



CONTENT CREATION FOR

SEO

# OUTLINE

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# INTRODUCTION

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Content has always had a role in marketing, but in today's digital landscape, content is fueling search, social, and lead nurturing efforts across every industry. Content marketing is simple in theory: create relevant content, and search engines will rank your content at the top of the results. Digital marketers and agencies have jumped into the game of content creation and strategy, but creating content at scale that stands out has proven to be challenging.

This book will alleviate some of the frustration of the newest algorithm updates, Panda 4.0 and 4.1. We'll touch on the history of algorithm updates, talk about Panda 4.0 and where it fits in Google's plan, and break down the state of today's content marketing and the emergent best practices.

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# THE HISTORY OF GOOGLE SEO ALGORITHM CHANGES

There are hundreds of algorithm updates taking place each year that affect SEO and web page ranking. Some of these updates are shared with the wider public and given grand/cute titles, while most aren't publicized or given a name at all.

As most Internet users over the age of 25 already know, Google wasn't always the go-to search engine for web surfers. Back in 2000, Google shared prominence with many search engines, including Excite, Yahoo!, Lycos, and Magellan. Where are these search engines now? Mostly dead or acquired (Bing and Yahoo!). Google has achieved – and so far maintained – the top spot among competitors (67% market share) largely because of its flexibility and constant updates to make its services better. In the past five years, there have been countless changes to the algorithm and visual layout that makes Google Search so effective. Here's a brief overview:



APRIL 2010  
GOOGLE PLACES

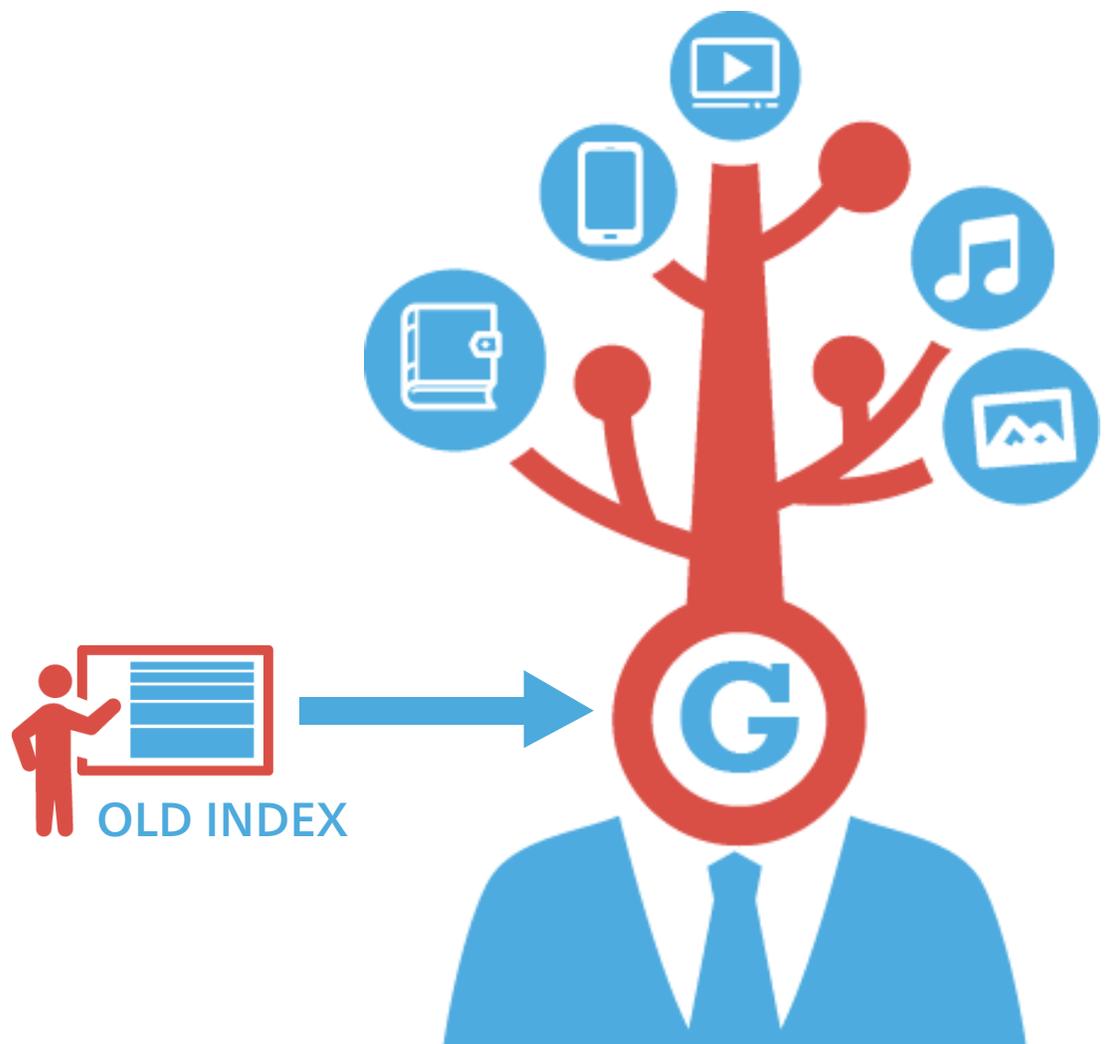
Google Places replaced the Google Local Business Center, and aligned the search results for place names more closely with local listings. The most important change that this algorithm update brought on was the ability of small local businesses to put themselves on Google Maps and have their websites listed much higher than before.

**Suddenly it became incredibly important for small businesses to embrace SEO techniques that included their location.**



## JUNE 2010 GOOGLE CAFFINE

Google released the new Caffeine algorithm with the future in mind. Content online was changing drastically, now including video, images, news, and real-time updates. At the time, Caffeine provided 50 percent fresher results for web searches than their last index. With more content being published more often, **Caffeine focused on analyzing the web faster and updating their search index on a continual basis.** With proper SEO fundamentals, webmasters and marketers could be confident that new content would be indexed quickly and fresh content could play a larger role in search results.





## DECEMBER 2010 SOCIAL SIGNALS

The Social Signals algorithm change was long expected of Google in the face of the onslaught of social media. With this update, Google (as well as Bing) stated that Twitter and Facebook influence search results. In an interview with Danny Sullivan, Bing said: “We do look at the social authority of a user.” Google also stated that they **“compute and use author quality” and “use this as a signal.”** Google+ and authorship will begin to become integrated in search marketing strategies.

## FEBRUARY 2011 PANDA ALGORITHM UPDATE

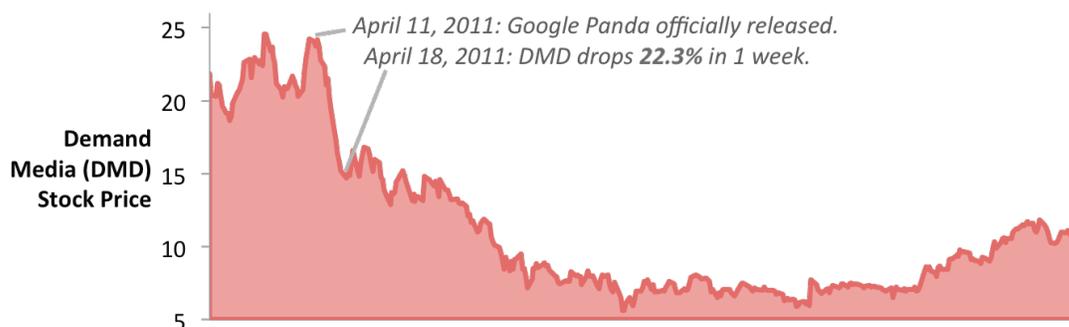
In February 2011, the first Panda algorithm update (also known back then as the Farmer update) turned SEO on its head, with its **goal of penalizing websites with low-quality and spammy content.** Without officially stating that this update was to target content farms, it is clear that the update penalized sites that duplicate content.

Prior to this update, marketers could pay increasingly low rates to content farms that churned out hundreds of low-quality articles per day. So long as they peppered their work with keywords, Google would find it and rank it. The Panda update changed the focus on content from quantity to quality.

The update was expected to affect about 12 percent of the US search results; it rolled out worldwide in April, 2011 and it impacted many websites. Hubpages.com, launched in 2006, found that after the Panda update, their SEO visibility dropped by 62 percent. Other sites found an even greater SEO visibility decrease. This chart from SearchMetrics.com outlines the biggest losers from the Panda update:

Domain	OPI today	OPI last	Difference	%
blippr.com	11,024	529,970	-518,946	-97.90%
suite101.com	19,874	263,529	-243,655	-92.50%
tradekey.com	2,970	38,237	-35,267	-92.20%
associatedcontent.com	23,687	281,343	-257,656	-91.60%
articlebase.com	13,492	157,958	-144,466	-91.50%
helium.com	7,170	83,184	-76,014	-91.40%
faqs.org	15,971	140,951	-124,980	-88.70%
freedownloadcenter.com	23,216	192,128	-168,912	-87.90%
mahalo.com	56,305	442,563	-386,258	-87.30%

Panda didn't just affect website traffic and SERP visibility; it also had a real impact on businesses' revenue and stock prices. Take a look at Demand Media's (eHow) stock price after the Panda update:



Panda continued to be reworked and updated throughout 2011 and beyond. Many of the updates were minor and impacted few sites.



## APRIL 2012 PENGUIN

Panda was – and continues to be – an upheaval in the old world of content farms. Google continued to **fight against link and web spam**, penalizing sites that used tactics such as:

- Link schemes
- Cloaking, “sneaky” redirects
- Spammy and overused anchor text phrases
- Spammy link profiles (quantity vs. quality)
- Google stated that the Penguin update was expected to impact about 3 percent of English search queries.



## AUGUST 2012 HUMMINGBIRD

Hummingbird took its place in August as Google’s new and largest algorithm, with Panda/Penguin being smaller algorithms incorporated within. With the Hummingbird update, Google sought to have its search engines work more effectively for mobile – specifically voice queries. **The order of the words took on a more important role**, as Google had discovered that people using voice browsers tended to form their query as a question. Hummingbird directly affected mobile-based SEO so that Google could work more effectively on smart phones and tablets.

# PANDA 4.0 + 4.1 AND HOW IT FITS THE ALGORITHM ECOSYSTEM

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In March 2013, Google said that there would be no further Panda update confirmations because “they’ll be incorporated into [the] overall algorithm.” Roughly translated, Google said they’d update Panda when they wanted to, without announcing that any changes have happened.

In 2014, Google rolled out Panda 4.0 in May and Google 4.1 in September. These updates both continue the trend of fighting spammy and duplicate content with a focus on finding and rewarding authoritative content.

It’s hard to pin down the specific changes in any algorithm update (especially with Panda 4.0 due to Google also releasing the Payday Loan 2.0 update May 20th, 2014), but there are a few things that we know for sure about Panda 4.0:

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1

## Content-Based Topical Authority Sites are rewarded and given more SERP visibility.

These are more specialized websites that focus on creating a lot of valuable content around one topic, rather than generic websites highlighting all sorts of topics. eMedicine improved SEO visibility by 904 percent after the Panda 4.0 update, highlighted on Cognitive SEO's blog:



2

## Websites can't rely on syndicated content or repurposing curated content.

Websites that historically repurpose existing content do not provide authoritative value on a specific topic. The importance of consistently publishing original, high-quality content that is widely shared has never been more critical to success in today's SEO landscape.

3

This was the first noted Panda update and algorithm update post-Hummingbird; **both focus on content and the end user.** According to Google's Matt Cutts back in June 2013, Panda updates had been rolling out, first monthly and then in 10-day cycles, without any public proclamations. Yet less than a year later, Google alerted the world to Panda 4.0, which would seem to indicate that it's different – and more significant – than its unpublished predecessors.

4

In the early days of Panda, with the quicker iterations, brands penalized by Panda could feasibly clean up their content and get rewarded in the next refresh. That cycle may have lengthened, which **means brands should get their content in order before they're penalized at all.**

In addition to what we know, we have a couple of very well-informed guesses:

1

In an internet real estate that **focuses on entity relationships and natural-sounding language**, Panda 4.0 will reward the same type of content food. Remember that Panda 4.0, unlike the original Panda, came after the incorporation of both Penguin and Hummingbird, meaning Panda 4.0 has surely been shaped by those updates as well.

2

Panda 4.0 will prove to be a major algorithm update instead of a mere data refresh (meaning there'll be a difference in how Panda evaluates your on-site content). Content creation and content consumption has changed.

# CREATING EFFECTIVE CONTENT

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If there is one consistent theme among all the latest algorithm updates, it's that Google has made it clear that they value **fresh, original, reader-friendly content**.

Consumers are seeking answers to questions across every vertical, and brands must now own original content if they hope to capture that demand. Their content must be valuable, original, engaging, and —most importantly — written by writers who have their fingers on the pulse of a company's respective industry.

Inbound marketing encourages brands and websites to answer customers' questions with high-quality original content, bringing customers to your site through your brand's authority rather than interrupting them with ad messaging.

As more brands begin to get into the world of content writing and publishing, many marketers are struggling to shift their digital marketing backgrounds

to editorial strategies. Many marketers are turning to agencies and services to help with their content marketing strategy, but today's content marketing landscape can be quite confusing. There are content syndication companies, content curation companies, content creation companies, social media marketing agencies, content marketing agencies, SEO agencies, and marketing automation companies.

Whether or not you engage in working with one of these companies, here are some best practices when it comes to creating content. Effective content takes more than just mindless creation; brands must consider a few factors in producing good, algorithm-friendly content.

# 1

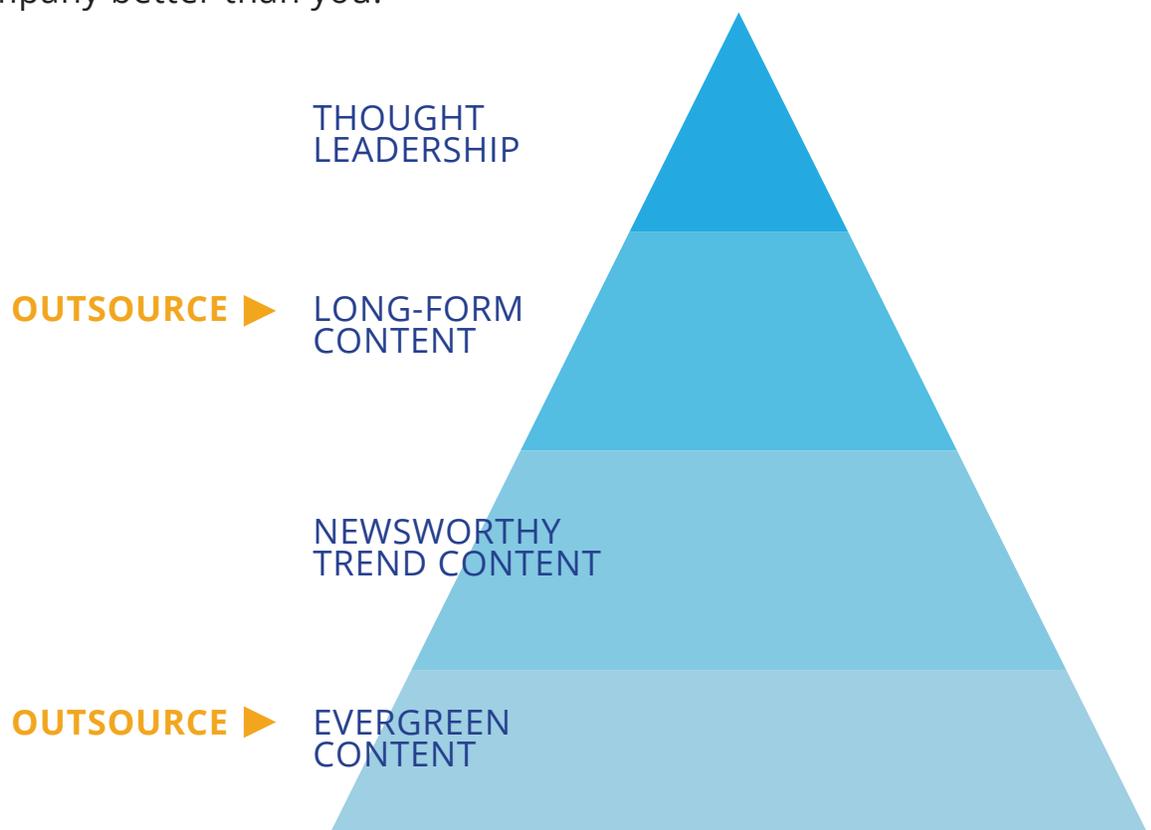
## FOCUS ON YOUR AUDIENCE AND TOPICS FIRST

Too often brands will publish an abundance of content and be surprised that their content isn't an instant marketing success. Create an editorial calendar with your marketing team where you decide on a consistent publishing schedule, theme, and target audience.

# 2

## WHAT CONTENT CAN BE CREATED IN-HOUSE VS. FREELANCERS?

After creating an editorial calendar and publishing schedule, it's time to begin creating content! Content that is company specific (product demos, descriptions, interviews, case studies, and presentations) should almost always be created in-house. No matter who you hire, a freelance writer will not know your company better than you.



# 3

## THE NEW CONTENT CREATION PROCESS

The content landscape takes more than just creating great content. Digital agencies are focusing on helping clients with content marketing strategies, keyword priorities, and promotion best practices. Writing and editing are often overlooked, especially for clients that needs hundreds of pieces of content quickly that is ready to publish.

### Planning

- Digital agency, SEO agency
- Focus on audience, editorial planning

### Writing

- In-house for company specific
- Outsource for editorial, evergreen content

### Editing

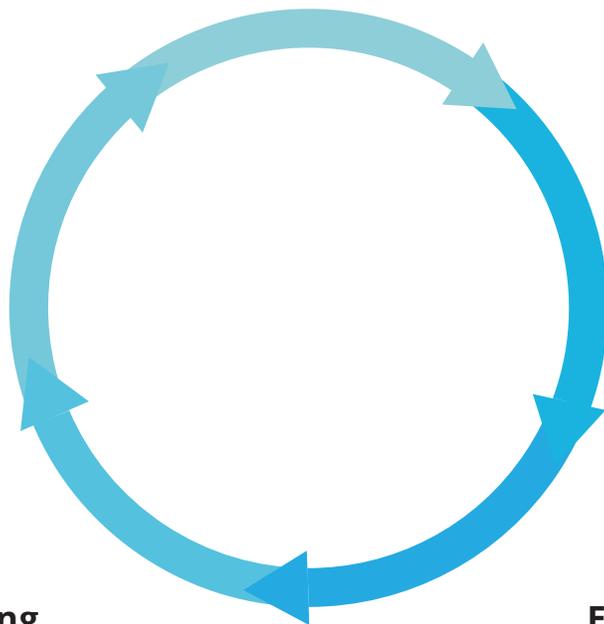
- In-house copy-editors
- Outsourced editing service
- Focus on brand guidelines/voice

### Publishing

- In-house marketer/
- Publish to CMS/Social Channels
- Resource section/hub

### Promoting

- Digital agency
- Work with vendors to promote across channels



# BEST PRACTICES IN OPTIMIZING CONTENT

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There are staples when it comes to SEO best practices; however these are staples for what should be updated, not necessarily how they should be updated. And it goes without saying – right? – that we recommend using strictly white-hat practices across the board.

The below is a list of on-page elements that should always be optimized:

- Title tags
- URLs
- Heading tags
- Meta descriptions (while not ranking factors, we use them for enhanced click-through rates)
- Body Copy (more on this in a bit)
- Image alt attributes
- Anchor text (create a diverse yet relevant anchor text profile; do not overuse any one term)

All of these play a part when talking about on-page content, but obviously what will be the largest signal for Panda to either help or hurt your site is going to be your body copy. There are a lot of factors in play here: length, keyword density, usefulness, and more.

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## BODY COPY TIPS

As far as length goes, many webmasters are saying that content under 200 words will be more likely pulled into the Panda evaluation process to trigger its algorithm flags. Others agree that a 300-word count will keep you safe and above any Panda threshold. And a recent study showed that the average word count of top-ranked searches came in at a whopping 2,416 words. Obviously nobody outside Google is privy to Google's exact algorithm, but these are useful numbers to keep in mind.

Our philosophy is that you shouldn't aim to write 300+ words simply to avoid a penalty. Colin Guidi at 3Q Digital states:

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“You should be writing not preemptively but to become more authoritative, visible, and helpful on a subject. If you wouldn't want to read it, don't write it.”

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# TIPS ON ANALYZING PANDA'S EFFECTS

For some of our clients, Searchmetrics SEO Visibility shows a slight decrease after 4.0, yet organic traffic levels from Google show either a steady pace or normal seasonality. Likewise, we've seen traffic decreases for accounts that show SEO visibility increases.

The takeaway here is that you should leverage SEO tools in tandem with analytics. Let your tools be a discovery feature for you, with the hard analytical data to help you determine if you either were hit or benefited from an algorithm update like Panda 4.0. Remember, Panda is an update meant to affect your ranking visibility, which will very likely coincide with your organic traffic levels. Monitor your organic rankings via a tool like Searchmetrics, and keep an eye on your organic traffic via your analytics platform of choice.

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## WHAT'S NEXT?

More mobile-focused updates are expected to roll into the larger Hummingbird algorithm in the coming months. As in the past, Google headquarters will likely continue to update the search engine regularly without so much as a press release; the major changes that affect business and individual SEO content, however, will probably feature in the headlines of technology news as they have in prior years.

## EXTRA REFERENCES

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[The Moz Blog: Google Algorithm Change History](#)

[The Moz Blog: The Day the Knowledge Graph Exploded](#)

[Google Inside Search: Another step to reward high-quality sites](#)

[Mashable: Google Caffeine: A Detailed Test of the New Google](#)

[Search Engine Watch: Where Are They Now?](#)

[Google Panda: Understanding the Technical Inner Workings](#)



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