

The SEO Market Review 2013 E-Book

Danny Denhard

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SEO in 2012 is the most sophisticated it has been since its inception, the majority of markets are saturated, Google is evolving at its quickest rate and many more factors and signals have come into effect. With six mid to large size algorithm changes in the past month Google means business in pushing quality websites - not just with a quality heartbeat but quality external signals.

This e-book quizzes some of the best brains in search; (ranging from founders of agencies, to independent consultants to Head of SEO departments) the answers as you will see are honest, open and provide some great insight into the direction of online marketing going into 2013.

This e-book does not only cover SEO, it reviews the impact and importance of content marketing, the next steps for link building and the increasing relevance of Social Media.

The Questions -

- What is SEO in 2012?
- SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?
 - Would you change it?
- What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?
- Where do you see the industry going in 2013?
- What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?
- What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?
- Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?
 - What's the most important element and why?
- Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?
- Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?
 - Where do you see it going?
- Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?
 - And what would your top tip be to future proof?

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Kevin Gibbons

Name - Kevin Gibbons

Company - [Quaturo](#)

Location - London

What do you do? I'm founder of a content marketing agency called Quaturo in London - we specialise in producing outstanding content to get brands noticed online.

Best piece of work to date - we've been doing some great stuff with infographic placement recently - this is by placing content on leading authority websites within a brands niche. And by creating great content, we've managed to open doors for generating coverage on a range of high profile, domain authority 90+ websites which has generated some great links and online attention/buzz for our clients.

Any Specialities - we specialise in content marketing, so our core services are content strategy, content development (infographics/creative writing) and blogger outreach/social promotion.

Twitter - [@kevgibbo](#)

LinkedIn - www.linkedin.com/in/kevingibbons

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012?

In 2012, I think we're seeing SEO from previous years being split into two sides.

1) Technical SEO

2) PR.

So I would say that SEO is now evolving towards the more technical and consultancy side of projects. With content marketing and PR the main focus for driving natural link acquisition. Whereas previously SEO would have been seen as an all-encompassing term to cover on-site/technical optimisation and link building/reputation building.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

Not really - if all you focus on is SEO, I'm not sure you're actually that good at SEO anymore. What I mean by this is that PR and social are now playing such a key role towards influencing search rankings that most great links are now created as a by-product of good PR. Old link building tactics, such as submission-based sites or replicating competitor links are becoming less and less effective towards getting results, to the point that in many cases it's just not worth the effort.

Would you change it?

To be honest I think people worry too much about what things are called! The same is true with inbound/content marketing, or earned media if you want to use the old agency term - but does it really matter what these things are called? It works - that's what's important!

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

Despite the ways things are heading with social integration, you still can't look past links just yet as far as ranking factors are concerned - a website's reputation and how this is viewed as a brand is vital in Google - so in my opinion the top 5 factors to show this would be;

1. Natural links
2. Authoritative/relevant links
3. Clean link profile/history
4. Social links/signals

5. Authorship

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

Social signals and authorship is going to be huge in my opinion. The only reason I didn't emphasis this more heavily in the 2012 answer, is because I think Google are only just getting started with this. But what Google have learned, in my opinion, is that the reputation of content can't just be valued on links alone. User habits have changed and social is too important for sharing content online that it can't be ignored by Google - otherwise Facebook and Twitter search are too much of a threat to them in order to return the best results to searchers.

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

1) Time management - prioritising effort where it's most effective, and minimising busy, unproductive work. 2) Building outreach connections - content development/creativity in a lot of ways is the easy part, having the connections and relationships to promote content to takes a lot of time and hard work. 3) Scaling the Quaturo team whilst keeping the quality of delivery to very high standards and on top of our game.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

I did a lot of [research](#) on this for my [presentation at SMX London](#) this year and at the moment, it's still more of an indirect impact to SEO - great social attention = links from bloggers/media etc. But Google+ already impacts personalised search and freshness of results and it's only going to be an increasingly more important direct impact to organic search. As will signals from Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites too.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

10! For sharing content, online promotion, building a reputation and relationship building - it's vital!

What's the most important element and why?

For Quaturo it's all about audience building for our clients and making sure we can build relationships with key influencers which can act as a platform for promoting great content. Obviously this works both ways and it takes a lot of effort - but it's definitely worth it. The social channel largely depends on the client, but Twitter almost certainly plays a key role - and we find that StumbleUpon can often be underestimated as a great source of targeted traffic too.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

10 - Our business is all about creating great content for clients, that can make a buzz online - so it's a key part of maximising the potential outreach by sharing socially amongst key influencers.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

6 - as a promotional platform/channel? 0! But for authorship and influencing personalised search it's very important.

Where do you see it going?

Social impact towards search is only going to become increasingly important. We're finding that most people have now realised that in order to get their content ranking in Google it's needs a strong social footprint as well as links (it makes sense, it's far more natural!) - plus it's a great platform to reach influencers, bloggers and journalists - to help build your reputation further.

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?

Not if you're doing the right things! Google are making things harder for sites to rank by purely doing SEO - but if you're building an online brand and an audience within your niche - then you're going to be rewarded.

And what would your top tip be to future proof?

Build a brand! It's hard work - but if you're looking to outrank leading brands long-term, it's the only realistic way you can compete online. Online brands can have an advantage here - because they can focus all of their PR and branding efforts towards making an impact online, as well as social and search.



Paddy Moogan

Name - Paddy Moogan

Company - Distilled

Location - Queenstown, New Zealand

What do you do? SEO Consultant

Any Specialities - I'm mainly known for link building but also do a lot of technical SEO

Twitter - [@paddymoogan](https://twitter.com/paddymoogan)

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012?

I still feel like the fundamentals of SEO are still the same as they have always been - you need good content, good links and good technical SEO. There is obviously more to think about than previous years and much more of a focus on social, so this has made the job of SEOs a bit more diverse.

Something that is more important in 2012 is integration between different channels such as organic search and social.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

I think it is fairly accurate, it just encompasses a lot more than traditional SEO ever has. I think there are also lots of arguments around semantics and what to call SEO. Ultimately, many businesses need SEO in one form or another, our job is to figure out what activity will make them the most money. Whether that is technical work, building social followings or conversion rate optimisation - as long as we give our clients a better return from online business, I don't think it matters what we call it.

Would you change it?

I don't think so but I wouldn't mind if we started to refer to it more within online / digital marketing so that it sits alongside other channels that can make money online for businesses.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

Links are still number 1 in my opinion and I can't see them going away any time soon. I'd add in social signals for QDF pages such as news websites but I'm still not seeing loads of evidence of them improving rankings beyond a few weeks. Following these, on-page factors are still high on the list including site architecture and efficient crawling. Unique content still matters as much as ever, freshness helps depending on the keyword and type of site too.

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

In reality, things are not going to change that much. I can see the industry moving more towards content marketing (it is already doing this heavily) but I can see larger companies taking it more seriously. For example I can see larger companies building out larger in-house content teams.

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

- 1) Getting buy-in for big ideas can be tough, in particular big content ideas that may require a lot of resource to create and promote.
- 2) Showing the tangible value of SEO has always been a challenge because results may not happen overnight.
- 3) Encouraging integration between channels is a big challenge, particularly when different agencies work on these different areas.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

There are a few ways that social is important to SEO. I think it allows for genuine engagement with customers that can lead to links, social shares and user generated content - all of which help SEO. The key is integration which is a big challenge.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

Seven or eight right now. It is very important but there are still areas of traditional SEO that take priority and need working on. Traditional things like keywords, content, links and user experience are still really important and shouldn't be overlooked because social is being talked about more.

What's the most important element and why?

To me, social is all about engagement so I'd say this is the most important element. If you are able to engage with your users successfully, many of the other elements become much easier.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

It differs per client because of their diverse industries. To some clients, it is very important and a high priority. To others, they do not have as much of an opportunity because of the nature of their products.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

Right now, probably a five or six. I'd recommend having an account setup for a business, getting rel=author implemented and trying to encourage +1s, but I'm finding it pretty hard to tell clients they should be investing serious resource into Google+. I feel like many SEOs are in a holding pattern right now and are waiting to see what it next for Google+ and if it really does get to the tipping point it needs in order to become mainstream.

Having said that, SEOs need to be prepared for the personalisation that Google+ may keep bringing to search results. Gathering data about customers using Google+ and actively engaging with it would be a very good first step for all businesses.

Where do you see it going?

I think that more features for businesses would be a smart move for Google and integration with other Google Apps products would be great and get influencers on board. They have taken a few steps towards this more recently. For personal users, I think we'll see them adding features that make Google+ more integrated with Android. So having good photo upload / sharing features etc. To really get some traction though, I think they'd need to buy a company with an existing user base and good product. For example I think they could have bought Instagram and tried to integrate with Google+.

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?

Depends on what tactics you use and how long you've used them :)

I'm still not sure that Google are close to an update that weeds out paid links that aren't part of public networks. I think they'll try and iterate on Penguin and push it further to devalue more and more low quality websites, so if you've been using these for many years, there could be reason to panic.

And what would your top tip be to future proof?

Either don't rely on one source of customers, i.e. Google organic search. Or do genuine marketing that goes far beyond quick SEO wins. Go back to basics a little when it comes to PR and marketing to get real customers on board. Try not to rely on tactics that are only being employed to chase part of the algorithm. Build your website into a brand that will be hard for Google to penalise.



Dan Barker

E-business Consultant

[@danbarker](#)

Questions –

What is SEO in 2012?

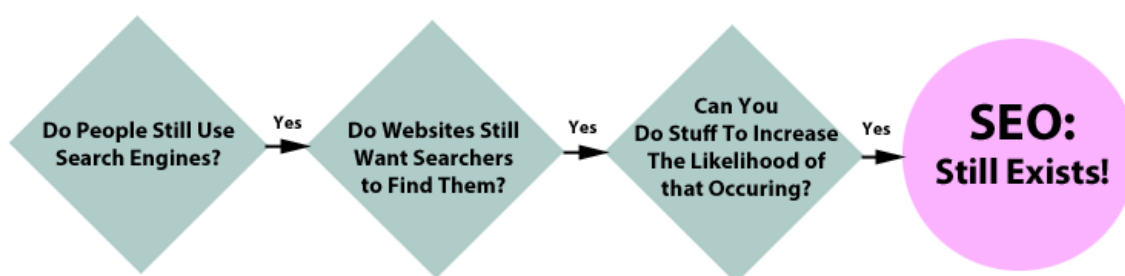
SEO is similar to the way it's been for the last few years. The biggest change this year has been 'Not Provided'. It's coming up to a year since that first started rolling out, and it's really been a horrible change.

We've been bombarded with the phrases 'post-panda' and 'post-penguin', but I don't think either has had nearly the impact of 'Not Provided'. Outside of that, much of the change has been in the industry itself, rather than in SEO itself.

In terms of SEO itself in 2012: people still want to try and find new customers and keep their existing ones via search engines.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

Here is a simple flowchart to answer that question:



I think much of the “should we change the name??” questioning is largely about 3 things:

1. Some popular SEO ‘tactics’ have become less useful – or at least the general perception is they are less useful. And therefore people have switched to different activities. They’ve changed their activities and they therefore question the name of what they’re doing.
2. ‘Inbound Marketing’, which is really just a fairly arbitrary collection of channels, has become recognised as a practice, and ‘Content Marketing’ – quite an old thing – has become popular within SEO. Some SEO agencies are moving toward those & therefore as people see ‘SEO Companies’ switching the word ‘SEO’, they question whether it is still valid.
3. People who a year or two ago would have called themselves ‘SEOs’ have gained skills in other related areas, and therefore want to broaden out the way they talk about themselves.

All of those are really related to people and products. But the term SEO itself – taking action to increase the likelihood of searchers finding your most relevant pages, content, and information – is still useful.

Would you change it?

No. An SEO company may become a Content Marketing company because they've changed their particular focus, a linkbuilding agency may become a linkbuilding and link removal agency, but SEO as an activity still exists.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

1. Keeping up with change. Technical SEO is more complex than ever.
2. Picking the right things to measure, understanding the results, and reacting to them.
3. Knitting together the agendas of different people within companies.
4. Deciding what matters, what doesn't, what is counterproductive, and avoiding wasting money.
5. Simplifying when everything tends to become more complicated.

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

I think the big agencies will get bigger, some of the smaller agencies will disappear, in-house roles will be either higher level in larger companies, or more generalist in smaller companies (ie. fewer 'SEO exec' roles in-house), the questioning over names will continue. The world will continue to spin.

It would be nice if there was more attention on other things within search itself too. Eg. When was the last time you read something about how Amazon search works? Or improving the relevancy of on-site search results from a customer perspective? Or even about action you can take to improve results on other Google products? (Google+, Image Search, the Knowledge Graph, Google Shopping, etc).

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

My work is a bit odd in that I work with lots of different companies, and I do lots of different things. From planning, 'strategy', recruitment, to analytics, project initiation, ui/ux and testing, through to work around all of the digital marketing channels, audience research, writing, etc. Among all that the hard bits are:

1. Fitting everything into the time available.
2. Concentrating on the bits that matter most.
3. Trying to make it easier for things to get done – whether it's me doing them, or someone I work with, or one of their agencies, or one of their technical suppliers, etc.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

I think the 2 are naturally loosely linked, and if you like you can choose to link them more closely and use each to increase the results from the other.

Search brings people to websites, and social media brings people to websites. Search brings traffic to social media properties. Search traffic can be used to impact social media results of a site, and social media traffic can be used to impact search traffic to a site.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

I don't know. I've met lots of great people through the internet and I've learned a lot and I've been able to help some people too. Some of that has been through social media, from newsgroups to IRC to internet forums to Twitter & LinkedIn and Google+. Actually I don't think I've met anyone in person that I first came into contact with through Google+ yet, but I'm sure it will happen.

What's the most important element and why?

Sharing interesting, useful, entertaining, informative, or enjoyable stuff.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

It varies. Over the last couple of years I've worked across over a hundred sites, for a few dozen clients. A few of those have made large amounts of money directly via social media, and a few of them have made nothing directly from social media.

All of them have benefitted indirectly though. Sometimes that's just from their employees using social media to help with their jobs, sometimes it's from coming into contact with exactly the right person to make something happen. I can think of one in particular example who made tens of millions from a product that would definitely not have found its market without social media.

So the answer is 'a mixture'. I think the important thing to figure out is:

1. Is there a potential benefit to doing more than we're doing, or to restructuring what we're doing?
2. What's the best way to test whether that benefit is real?

And of course the benefit doesn't have to be money or sales. It could be helping staff, or learning about the brand, or just being able to pilot things quickly and easily, or finding your next employee or your next job.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

I like Google+ from a personal point of view, and I find it interesting from a commercial point of view. Google will keep trying to make it more important, and tie bonuses to it, and overlap it onto other products.

Where do you see it going?

I think Google treat 'Search' as both a product and as a layer sitting on top of their other products. I think they're treating 'Mobile' in a similar way at the moment – there are specific mobile products, but 'mobile' also sites as a layer on most of their products. And I think they're trying their best to do the same with 'Social'

I actually think it's growing quite nicely too. It's a fairly meaningless number, but it's still interesting to take a look at 'number of pages indexed in Google' for a few popular sites & products:

- Facebook: 6,300,000,000
- Twitter: 2,370,000,000
- Amazon.com: 627,000,000
- Google+: 438,000,000
- Wikipedia: 30,600,000

- Daily Mail: 8,930,000

By that alone, Google+ is doing ok in terms of convincing people to sign up and use it.

One very interesting factor of Google+ that people don't talk about much is that it's almost entirely a content sharing medium. Scroll through your feed and 90% of it will either have a link attached or an image attached. Google search is about content and third-party information; Google+ is about content and third-party information. I don't know if that's on purpose, but it's both clever in that it differentiates it and gives it a definite purpose, and not very clever in that it slows down the rate at which people use it.



Dean Cruddace

Name - Dean Cruddace

Company - SEO Begin

Location - Sunderland

What do you do? SEO

Best piece of work to date - Not one to brag, sorry

Any Specialities - I love taking businesses from a standing start to profit and knowing that I helped make a difference through SEO.

Twitter - [@DeanCruddace](https://twitter.com/DeanCruddace)

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012?

SEO in 2012 for me is understanding and adapting to Google's heavy shift in Search Plus Your World and continuing to cater for the every growing mobile market.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

The fashionistas can call it what they like, it will always be SEO to me

Would you change it?

No.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

I could not nail down specific factors as they would vary dependent on the project but more of a working mechanism would be: Common sense, taking nothing as gospel, testing and keeping the client in the loop about everything you are doing to deliver.

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

Not a huge shift in what we are already doing, but quite possibly more concentration on microdata.

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

The lollipop woman on the school run (she stops the traffic every second car ffs), micra drivers ... oh you mean in my digital day!

Thankfully I have spent the past 11+ years honing where I get my information to help me in my daily life, so it is more about challenging myself to learn something new everyday if I can, keep an open mind to opinions and accept that not everyone will agree with what you may have to say.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

In an overall digital marketing mix it can play a great part in continuing the message, that is the point of social. With regards to the relationship to SEO we have an inkling through various tests over the years to help speed of indexation, topical focus and strength through numbers.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

It is a good 9/10

What's the most important element and why?

The most important part of social for me would be the interaction, good and bad they all add to your brand message. Ignore at your peril.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

I do stress the importance of being active in the conversations around their products and services & SM can be the first port of call for potential, present and returning customers. Let them know you are there to help.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

For SEO it is becoming increasingly important especially from the local SEO perspective, again it is entering the conversation around your products and services. With Google Places continued merging into Local+ and becoming part of our business pages we have the opportunity to strengthen the brand signals and to look after our customers.

To me I use it more on a level of keeping an eye on what is going on in the SEO world although I do occasionally venture off the beaten path.

Where do you see it going?

It's not a huge leap of faith to see Google+ becoming another Google property to be monetized, either through AdSense and/or AdWords integration into brand pages and even PPC in our streams.

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?

For me no. If I panic at every roll out of an algorithm tweak or even a new deployment I would not sleep much. Just roll with the punches when they come, adapt and learn.

And what would your top tip be to future proof?

Don't get over edgy when it's not going the way you expected, have a little patience and revisit your testing environment.



Neal Dougan

Name: Neal Dougan

Company: <http://EvokeSEO.co.uk>

Location: Harrow / NW London

What you do: Search Marketing - PPC – CRO

Best Piece of Work: <https://mahifx.com/john-paulson>

Any Specialties: We are a small search marketing agency that helps companies get more business, brand awareness and prominence through SEO, producing fun and interesting digital stuff, effective PPC campaigns and fine-tuning their websites so that when the traffic comes, it has the best chances of converting (CRO).

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012:

SEO is a really weird place to be at this moment in time. There have been so many changes over the past year that has disrupted the industry and made people think about their processes and activities when it comes to link building and on-page optimization. Companies are starting to change the way they do things in order to have a sustainable future. If they were grey before, they are whiter than white now and making a song and dance about it too. I won't mention any names. Pre 2012,

I was always hearing agencies boasting about how great they were and that they could rank for anything. Well I don't hear them talking now!

SEO now is about "Content Marketing" Oh I love a good buzzword. "Let ship some content marketing and do some #RCS!!! Everyone and their dog has been going on and on about content marketing and it's starting to annoy me to be honest. If you're an SEO worth your salt you would have been doing "Content Marketing" anyway. So why is it so important now? Because the Rockstars tell you to do it? Because you got a nasty message from Google and you thought "Shit, better cancel my subscription to MegaRankingLinks.com and start doing what Tom Critchlow just wrote about"? For me SEO in 2012 is about doing your own stuff, doing what is right and sustainable for your clients and not worrying about what everyone else is telling you to do. Work it out yourself, take everything with a pinch of salt and test out the theories and advice you hear.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

There's no getting away from it that SEO as a name has a bad reputation. When I tell people that I'm an SEO, about 70% of the people have some sort of a clue what I do and about 40% of those people say something to the effect of "You do dodgy stuff online then" or "We hired an SEO and it didn't work" So SEO as a name and as an umbrella term for a whole host of combined tasks, might be the wrong thing to use. Although I'm pretty sure that if I told them I was an "Inbound Marketer" they probably would think I sell bondage gear down Portabello Market.

Despite all this, I still think SEO encompasses content creation, link building, CRO, analytics, social, outreach etc. An alternative would be “Search Marketing” “Online Marketing” but I’m happy with SEO. I kind of like the idea of proving people wrong and changing their perception of an SEO company rather than the craphats that say they can rank you for the term “Handbags” and charge £700 per month then disappear after a year of taking the money.

If we all can provide a positive experience for our clients under the name SEO, then it’s a little way to improving the industries reputation. A long shot, but I’m up for the fight.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

If it’s based around algorithm metrics I’d go for..

1. Web Authority
2. Links - Quality
3. Links – Anchor Text
4. Page Titles
5. Website Content

Top factors in relation to the actual tasks with SEO

1. Content
2. Social
3. CRO
4. Outreach
5. ROI

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

I think more emphasis will be given to creating a resource around a product or a brand. It’s about producing those quality signals, not just for Google, but for your potential customers and audience. As time goes on and Google roll out more updates, I think the low level link building will quickly become a thing of the past and maybe a bombardment of the high quality activities such as guest posting will commence. The danger is that this will eventually become fodder for Google to penalize that activity, due to people doing it wrong and making it spammy. Blog owners, instead of excepting quality posts for free, will except below par articles for money (which I am already seeing in large volumes). It will eventually start to look like a network link. Also I think 2013 will be the year that SEO companies have to change their skill sets. Because Penguin has had such a massive impact on link building, I think SEOs either have to zone in and specialize in one or two activities or improve across the board on all facets of search marketing.

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

1) Educating potential clients about what is important and what will get you the results. Convincing them that what we are offering is not comparable to a quote they had from Company X who said that they can produce 3 infographics and rank them for 5 keywords for £4000, within a competitive niche.

2) Dealing with web developers that have read SEOmoz a couple of times and think that they know more than you.

3) Working with clients that suddenly want to cut corners in terms of content creation, and having to pick up the pieces when things don't turn out the way it should.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

Yes, it's very important. It has to be a part of your overall strategy. To seed content, to attract traffic, to engage with your audience, to attract links and ultimately get more customers for your clients. Also I think it will no doubt start playing an even bigger part in rankings, and has a major trust signal for Google over traditional links and link building.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

I'd say an 8/10. It's a means to connect with people in your industry and a way of getting new business without the hard sell. I tend to use Twitter and LinkedIn for business and Facebook for messing about on. Although if you look at some of my tweets, you'll realize I mix both business and messing about!

What's the most important element and why?

For me it's Twitter. It's where I connect with people in our industry, where I shared ideas, articles and also where I rant quite a bit about all subjects. According to Klout, I'm an authority on "The Sea", "The Olympics" and being rude to people.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

We don't offer a social media service to our clients, but we certainly utilize the power of SM to seed content, create a buzz about brands and also to build authority within different niches. So probably would give it a 10.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

It all depends on how successful it becomes. It's a long way off from being the finished article, but the effect that I see it having on rankings, especially personalized SERPS is huge. Also with Google Places now integrated into Google+, I think what may evolve is a Google version of LinkedIn.

Where do you see it going?

As I mentioned before, a Google+ version of LinkedIn is on the cards. Links will become less of a ranking factor and it will move into social signals, especially from Google+ as Google can police that better than other platforms.

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?

Not really. As long as you're doing a lot of the right things and if you have to do the low level / frowned upon things, then do it in moderation or away from the money site. As you all know, it's all about having a good mix of links and varied anchors. Check out <http://ahrefs.com> to see your link profiles in detail and potentially what Google sees of your link building efforts.

And what would your top tip be to future proof?

I hate repeating what people say, but I'm going to say it anyway. Content. Penguin is a sure fire signal that Google will assign a higher level of prominence to great content. I've seen it first hand on a massive scale last October on a project I was doing, where we were ranking for very competitive terms on just social and a small number of authoritative links. So there it is.



Dan Sharp

Name - Dan Sharp

Company - Screaming Frog (<http://www.screamingfrog.co.uk>)

Location - Henley-on-Thames

What Do You do? I'm founder and Director of Screaming Frog who are a search marketing agency that also develop and sell some SEO software.

Best piece of work to date - We are probably most well known for our Screaming Frog SEO Spider tool. Although we do plenty of other cool stuff for clients :-)

Twitter - [@screamingfrog](https://twitter.com/screamingfrog)

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012?

The SEO industry is constantly evolving and we have seen big changes in the landscape and our responsibilities and practices as SEOs over the past couple of years in particular.

The fundamentals have stayed much the same however; deliver qualified traffic to a website to increase conversions by improving visibility.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

For me, yes. SEO has grown up and it's true that much of what we do is just good marketing, but I'm not convinced the growth in our responsibilities or negative connotations for 'SEO' require a name change. Just better education.

You can sell it as inbound marketing, but that's nothing particularly new. SEO can involve all or some of the elements of inbound marketing. I'm fine with the definition of inbound marketing and its use, but I prefer not to forget about paid search as an online marketer. As a consequence, I generally use good old terms such as search engine marketing or online marketing anyway.

It's the same as the new content marketing agencies appearing who also do SEO - it's nothing new, just a new way to sell it. If you weren't already creating (or at least advising) on content in SEO, then you were probably doing it wrong in the first place.

Would you change it?

Was I not clear enough? :-) No.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

Links still rule the algorithms without a doubt. They lay the foundation of trust and authority which play such an important role in scoring.

The influence of site architecture and internal link structure, particularly on larger websites are often underestimated.

After that, you're talking title tags, anchor text etc.

Social signals are still in their infancy at the moment, but they have hugely influenced the traditional link graph of the web. So hardly ground breaking information, but these will certainly have greater influence moving forward.

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

I believe as an industry it's a healthy place to be with plenty of growth and opportunity. It's also an exciting place to be, as our remit grows, allowing us to develop skills and responsibilities. So it's a fun time to be in SEO, with plenty of challenges as it's harder and more complex than it's ever been.

I see much of the current trends continuing. There will be increased focus on creative content, developing assets and traditional marketing and PR techniques in SEO which is a good thing. Search engines will continue to evolve as ever, so we will see SEOs and agencies who can't adapt from old school techniques die. Or at least, out of jobs.

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

My team, clients and projects. Not necessarily in that order! If you're not challenged then you're not developing.

I like to think all three provide me with plenty of challenges that become rewarding.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

If you consider them purely as a signal in scoring I believe the weight of social signals to be much less than links. For example you can't rank (in the longterm) for competitive queries on social signals alone, whereas you can on links currently.

However as the web matures, content that used to get 100 links now only get 10 or 20, but with lots of social shares. Therefore socials' importance in the search engines will increase as the search engines continue to evolve.

Social can certainly be a immensely effective way to communicate and share your message or content though and help attract links, drive visitors and conversions etc. So for those reasons, it's absolutely essential as part of your SEO strategy.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

10 for Screaming Frog as a business. The success of our SEO spider tool has largely been down to communication via social, namely Twitter.

We haven't marketed the tool really, just tweeted about it and it took off from there! The feedback and suggestions we receive as well are fantastic. The value for us has been huge.

What's the most important element and why?

Away from pure business sense, social is just great for building relationships and sharing good content. That is of course, why it's there :-).

It helps you connect on a personal level with ease. I've made some good friends through Twitter in particular, which just wouldn't have happened without it. Relationships like this are important opportunities in business.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

Social media is part of all our clients' SEO strategies. But the importance depends on the client. Some of our clients are very savvy and could teach us a thing or two. One in particular, has a huge following in the UK and USA and does a fantastic job of communicating their personality and brand (by being fun and humorous!) while offering customer support and marketing cool stuff at the same time. As a medium, it's certainly a 10 for them considering the rewards they have seen.

For other clients it can be less important, due to their business, industry or target audience for example. The trend we are seeing is that more and more businesses are understanding and getting value from social. Even those that don't find it comes naturally, want to try their hand.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

Again, as a signal alone it's pretty small. I'm not a massive fan of Google+ and it only really became a consideration with search plus your world integration.

Furthermore it's integration with Google authorship means that you have to pay attention.

AuthorRank as a signal is something the search engines are very serious about and will undoubtedly become increasingly important.

Google also switched place pages to Google plus pages for business to drag more users over.

In the real world, virtually none of my non-techie friends even know what G+ is though. Or care.

It's still dwarfed by Facebook and Twitter.

Where do you see it going?

It depends on its success over the next year or so. Google is desperately trying to make it work, but if it doesn't, it will disappear (like we've seen with other G products!).

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?

No. There will always be updates and changes to algorithms, you shouldn't be worrying about them.

If you are, it's probably because you know you're doing something you shouldn't or something that won't last forever.

So it's time to change, try to think like a search engineer and focus your energy from worrying, to working on the good stuff that they will want to reward in the long-term, for sustainable results.

And what would your top tip be to future proof?

Apart from the above, diversifying. Like anything in business, never rely on just one thing. Don't put all your eggs in one basket, because things can change quickly.

You see it more regularly than you might expect, when businesses have one major client, lose them and half their revenue disappears forcing them into layoffs or admin. You can't rely on one source for business, you can't rely on one type of marketing (or link!) and you certainly can't rely just on Google.

We blogged about a penalty an old client received recently which Google got completely wrong (<http://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/when-google-gets-penalties-wrong/>). So it highlights just how important this is!



Pete Handley

Name – Peter Handley

Company - theMediaFlow

Location – Alton, Hampshire (office), Portsmouth, Hampshire (home)

What Do You do? I'm the Director of SEO, Responsible for strategy and delivery for all theMediaFlow's SEO campaigns

Best piece of work to date –

1) HippoBag – a campaign that we've managed to really strongly influence traffic and conversions for despite difficulties in getting work implemented on the website (for a variety of reasons)

2) SEO work at my previous role at Vertical Leap for easyCar.com, which was later nominated for European Search Award after I'd left. Saw big increases to traffic and revenue as a result of content driven SEO growth strategy.

Any Specialities - theMediaFlow is a specialist online marketing company, working in highly competitive sectors. We have experience across a wide variety of businesses, working with them not only to achieve higher search engine rankings, but also to develop and deliver an integrated digital marketing strategy. Very focussed on not just driving traffic, but also conversions and ROI.

Twitter - [@ismepete](#)

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012?

For all that everyone says about how SEO is dead and what not, it's surprising in that context how I am still doing a lot of what I did when I started in 2006. Title tags still need to be optimised, you still write Meta Descriptions, look at website and internal link architecture, setting alt tags for images and such.

What I've seen happen since I started is that its moved away from being the domain of the really technical types, and has become much more central to "marketing" type folks (though people with technical skills are still very much in demand).

SEO is about optimising websites to gain increased visibility from search, which in turn should drive traffic and conversions to that website. A whole host of other skills can come in to it too, from social, from conversion rate optimisation, being able to analyse huge amounts of analytics or link data for a site – but a lot of the fundamental reasons to employ an SEO are still broadly the same – you are usually doing it to get more traffic, and make more money from that traffic source.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

Personally, I still like and prefer the name "SEO". I understand the movement to rebrand to "inbound marketing" and other terms to a degree, but I don't really like that name.

This question comes up because SEO has evolved to the point where it isn't ***just*** SEO anymore – it's about Online or Digital Marketing for a website.

SEO as a term very much describes the most important elements of my current role. I still optimise websites so that search engines will bring them more traffic. But if that traffic doesn't convert, of course we'll offer assistance on conversion rates for the site, as to keep the client happy, they need ROI. When a customer wants to move toward establishing a presence on social, and you are their go-

to guy/gal to ask about online marketing questions, are you going to turn them away when you have a lot of the knowledge that they are wanting to learn?

So, yes its accurate, it's just that we do more than just SEO (if you are doing it right)

Would you change it?

No, not really – if I were to describe myself, it would either be as an SEO or Online/Digital Marketer – these words exist and have meaning already, and I don't feel a need to change it further.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

Not necessarily in this order, as different factors have helped various sites massively in their own ways for me over the last year:

1. Good On Page Content (old one, but still massively important)
2. <title tags> (old one, but still massively important)
3. Schema/Rich Snippets (less so from "ranking" but great for clickthrough's)
4. External Links (with a focus on quality and brand as opposed to volume and commercial anchor text)
5. Internal Linking & Site Architecture (old one, but still massively important)

I've seen making on-page changes & developing content have a lot of impact over the last 12 months, so long as a site hadn't been hit with a Panda filter (I did have problems with a site we were developing great content for, but was suffering after being hit by Panda, and really struggled to get moving).

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

Similarly to what we've seen in 2011 & 2012, Google wants us to be focussing on quality (content, link building) and building brands. Things that everyone has been talking about for a while, quite sensibly.

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

Communication, Communication, communication

More seriously, it can be frustrating, particularly when you have various engaged parties on a campaign and are having to chase for things from them all. Project management and organisation are essential skills for the modern SEO.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

I think it's debatable at the moment if social directly affects SEO. But a lot of the time, what works well socially, also attracts links to aid with SEO and vice versa. So, I think that they dovetail well together.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

On a personal level – probably a 9 – I get a lot of value from my Twitter and Facebook networks that aids me professionally, and I've made a lot of friends through Twitter that I wouldn't trade for anything (well, maybe a boatload of cash – but it would have to be a lot).

What's the most important element and why?

Engagement and portraying yourself in a way that you are comfortable with. It's a "social" media, it's not all just about selling, but brand awareness (company or personal), being personable, being useful and helpful will serve you well in this sphere.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

It depends – for one of my clients, I'd currently say 0. For the rest of them, between 4-8 – important but not necessarily central to what they are doing for the majority – for some niches, social works better than others.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

I guess its inevitably going to have some influence – it's a Google product that they are pushing hard, but I don't think it's particularly vital just yet – lets go with a number between 1-3.

For me, I'd give it a 2 – I push content there, and have had a couple of decent conversations, but none of my real friends are there, and there hasn't been a network of "new" people for me to find and engage with as there has been on Twitter

Where do you see it going?

Hopefully the graveyard, but I see it meandering around not doing a great deal for some time to come really.

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?

It depends on what work you've been doing I suspect – if you've been continuing to spam the anchor text, duplicate content like there is no tomorrow and have escaped thus far – probably.

If you are doing what Google wants you to do (building a brand, creating excellent content), then you shouldn't have too much to worry about.

I think that Panda and Penguin caught people off guard a bit because for all that you would spout about doing things **right** prior to these updates, the truth was, you could get away with an awful lot of manipulation, and in a lot of cases, HAD to manipulate to compete (I'll ignore that any SEO work can seem manipulative for this point). These updates levelled that playing field to a degree, though many sites that manipulated on a large scale but were big brands got away with it, and still are. Users expect to see certain players when they search for certain things, and Google has to give certain sites a pass in that sort of context in my opinion.

And what would your top tip be to future proof?

Do things right – don't take the "easy" path. Building a brand (I'm as sick of that term as everyone else, but they are all right) isn't easy, producing quality in all things you do isn't easy – but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be doing them. The shortcuts are only going to get harder to get away with as time goes on, and fixing the issues that result from these is probably going to be more work than doing it the right way in the first place would have been.



James Gurd

Name – James Gurd

Company - Digital Juggler

Location – London, UK

What do you do? E-commerce and Digital Marketing Consultancy helping B2B and B2C clients with advice, support and guidance to help them improve their web presence and profitability.

Best piece of work to date – Recently I co-authored the Smart Insights SEO Guide, a 7 step interactive guide for people wanting to learn about SEO and how to implement SEO strategies

(<http://www.smartinsights.com/guides/seo-7-steps-to-success-guide/>).

Any Specialities – Managing e-commerce RFP/ITT projects to help companies plan the build of a new website or re-platform an existing website. Have done this for major brands including SweatyBetty and Smythson. In-house e-commerce & digital marketing training – both generalist (e.g. managing e-commerce teams) and specialist (e.g. creating a content marketing plan).

Twitter – [@jamesgurd](https://twitter.com/jamesgurd)

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012?

I'm hoping that SEO moves further away from a focus on search engines to a centralized goal of delivery excellent customer experiences that can then be optimised for search engines.

The recent Google updates have made more people focus on quality, not quantity, which is a good thing. I think that 2012/2013 will see a more enlightened evaluation of what SEO really means from Client and Agency side marketing teams. I expect to see the silo walls of areas like SEO, PR, Marketing etc start to fall and better collaboration to get greater impact from investment.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

I don't think it is – SEO suggests a focus on the search engines, not the customer, which to me is wrong. You can't optimise something you don't have, so you have to start with what is going to add value to customers and encourage them to visit your website & convert.

I think what we understand by the term SEO is evolving quickly and becoming more diverse. It includes areas like social media, PR, content marketing, rich media etc.

Would you change it?

No – it has taken long enough to establish the SEO industry and I think change would just confuse people. More and more business owners I meet are comfortable with what SEO means, even if they don't fully grasp the detail.

Plus, we will only end up with another industry acronym that gets banded around by lots of people who don't really know what it means or how to apply it practically. How about Content Optimisation Co-ordinated Knowledge.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

1. On-page – doesn't matter what people say, you can get quick SEO results by simply ensuring all on-page factors are effectively optimised. I've seen Clients get to page1 within weeks by focusing on page titles/ descriptions/H tags/URLs etc. Obviously you need other techniques to maintain this in the long-term but don't ignore the importance.
2. Link environment – Penguin has had a pretty large impact + you should be building quality links anyways as they have a better chance of sending you direct traffic, not just acting as a ranking signal.
3. Uniqueness of content – thankfully updates like Panda are downgrading low quality content sites, so it encourages people to think harder about content instead of churning out volume for the sake of it.
4. Mark up – finding ways to make your content stand out from the crowd. Started years back with things like customer reviews but the recent Authorship mark-up is a big thing for content creators.
5. Social signals & PR – tapping into networks to encourage content sharing and voting, getting other people to validate the quality of what you provide.

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

Consolidation of SEO and PR industries, possibly via better collaboration or via specialists learning complimentary skills e.g. SEO learning the basics of PR to syndicate content, PR learning how to optimise their PR content. I'm hoping we'll see a drop off in the number of people who claim to be SEO experts but aren't (by the way, I'm not claiming to be an expert in case you're wondering, I'm more of an e-commerce generalist). Some people pass off SEO advice that is ill thought through and demonstrates a lack of understanding of how to apply SEO good practice in an e-commerce environment.

I also expect SEOs to have to blend the marketing skills with technical optimisation. I've only met a handful who cover the spectrum of skills and technical optimisation is critical to SEO – if the site isn't optimised and you have performance problems (e.g. lots of crawl errors from broken URLs), it impedes all the other sexy stuff like link building and social.

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

My absolute no.1 is not taking everything Google says at face value. Yes you need to understand the guidelines and keep on top of announcements (algo updates, search highlights, penalties etc) but you also have to learn to interpret the search landscape and use your own experience to shape plans.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

It's about getting a bigger reach for your content assets and key messages. We all know about the growth in usage of social media and there are plenty of examples of brands using social channels well to increase audience participation. Social has the potential to amplify the impact of content

marketing plans via content sharing, sending stronger ranking signals to search engines. Social needs to be thought through both on and off site. On site you have social voting and bookmarking, helping promote individual URLs. Off-site, you have social networks through which to share content, identify and build relationships with influencers, communicate with bloggers etc. SEO and Social are closely linked now that search engines are investing time and resource into indexing social content.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

Hard to say - are we comparing this with other SEO tactics on the basis of having finite resource and where would I prioritise? Plus, it is going to be more relevant for some brands than others. For example, how much social activity are you going to get for an Insurance brand vs. large retailer like H&M? If I had to pluck a number out the air, I'd say 8 because search engines are planning to improve their indexing of social content, so the better a website can use social to extend the reach and relevance of its webpages, the better.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

That varies between 0 and 10!!! I know Clients who don't take it seriously enough and treat it with little respect. They play with it, thinking that just by tweeting or posting updates to FB, they have a 'social media plan'. They also don't have a structured process for measuring and analyzing social media presence, which is a major oversight. That said, I have other Clients who really embrace it and prioritise it as a marketing channel, dedicating time each week to maintaining & growing their presence.

The degree of importance placed on social is directly related to the interests and motivations of the person looking after social media. If they don't get it and don't really use it themselves, it's a bit of a tumble weed affair.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you? Where do you see it going?

At the moment, I don't think it's as important as being well established on key social networks like Twitter & Facebook (unless your audience are regular G+ users – best way to find out is via a poll) – so I'd say a 4 or 5. However, Google is going to fight tooth and nail to get people using G+ as it attempts to enhance its social media toolkit. I think the G+ Hangouts could be a potential goldmine for companies – they can be used for many purposes, from customer service forums to crowd sourcing product ideas. Some retail brands are already using this. I think this could be a great way to get people talking to you via G+ and commenting on links you post + giving you some +1 love. Inevitably, the more times your URL is given a +1 by customers, the greater the love it will get from Google in comparison to competitive URLs with no +1 love. Interestingly, Google has been experimenting with G+ and recently added the sharing option to organic listings in SERPs, so you don't even have to visit a URL before you can post in to your G+ feed. So in summary, there is a benefit to being active with G+ but I advise Clients not to launch a presence unless they have the resource to manage it properly. As a first port of call, get the +1 button added to your webpages so people can at least use G+ for social voting.

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about? And what would your top tip be to future proof?

No – why panic over something you can't foresee? Inevitably there are winners and losers with each major update and even if you have been following Google's guidelines to the letter, there is no

guarantee you won't get stung (see Wil Reynolds open appraisal of what happened to SEER - <http://www.seerinteractive.com/blog/7-lessons-i-learned-while-being-banned-in-google-for-12-hours>)

My top tip is to focus on your customers, not search engines. Do everything you can to provide a high quality website, great content etc. Identify high quality domains to link to and wherever possible find bloggers & thought leaders with whom you can build relationships and encourage them to review your products/services and tell their audience about you. Where relevant, develop a content marketing plan that aims to give your customers amazing content that helps them make a purchase decision and/or gives them entertainment (how much content you can produce really depends on your industry and the appetite/need of customers). Once you've got all that in place, work out how best to optimise for SEO. And don't be afraid to use SEO to identify gaps for content marketing/link building etc and plug these as tactical campaigns.



Rob Watts

Name - Rob Watts

Any Specialities - Grumbling

Twitter - @robwatts

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012?

Huge question I'll try and stay on track –

At its fundamentals, I would say that SEO is still very much what it always was back when it all started; namely the optimisation of content so that it performs well in the search engines.

That “duh” moment aside, it has of course moved waaaaay beyond the point of ensuring that a few keywords are in the right places or that you happen to have a few links with your target ranking anchor text.

Whilst it's tempting to stick to the silo of what some might say it is, I don't really think that it can be looked at in isolation, at least not in any old school definitive sense.

Today, if you're an SEO of any use then you just have to have a broad understanding of a multitude of elements and disciplines that influence a domains performance. If you don't understand how it all fits together then you could easily be missing an important part of the pieces that constitute the whole.

Examples of this might be something like the concept of site speed and the relationship to conversions and performance. You'll understand that low conversions in addition to poor sales might also contribute to low social signals. You'll appreciate how the lack of such social signals could potentially be the writing on the wall in 2013 and beyond.

It might be something to do with knowing how and why videos or images or news appear in the SERPS. What triggers them, and how you can use this knowledge to piggyback upon them without pushing too far or getting dinged.

It might be about a PPC campaign and how that neatly dovetails with organic performance and CTR. It might be about the relationship between a good snippet (base or rich) and CTR and how that might impact subsequent data refreshes; or learning about how Google constantly experiments and plays game with site owners, across niches, verticals or geographies and also knowing the possible whys.

It might be an uber understanding of the various shades of grey that could contribute to getting a domain banned or dinged.

An appreciation for what Negative SEO is, how it works, and what to do if it happens.

An understanding of the myriad of other shitty practices that are out there from old school 302 hijacks to hacks, to XSS attacks. Outdated software vulnerabilities. How they happen and why they are bad. What you should do to guard against them etc

How the likes of Google or Bing perceive you, be that through general domain use or direct quality scoring.

A good SEO will have an almost DNA level understanding of Google and how and why it operates in the way it does. They should be all over GA or WMT, they'll look at what is and what isn't reported and ask themselves why.

An SEO at their A game should be able to evaluate a domain not only from the perspective of its base structure onsite, or the variances within its offsite metrics but also how it fits in to the general Google view of the world *and that niche*. The value add that a domain might bring, the multitude of factors that could help it separate itself from the rest and the ever prescient threat of Google or some other players ability to disrupt or takeover.

It's too big a piece to elaborate on every single nuance but if you don't have a firm grasp of search engine political history, or don't appreciate the debates that have informed search engine updates and policies we see today then it's likely that you might be missing a trick or two.

What's a good link? What's a bad link? Why? What's a link condom? What's a good site map? Are they always necessary? Is a PDF link worth having? Should you read patents? Why?

I could get very circuitous and bore everyone silly so I'll close by saying that for me and I'd imagine many others, SEO today is still about what happens onsite and off, yet increasingly it's also about what happens in the middle; that huge unseen hand that whilst dressed up as algorithmic is often anything other. The old maxim applies of don't make them look stupid.

SEO is still an evolving piece which in many ways is dictated by the engines need to make the manipulation of its result set as difficult as it possibly can be. Increased adoption of signals that are difficult to game, manual backstage interventions, policy shifts etc all help send a message that commercially at least the SERPs are a continually moving target and that this is likely to increase. Available space within them is also likely to contract. The knowledge graph is another massive challenge for all manner of publishers but some might say that Google as a content platform was inevitable so...To bang that well known drum, spend less on SEO and buy adwords.

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

Yes, for reasons outlined above. You're still trying to optimise content and strategies via the use of tactics that make best use of the factors that you consider to contribute to good rankings. Good onsite, clever offsite and an appreciative imagination for what might be going on in the middle.

Would you change it?

And call it what? Inbou..... :-O No.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

1. Great Product
2. Great Links
3. Relevant Content
4. Good Social integration
5. Good Platform

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

Increasingly Social with an emphasis on sustainable data driven content

What are the top 3 things that challenge you daily?

1. My kids
2. Myself
3. My Cat.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

Very – If you are online and you are looking to own a product space then you must be social media aware.

You should be using all of the opportunities it presents and touching as many of those points as you

can. Google might well tell us today that such signals are only lightly factored but you can pretty much rest assured that their absence will overtime do more harm than good.

It makes sense to think that a socially optimised platform like say, G+ might put a degree of weight towards content that received regular citations. The inclusion of the social media tab in GA is a good insight in to some of the thinking behind the product. To suggest that the analytics guys, social guys and search girls at Goog don't discuss these things is absurd at best and insane at worst. Take your pick.

Whilst social signals might not appear to be that relevant to rankings today, it would be silly to think that this is likely to remain the case.

The other thing to consider is that social signals are often replicated across a multitude of different places. Twitter feeds, stumbles, scrapers etc all have the potential to drive traffic. How a search engine may interpret these is up for debate but it's one to think about for sure.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

10 – If you are out there in the right places talking to your constituencies then you are doing something right for your brand, or your niche. If you aren't there, then your competitors will be. Get in there and try and own it.

What's the most important element and why?

Oxygen – we'd all suffocate without it.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

It very much depends. Some folks have different priorities and aims. Most get it, some don't. The trick is to try and ensure that they see it for the 10 that it should be.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

Today: 5

Where do you see it going?

It's there and it's silly to ignore it. Ultimately it's about resource. Not every company has the capacity to spend all day creatively building audience on multiple platforms. When we see content ranking for brand or competitive keywords from G+ then we'd be mad not to try and be there in those spaces. For some, it offers an easy opportunity to occupy a space that might take years to reach organically. So yes, it's certainly important.

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?

If you have a quality product and watch your link profile regularly and have been proactive in any issues you may have seen then... no. If it goes tits up, then talk to someone about it but only if you're convinced that you have something worth ranking. Lots of websites get killed by stealth, silently because they failed to keep up.

And what would your top tip be to future proof?

Own your brand and niche, be that authority. Build audiences everywhere, go to where your customers hang out, add value, create conversations, become ubiquitous. Don't be too stupid, be more honest with yourself.



Yousaf Sekander

Intro and bio -Yousaf Sekander is the Head of SEO at UK based digital marketing agency RocketMill. He is passionate about search engine optimisation, social media, UX/Usability, Android, Flash & Adobe Air development. In his my spare time, he enjoys reading books & spending time with his family.

Name – Yousaf Sekander

Company - RocketMill

Location – Crawley, UK

What do you do? Help clients understand the importance of digital marketing. Put in place campaigns that deliver high return.

Best piece of work to date – [Social Crawlytics](#)

Any Specialities – RocketMill specializes in local search, we have a fantastic team of local search engineers.

Twitter - [@ysekand](#)

Questions -

What is SEO in 2012?

SEO as a name is a hot topic - Is SEO an accurate name in 2012?

SEO is not what it used to be therefore the name will evolve.

Would you change it?

No, not right now.

What do you think are the top 5 factors in SEO at the moment?

1. Content
2. UX
3. Social Relationships

Where do you see the industry going in 2013?

1. Content will play an even bigger role
2. Conversion rate optimisation is going to become a huge market.

What do you think the importance of social media is to SEO?

All my SEO campaigns have been social media centric, SEO without social media just doesn't make sense in this day and age.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to you?

8 ½

What's the most important element and why?

Word of mouth.

Out of ten how important is Social Media to your clients?

6 purely because some of the verticals we work in.

Out of ten how important do you think Google+ is for SEO and to you?

At the moment probably 5-6 but it will become more important than that over the course of next year.

Lastly, do you think the next Google update is something to panic about?

If you are doing the right things then you should never worry or panic about anything. That might be a simplistic way of looking at things, but it really does come down to just that.

And what would your top tip be to future proof?

Produce content that helps your existing clients and helps educate your potential clients. People are consumers of digital content and many of them just want to learn something about what you do and how you do it.