2. "Pizza delivery near me" — For such questions, Google relies on the user's location and turns toward Google My Business listings.

That is why it is important to claim your Google My Business listing.

In the listing, ensure that your name, address, and phone number (NAP) are accurate.

The phone number should ideally contain the area code. Further, I recommend using your business domain for your Google My Business login as opposed to a free Gmail account.

The introduction field is your business pitch. You should beef it up with about 400 words to describe your products and services.

It is also important to associate your listing with relevant categories. Google wants you to use categories to "describe what your business is."

Here are three examples to help you differentiate between correct and incorrect categories.

Choosing the right category is important. It can mean the difference between appearing at the top vs. disappearing from the voice search results.

Ideally, you should upload a few high-quality pictures of your business to persuade your prospects to visit your store.

If you are filling out your NAP information in other business directories, then you need to stay consistent.

Even slight differences in your address or other business information can be detrimental to your local SEO.

If you want more detailed local SEO instructions, then check out my guide.

Strategy #3: Get mobile-friendly

Voice search mainly happens on mobile devices. It is obvious that your site has to be mobile-friendly.

Google recommends a responsive web design. Most WordPress themes are inherently so.

Want to test if your website complies with Google's guidelines?

You can use Google's Mobile-Friendly Test Tool.

Is your web page mobile-friendly?

http://neilpatel.com/

RUN TEST

If everything is fine, you will get a message that says, "Page is mobile-friendly."

On the other hand, if your website needs to be fixed, then Google will indicate the specific steps you need to take.

You are not done yet.

Your site also needs to load fast. With our short attention spans, it must not come as a surprise that we expect websites to load instantly.

You can plug your site in PageSpeed Insights to gather details on your load speed.

I scored 73 on the test, and Google listed a few possible optimizations to enhance my site's performance on mobile.

Needs Work

73 / 100

This page is missing some common performance optimizations that may result in a slow user experience. Please investigate the recommendations below.

! **Possible Optimizations**

Eliminate render-blocking JavaScript and CSS in above-the-fold content
▸ Show how to fix

Prioritize visible content
▸ Show how to fix

Leverage browser caching
▸ Show how to fix

Optimize images
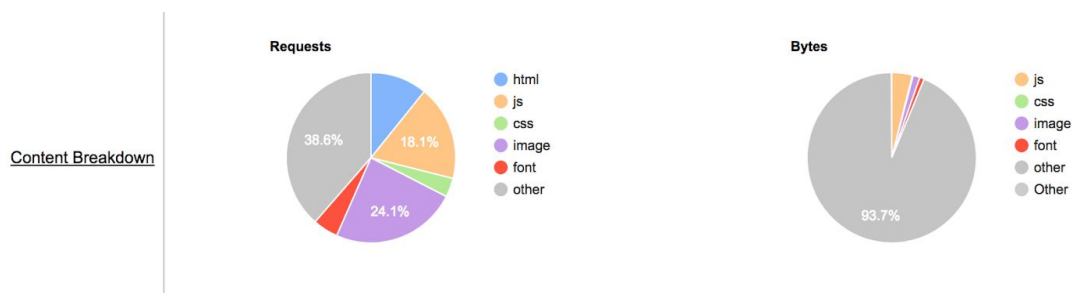▸ Show how to fix

Minify JavaScript
▸ Show how to fix

Minify CSS
▸ Show how to fix
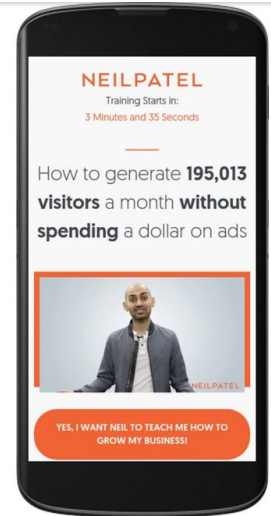
If you want to find out what exact elements are slowing down your site, plug it into Webpagetest.org.

You will get a content breakdown and a waterfall graph showing how each element affects your loading time.

Here are the results for NeilPatel.com.

Once you have fixed your design and speed, move on to the content.

You might remember that people read in an F-shaped pattern on desktops.

On mobile, the story is different. The German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence recorded [reading interaction](#) as below.
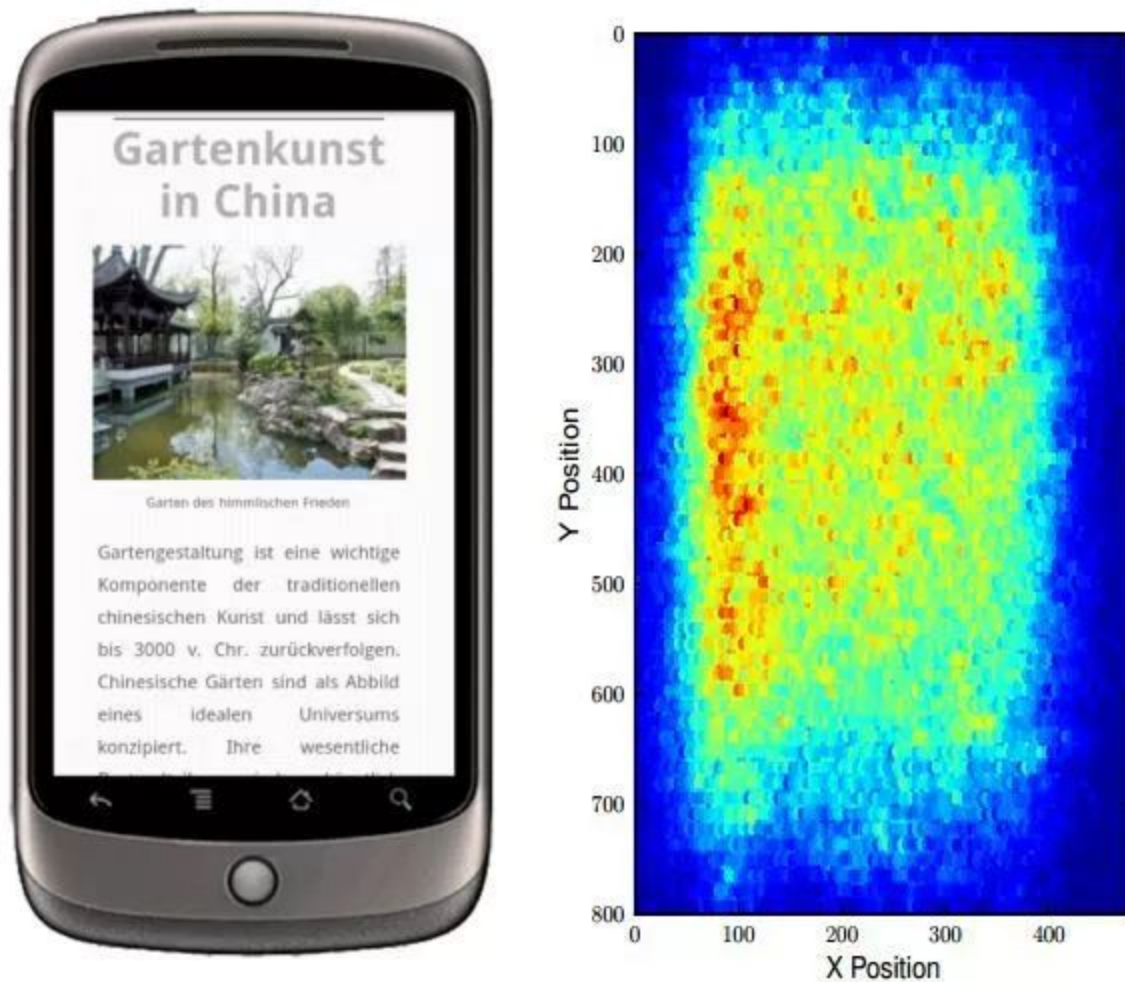
There were three broad categories of readers, and they switched their reading patterns.

SensoMotoric Instruments conducted a study on iPhone reading. They found that just [5% of people read the text](#).

2 Text is not read, headings are used for orientation!
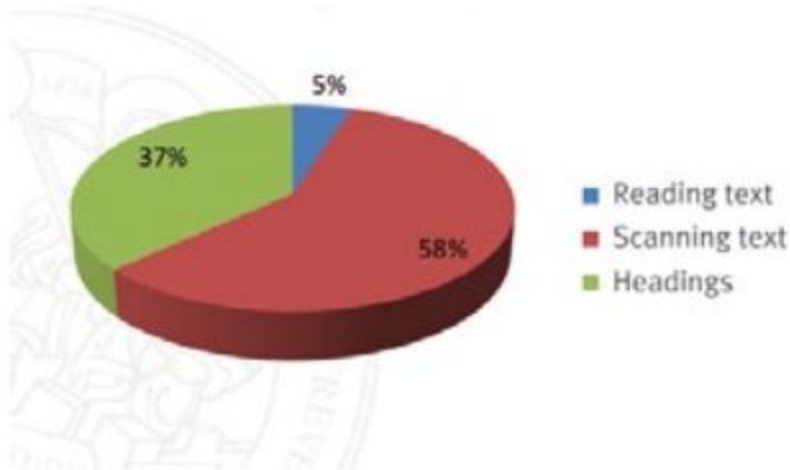
Most participants scanned the text instead of reading it. When the headings were recognized, they appeared to help with orientation.

Our reading habits are rapidly evolving on mobile, but we know that the content needs optimizing for aiding scannability.

You need to leave a lot of white space, use short sentences, choose simple words, small paragraphs, and engaging sub-headings.

This post sheds light on the topic in detail.

Strategy #4: Create blog posts answering your customers' questions

People speak different keywords than the ones they type in search engines to refer to your products, services, and business.

For example, a user might type "salon near me," but using voice search, they would say "what is the nearest salon near me."

You need to carefully listen to the words people use when talking about you.

Once you have collected their common questions and phrases, you can create content for them.

Most companies limit these efforts to a single FAQ page. I recommend creating dedicated blog posts based on your customers' questions.

You can also optimize the existing content on your blog and product pages for these queries.

Finding the questions of your audience and answering them through blog posts will not help with voice search alone.

It is also profitable. River Pools and Spas started following this strategy. They responded to questions from their audience on fiberglass pools.

As a result of content marketing, they were able to save the company after three consecutive weeks of overdrawing their bank account.

The owner, Marcus, shared that a single blog post helped him generate more than 2 million in sales.

The blog post answered a question he repeatedly heard from his customers "How much does a fiberglass pool cost?"

If you are not aware of how your customers describe your product, then you might be missing critical business insights.

Let me share another example.

Airbnb created the perfect experience for their customers by doing things that don't scale.

The founders turned around the company's growth slump by traveling and staying with their hosts. They found insights to create a world-class product for their customers.

Creating content around customers' questions significantly increases your chances of appearing higher in voice search results.

Conclusion

The future of voice search is not predictable. However, we do know that it is gaining considerable traction and its growth is not slowing anytime soon.

That's both good and bad for marketers.

It's good for marketers who understand the power of voice search and start optimizing their content for it.

It's bad for marketers who ignore the trend and continue creating the same old content.

You need to get back to the drawing board and modify your SEO strategy to incorporate voice optimization.

It is hard work, but voice search optimization makes your content closer to human language. Right now is the perfect time to jump on the voice SEO ship and gain an edge over your competition.