

The new-look Google

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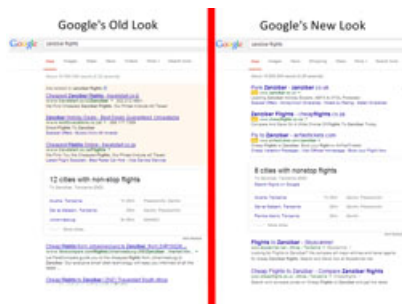
Over the last few months Google search has gone through some intriguing changes. Some are aesthetic, while others incorporate new social media elements into their search results.

Google's new look



(Image: innovativ.com)

I'm sure most of you have already seen the latest version of Google search which has been in effect since March. Google implemented similar changes to their mobile search engine permanently before the below changes were finalised for their desktop search engine. One very noticeable change is the look of the PPC (Pay Per Click) adverts. PPC Ads previously had a different coloured background to distinguish the ads from the organic search results. Now these ads have the same white background as organic search results, and are accompanied by a small yellow 'ad' graphic. The PPC and organic search listings' titles are now bigger and the text font has a wider typeface. The titles are also slightly shorter in character length and the line from underneath each search listing's heading has been removed.



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Google says that the above changes are to improve search result page readability, give it a 'cleaner' look and to have a consistent look for both mobile and desktop search.

The new Google and user search behaviour

While Google's new look has been with us for a few months, we have now had some time to perform an initial analysis of its effect on SEO. I have not noticed a drop in organic search traffic regarding any of the leading South African brands, across various industries which I monitor on a daily basis. Organic search traffic or visits is still the largest source of website traffic in most cases; as well as more often than not providing the highest 'quality' traffic in terms of pages/view and the lowest bounce rate when compared to the other sources of website traffic.

Google Search is more than just search results

Google has merged search and social media comprehensively recently. For example: When an individual google's '#designindaba' you may see Design Indaba-related excerpts from ad agencies' Google+ pages' posts followed by links to Facebook and Twitter content, all to the top right of the search results. I think these Google+ post excerpts will have a major impact on social-related Google searches because they appear as large eye-catching 'ads' depending on if the Google+ post contains an eye-catching image.

Google has also added video highlights to their search result pages from sports games which were played the previous day. These are YouTube videos which are embedded above the top organic search results. This is currently only in the US for now, and covers NHL ice hockey and NBA basketball games.

These changes confirm that Google is working hard to improve the user experience and to provide the most relevant results in the quickest possible time. From an SEO point of view, it's important to optimise everything.

Google Authorship

A relatively old element to Google's social media integration is Google Authorship. I have been implementing Google

Authorship for websites for years now, but I feel it has yet to be harnessed by South Africa's leading brands. Google Authorship integrates an individual's Google+ profile with a particular website or web page that he or she has authored. Google Authorship is an effective means to distinguish your search result listing from others. In my opinion it adds a personal and authoritative quality to a search result listing. Let's also not forget that users are embracing the world of social media and online social connections like never before, so it may attract the attention of users as part of their online social experience.

Organic Search is important for brands

Google's Panda 4.0 algorithm is meant to keep Google at the forefront of the search engine business. Google's ability to weed out websites from its search result pages which offer poor relevance and low value content has improved. Comprehensive SEO-related social media implementation (SMO or social media optimisation) as part of SEO cannot be ignored and is crucial for success in today's South African search landscape.

Sources:

Google.

Search Engine Watch.

ABOUT STEPHEN SANDMANN

Stephen Sandmann is a Senior Digital Strategist at Quirk. He has a keen interest in everything digital.

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