

NEWSLETTER

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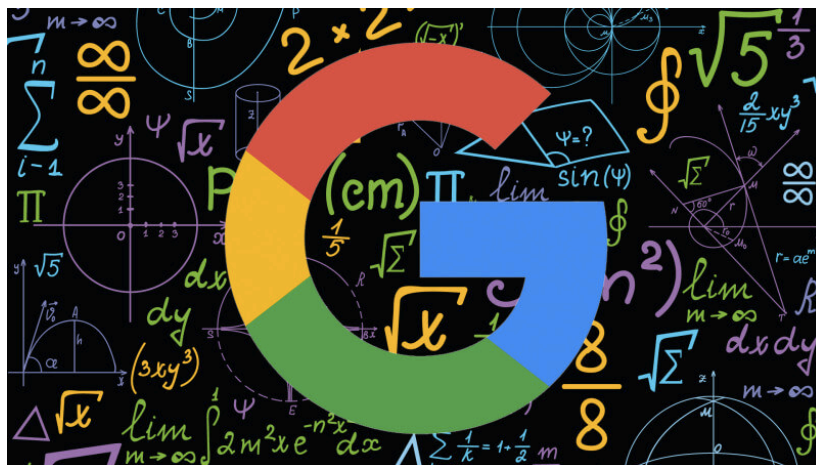
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NOTABLE CHANGES IN SEO WORLD IN 2018



We have witnessed some big changes in the SEO world in 2018. From big algorithm updates to mobile first indexing & changes in Google search console, there is a lot to catch up on.

Search ranking and algorithm updates

Speed update. Google pre-announced that they will be launching the Speed update anytime soon in January but launched it five months later in June. At first, many website owners and SEO professionals were flipping out, thinking that it will adversely affect their site ranking, but Google confirmed that this **update** will only affect the slowest sites. Google said it “only affect a small percentage of queries.”

Medic update. Clearly the biggest search ranking algorithm update in 2018. Google launched the **Medic update** around August 1 & confirmed it after the SEO community took notice and approached them to get more information. At first Google shrug it off saying that it just another “broad core algorithm update” that they do multiple times a year, but this update was different as it specifically impacted health and YMYL categories.

Other algorithm updates. Along with the Medic update, Google also launched **March core Update** and **April core update**.

Mobile-first indexing

Google started hinting that they will be going mobile first very soon....in 2016. Yeah, they were planning to go mobile first since 2016 and fully shifted to mobile first indexing in 2018.

For those who are unaware of it, Google finally decided to index the internet from the view of a smartphone instead of desktop. They started sending notifications via Google Search Console to inform the site owners about this shift. Today, Google claims that almost 50% of the websites have been shifted to mobile first indexing.

Here's a Google guide on how you can [prepare for mobile first indexing](#).

SEO changes

Structured data. Google is putting a lot of emphasis on structured data & schema. From [speakeable markup](#) for voice search related queries, a brand new [indexing API for job posting schema](#) to image search changes, various updates to [recipe markup](#), new job posting [guidelines](#), Q&A schema, live stream support, datasets schema, [how to, QA, FAQs schema](#) and so much more.

Other changes. Google not only introduced new schemas & API but also dropped support for the old ones like news meta tag, the standout tag and editors pick in Google news. This move was seen as an attempt to appear unbiased because all of the internet giants are facing allegation of partial treatment from a lot of publishers & users.

Google's effort around the dynamic rendering & lazy loading content and photos is an effort you've seen a lot around with JavaScript SEO in 2018 & will continue through 2019.

Personalization. As we mentioned earlier, the two internet giants Facebook and Google were accused of misusing personal data in 2018. However, Google [said](#) that they do not use personalization that much and it is limited to showing relevant local results. "BUT" the duck duck go founder says otherwise. He [explained](#) in a long Quora post that how Google misuses your personal data and how privacy becomes a myth when you use any of the Google products or services.

Google Search Console and other tools

Google launched a brand new search console in 2018. Just like most of their updates, they first launched the beta version of it and then [removed the beta tag](#) and fully launched it for everyone. They also provided a way to import your old search console reports and data to the new one.

Google also started showing Search Console snapshots directly in the search results for site owners. They also changed the limits and quotas on crawling and indexing within search console, removed the ability to use the public URL submission tool & provided convenience to the site owners by [automatically verifying](#) them with their Google Analytics account.

Google also tested new form of domain properties for cross site reporting, added a number of reports for event listing, AMP, links, mobile usability and more. They also launched several tools in 2018, and one of the best from the lot was [URL inspection tool](#).

This wonderful tool gives a snap shot of how Google sees your page. Pretty awesome, isn't it?

They also heard the demand of the SEO community and finally allowed us to view 16 months of historical data. Not only that but they also expanded the API to provide us with 25,000 rows of data.

Google local

Google Posts. Google spent a lot of time polishing **Google Posts**. They tested many UI around Google Posts on both desktop and mobile searches and also updated the My Business Console to enable Google Posts on the web or through the mobile app.

However, all these efforts from Google didn't yield the type of results they were expecting since many local SEO experts said that the Google posts traffic and engagement level is on the decline.

Google My Business. Google not only updated the GMB API several times in the past year but also updated the GMB mobile app to allow business owners to manage their listing on the go. They added more insights data, analytics, branded searches, more query data and also launched an **agency dashboard** as well.

Mobile search and voice assistants

The increasing popularity of voice assistants has made many SEOs take keen interest in voice SEO. Although Google Home is considered the smartest one out there, but the competition is neck & neck since all the tech giants like Apple, Microsoft & Amazon have their own home assistants. But we can give credit to Google home for being the first home assistant that comes equipped **with a display**.

From an SEO perspective, we couldn't care less about which one is the best, but rather very much interested in how we can beat the competition & secure the number one spot in voice search results. We know that featured snippets play a big role in it, and as the usage will grow, so will the SEO tactics to outrank each other.

Google UI changes

Google rolled out a **new design** for desktop searches, discover feed & more results button for mobile and did many changes to UI.

They also increased and then decreased their snippet length, expanded the autocomplete predictions and started showing cameos of famous people in search results.

AMP. Coming to AMP, Google released a developer preview of showing the publisher URLs in search and not the Google AMP cache URL. They also launched AMP stories in search & a bunch of other AMP features.

Other big Google news

In other news, Google is finally **closing down Google Plus** after 7 years due to many security incidents.

Continuing from the last year, our client's rankings haven't had any major impact after rollout of these algorithm updates and continue to rise as we shift to 2019.

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ARE OLDER LOCAL REVIEWS RELEVANT?



It's more than an obvious fact that consumers are most likely going to rely on newer reviews than the older ones. Also, in comparison with older people, younger individuals greatly depend on reviews for a number of things.

What's so surprising in this, you would ask? A new study has not only proved these facts but has also come up with some insightful metrics indicating the year after year changes.

A **Local Consumer Review Survey** published by BrightLocal last month, revealed that reviews are critical to the decision making process of consumers choosing goods and services from local businesses.

The below screenshot indicates a strong correlation between the trends and the age of the consumer.



It's nothing of a surprise that consumers aged 18-34 grew up in the online era. While those older than them grew up taking recommendations from friends and neighbors.

However, it all comes to the same point, people still consider reviews. The only difference over the years is that they are now digitized and available online for everyone to see other than just your friends or neighbors.

Key Findings of The Study

- 91% of 18-34 year old people trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations
- 40% of consumers only take into account reviews written within the past 2 weeks – up from 18% last year
- More consumers require multiple reviews to trust reviews
- 80% of 18-34 year old people have written online reviews – compared to just 41% of consumers over 55
- Older consumers are more likely to be skeptical about online reviews

In case you are looking for stats and in depth details, read the [Full Report](#) and for takeaway points, follow our Actionable Strategy based on the findings of the report.

- Keep your reviews fresh if you are planning to target younger customers.
- Reviews that are older than 90 days become less valid, those that are less than 2 weeks old are best and those within a couple of days are ideal.
- Bad reviews create a negative impact on customers, you must put in all your marketing strategies to action to turn them into good reviews.
- The more the reviews, more will customers believe in their authenticity. Make sure your product/service has LOTS of reviews or at least more than 10 reviews.
- Having No reviews is almost as bad as having bad reviews.

So be open to reviews and deliver what your customers are looking for! If you're looking for genuine reviews, we highly recommend you to check out our proprietary "**Review Widget**" which helps you get positive reviews on Google and Yelp. Not only that, it automatically filters out negative reviews being displayed on your website thus enabling better customer experience.

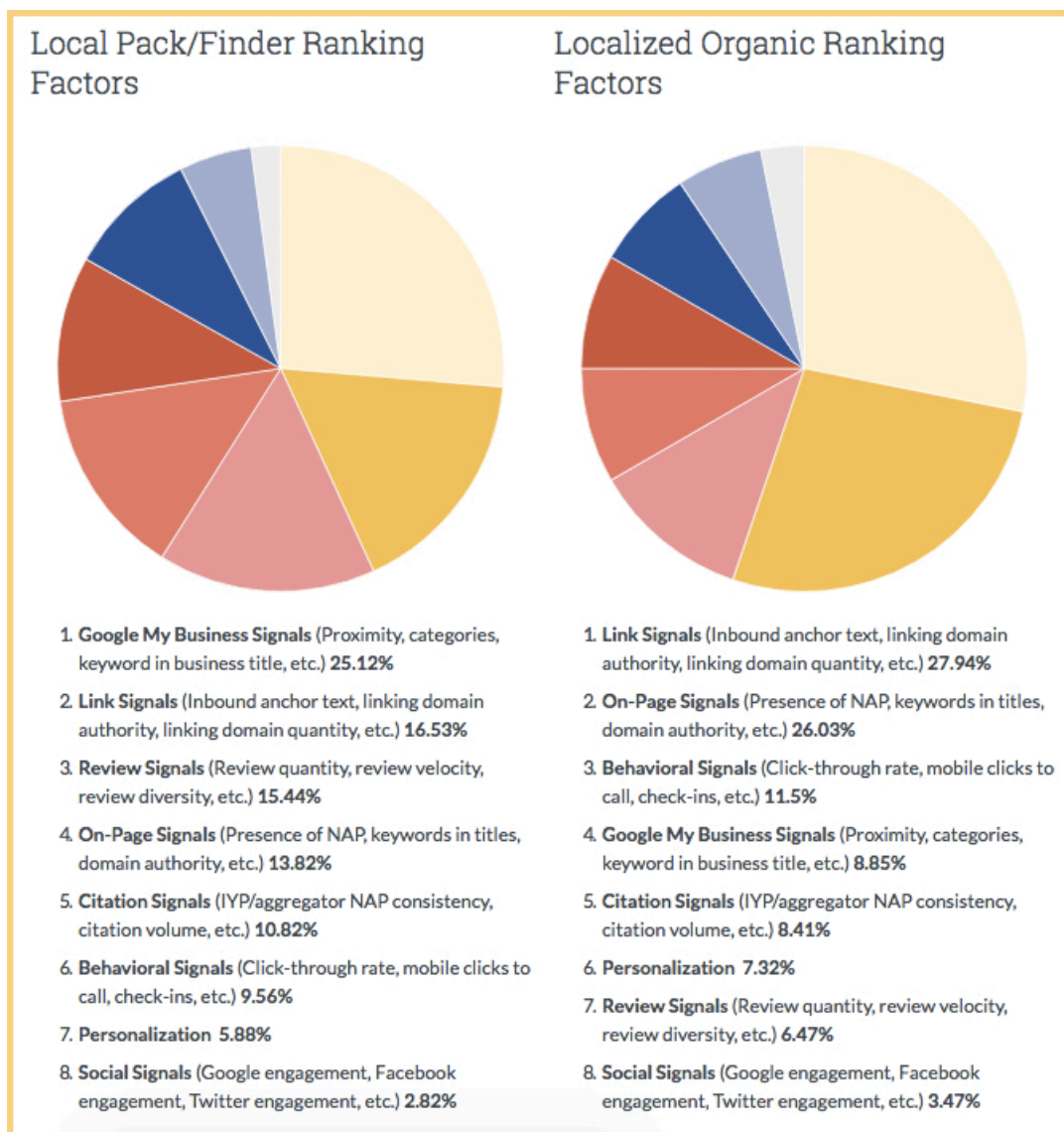
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2018 SEO SURVEY & CHANGES YOU SHOULD MAKE IN 2019

Moz has released the 2018 local search ranking factors last month & it reveals a lot about the upcoming big changes in the SEO world. If you are looking for accurate predictions, or just want to stay updated about the current trends, we recommend reading the [full report](#).

2018 was a good year for Local SEO since we witnessed a major boost in the rankings of the local players instead of the corporates. This just solidifies the facts that no matter your size, if your site has what it takes, then there's no denying that you can even beat the mega corporations.

Keep in mind that this survey was conducted among the SEO professionals. They were asked to rank the main ranking factors. Here are some of the key findings.



Local SEO has changed drastically over the past 3 years and if you are sticking to old SEO practices, it will do more harm than good. Also, if you want your site to rank high, you will have to prefer quality-over-quantity. Be it content, backlinks, reviews or citations.

It has been observed by many SEO professionals that you can manipulate the content on the knowledge graph. It mostly works for hijacking brand queries or getting clicks that you will not get normally.

Also if your site is not receiving the kind of traffic that you were expecting that maybe you have to send signals to Google. What it means is that if Google gets the "hey this business is alive signal", it might boost your rank a little. You can then use this to show a detailed report of your SEO efforts. But you will have to figure out which thing to prioritize. Because there's a lot of things going on and there's a good chance that your client will not understand the technical things. So you may have to break it down in simpler terms.

Factors to pay attention to in 2019

An easy way to check for what Google thinks is important with internal links is to do a site search on Google, type in one of your keywords & see what comes up first. This will help you determine what Google thinks is most relevant for your keyword. And if the result is not what you expected, fix it and do a search with the same keyword again.

If your business is new, you have to ensure that you have covered all these basics.

1. Order Citations
2. Website is up and running.
3. Page loads quickly.
4. High quality and relevant content
5. Add schema to the site
6. You are using Google My Business posts
7. You're responding to Questions asked via knowledge graph listing

If your business is around for a while, it is going to take a lot more efforts. You can start by checking the source of the traffic, if you are paying for it, then is it converting? Are your blogs up to date. Are you regularly uploading high quality content? These are only a few of the questions that you should ask yourself about your website.

Be informed that GMB categories are a major ranking factor. Therefore it is often manipulated BUT GMB related spam can be reported on Google Maps or escalated to Google via their various support channels. So if you see anyone misusing it, you should report it.

The conclusion of the survey is hard to sum up but if you will pay attention to the details, you will be able to crack the secret ingredient to a successful local SEO strategy. Although, you will have to do a lot of research to revise your current plans without hurting the existing campaigns.

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WHERE ARE THE OLD REPORTS IN THE NEW GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE?

Google is slowly moving features and data from the old Search Console to the new one. However, not all are happy with the way data is presented within the new search console because many reports are missing from it. Although Google has promised that all the data will be available in the new version as well.

Google announced via a tweet that reporting features for AMP, Index Status, Links, Manual actions, Mobile Mobile Usability, Rich Cards, and Search Analytics have been successfully moved to the new Search Console.



Here's a table that shows which reports have been moved where and what are they called.

Old Search Console report	Replacement in New Search Console	Comparison
Search Analytics	Performance	New report has 16 months of data and is much easier to use.
Rich Cards	Individual Enhancement reports	New reports provide detailed debugging information, and a one-click request to recrawl fixed issues.

Links to your Site Internal links	Links	New report combines both Links to your Site and Internal Links report, with more reliable link count numbers.
Index status	Index Coverage Status	New report provides all the information of the old report, plus detailed crawl status information from the Google Index.
Sitemaps report	Sitemaps	Similar information, but better-designed report. The old report supports testing a sitemap without submitting it; the new report tests only upon submission.
Accelerated Mobile Pages	AMP Status	Many more error types reported in the new report, plus a fix flow to request reindexing of fixed pages.
Manual Actions	Manual Actions	The new report shows your manual action history, including review requests and results.

Fetch as Google	URL Inspection tool	The URL Inspection tool shows information about the indexed and live versions of a URL, with the ability to request a crawl. New information includes the URL of the canonical page, any noindex/nocrawl blocks, and whether or not the URL is in the Google index.
Mobile Usability	Mobile Usability	Similar information, but in a more usable format. Also provides a fix flow to request reindexing of pages with fixed mobile usability issues.

Takeaway: Google search console is one of the most powerful marketing tools out there. It provides you with invaluable data, so if you are not using it, then we highly recommend reading this guide on [how to get your website on search console](#) and start utilizing this powerful tool to the fullest.

And if you are already using the new Search Console, the above table will help you locate old reports. Maybe it will be bit difficult to get used to the new Search Console, after using the old one for years, but as we all know, the only thing constant in digital world is change. So get used to the new interface and use it to your advantage.

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WONDERING WHERE YOUR OLD YELP REVIEWS ARE & WHY YOUR RATING PLUMMETED OVERNIGHT? HERE'S THE ANSWER



It's no secret that customer reviews are important to ALL businesses. People value customer reviews as much as personal recommendations. However, old reviews may not be as important as the new ones as reported in our earlier article. The freshness of the review matters a lot.

So it came as no surprise when Yelp decided to update their automated [recommendation software](#) to show only fresh reviews. The software moved the older reviews to not recommended category, hence taking it away from the public eye. As a result, many business owners were shocked to see a sudden plummet in their business's ratings.

We tried to gather as much information as possible about the update, and here are our findings:

- Everyone was impacted by this update since it was a cross-platform update.
- Not all 5 star reviews were filtered, it just moved the older ones to the "Not Recommended" category.
- It doesn't matter if you advertised on Yelp or not or if you were Yelp Elite, everyone was similarly affected.
- Reviews that were on the platform for several years were filtered.

For a little clarification watch this [short video](#) where Yelp explains why some reviews are filtered and some aren't.



Takeaway:

You can't do anything about the filtered reviews. They are gone forever so you should start focusing on getting new reviews instead of getting upset over the older ones.

If Yelp played an important role in your overall marketing efforts, then you should start focusing on getting new reviews from your satisfied customers. You will have to come up with creative yet simple ways to generate new reviews, like adding the link to your business's Yelp profile into the receipt email or on the checkout page.

Furthermore, you can also allow users to "check in" when they are in your location. Adding Yelp Review Widget on your site is also one underrated way to get more reviews. You can also embed some of the best reviews on your site to not only generate trust but also to prompt customers to check your business profile on Yelp. And last but not the least, keep your Yelp profile updated.

Finally, we highly recommend you to check out our proprietary "Review Widget" which helps you get positive reviews on Yelp. Not only that, it automatically filters out negative reviews being displayed on your website thus enabling positive customer experience.

6

YOUTUBE IS ACTIVELY REMOVING SPAM SUBSCRIBERS



You may have witnessed a sudden drop in the number of subscribers on YouTube. It is because YouTube is actively **removing spam subscriptions** from their platform.

Google said that they regularly check the authenticity of the accounts on YouTube and remove the accounts that look suspicious. It means that they not only deactivate the spam accounts but also remove their subscription from every channel they are subscribed to.

The most recent cleansing drive was performed on December 13th. So if you noticed a drop in the number of subscribers, this might be the reason why.

Upon contacting, they said -

“Removing spam from the platform helps ensure that YouTube remains a fair playing field for everyone and should result in higher confidence that you’re organically building a community of authentic fans”.

However, Google is not keeping the channels in dark. They are showing a banner on YouTube studio & Classic Creator Studio which informs the affected channel about the removal of spam subscribers.

However, Google is not keeping the channels in dark. They are showing a banner on YouTube studio & Classic Creator Studio which informs the affected channel about the removal of spam subscribers.

You maybe wondering that how Google decides that which account is spam. Here's their answer:

"We use a mix of industry leading techniques and proprietary technology to identify spam on the platform. Often, these types of actions are meant to make channels look more popular than they actually are".

Google explained that it will not affect the watch time since they were spam and wouldn't have watched the videos in the first place. So you will only loose numbers of subscribers and not the number of actual viewers.

Your biggest concern would be falling below the 1000 subscription threshold required to qualify for the YouTube Partner Program because that's the only way most of the YouTubers get paid. Addressing this concern, Google stated that:

"Channels that had a high percentage of spam and fall below 1,000 subscribers will no longer meet the minimum requirement for YPP and will be removed from the program. They are encouraged to reapply once they've rebuilt their subscribers organically. You can learn about how to apply for YPP [here](#)."

Takeaway

If your subscriber count fell below the YPP 1000 minimum, then there's nothing you can do to gain those back. You should focus on getting new subscribers instead. And to avoid this type of sudden shock in future, make sure that they are not spam from your end. If you need more information, we recommend reading this [article](#) by Google.