



# SEO in 2017

**The ranking factors study published by Searchmetrics shows that SEO is changing.** Since Google has completed the incorporation of RankBrain into its algorithm, artificial intelligence is now used for the evaluation of the most relevant content, meaning that general ranking factors are becoming less and less important. It is no longer just the individual keyword that is important, but the whole context of the search query.



The "classic" search result no longer exists!

How should marketing professionals react to these new challenges? Together with Searchmetrics, we offer suggestions on how you can react to the changes in order to keep improving your ranking in the new year.

**“The era of large, manual Google updates has ended. Google’s algorithm can now interpret search intent and conduct URL evaluations in real time, providing the most accurate results possible.”**

In order to effectively tackle the new challenges in SEO, it is important to understand how this discipline is changing. In the past, checklists were often used for search engine optimization, because ranking factors were well-known and only changed step-by-step when there was a large Google update. The discipline of SEO has now become more complex. Using numerous sources for gathering data (Google Chrome, Google Analytics, Android, AdWords, links to Social Media etc.), Google is now able to analyze in real time whether or not users are satisfied with the displayed search results.

If the user signals from a particular website are negative, then this website’s ranking will drop, because Google’s chief aim is to provide users with the most relevant results in every situation. Looking forward, (we expect that) there will not be any more stand-alone updates, as the algorithm will now be adjusted continuously. What this means is that simple tricks are no longer enough to influence search engines. It is necessary to create genuine added value for users.

## The „new“ factors

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### The “classic” search result no longer exists!

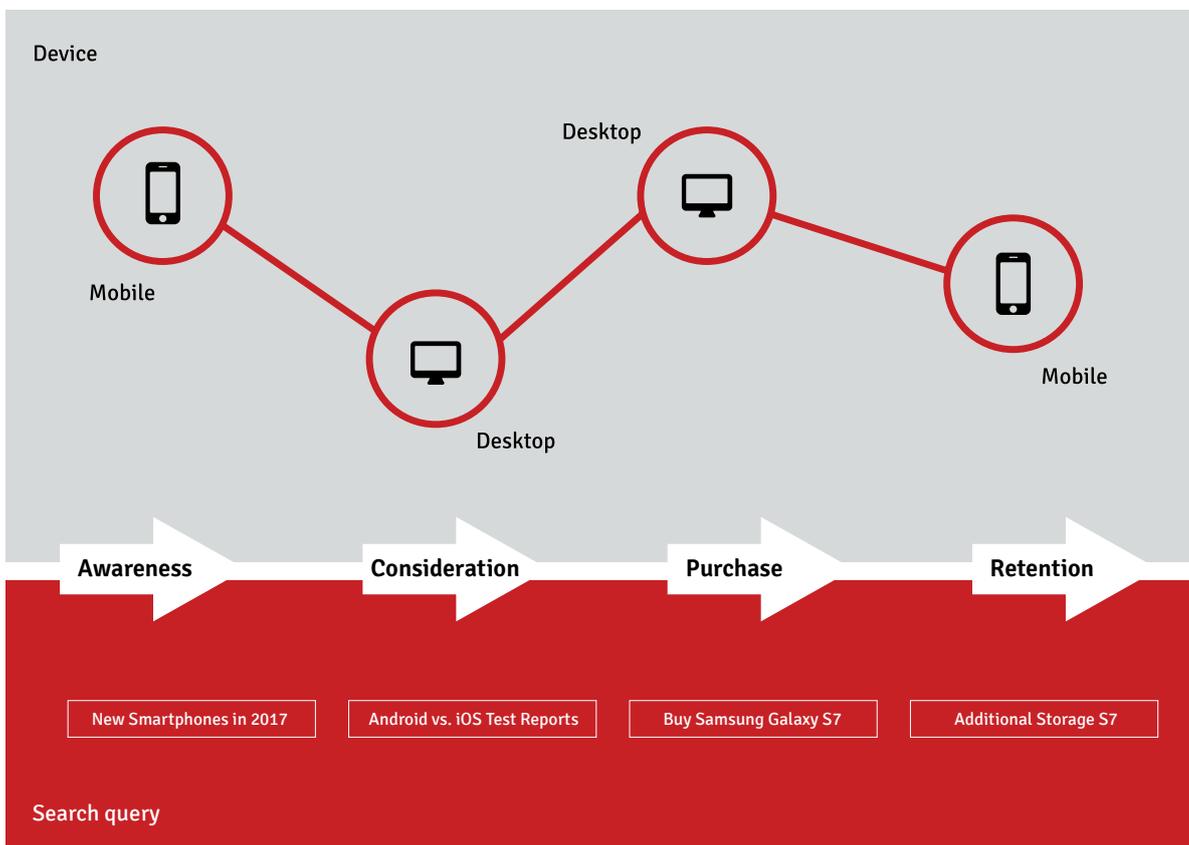
In order to provide users with the most fitting and most relevant content, users are no longer given identical results. Today, the Search Engine Result Pages (SERP) are dependent on individual factors, like:

- User Intent
- Device (Mobile or Desktop)
- Country and current location
- Time of day
- Time of year and current weather
- User history (Has the user already visited the website? If so, for how long?)
- Peer group (Who are the user’s friends, followers etc.? What has been shared in this group? Which websites do people with a similar profile visit?)

## Optimization tips for the new year

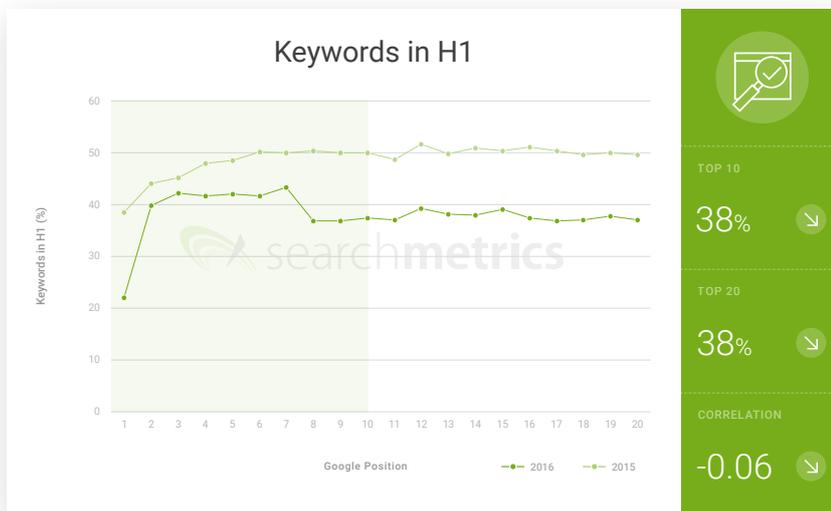
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### 1. SEO strategy along the user journey



Source: Namics

This paradigm shift demands a new approach to search engine optimization. Whilst digital marketers used to look for the right keywords, now they must focus on finding the right answers. It is no longer the individual keyword which matters, but rather the intent motivating the user's search query. With the help of Machine Learning, search engines have learnt to assess a page's relevance based on its content.



Simply having the keyword in H1 no longer assures you a top ranking.

This is confirmed by the data. Whilst in 2015 50% of the results in Google's top 10 contained the keyword in their H1, this has fallen to 32% in 2016. The search engine determines whether or not a page is relevant based on other factors besides the keyword.

In order to achieve this relevance, websites now need to start adopting a holistic approach. We therefore recommend that marketing professionals and SEOs stop just working with simple checklists, and start thinking in terms of complete user journeys.

### Key points for the development of a SEO strategy based on user journeys

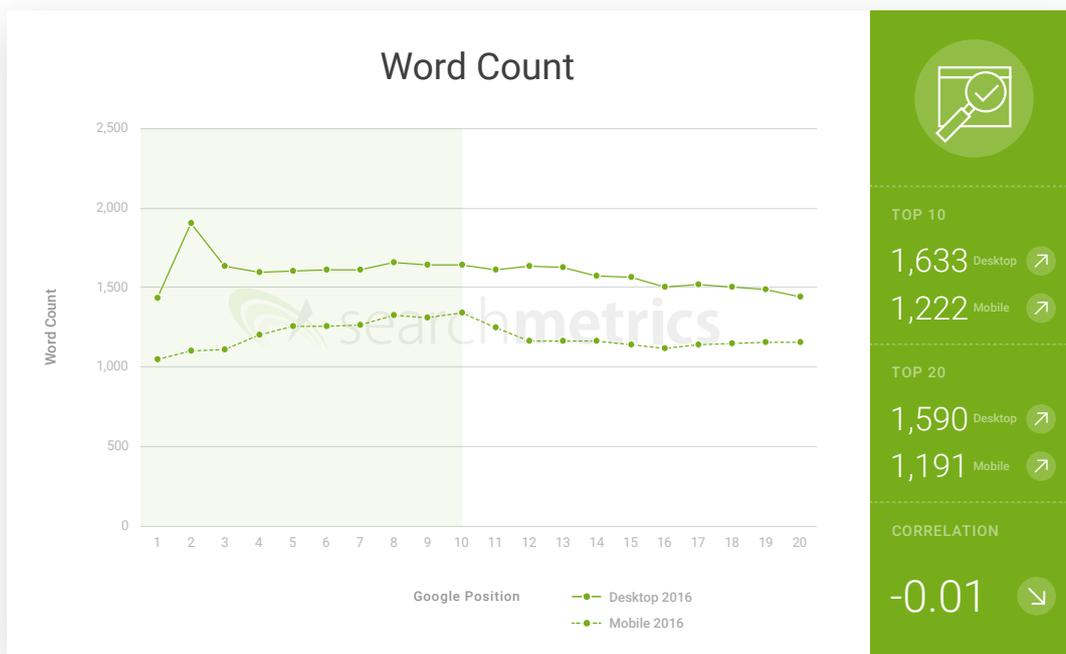
- What is the user intent?
- How do users differ from one another?
- Are there different target audiences?
- What kind of device is being used – mobile or desktop?
- In what form would the user like the result – as a short answer, text, images or videos?
- At which stage of the customer journey is the user using a search engine – Awareness, Consideration, Purchase or Retention?

Once these questions have been answered, the aim is to use this information as the basis for the creation of good, useful content, and to ensure that the technical aspects of the website are well-maintained.

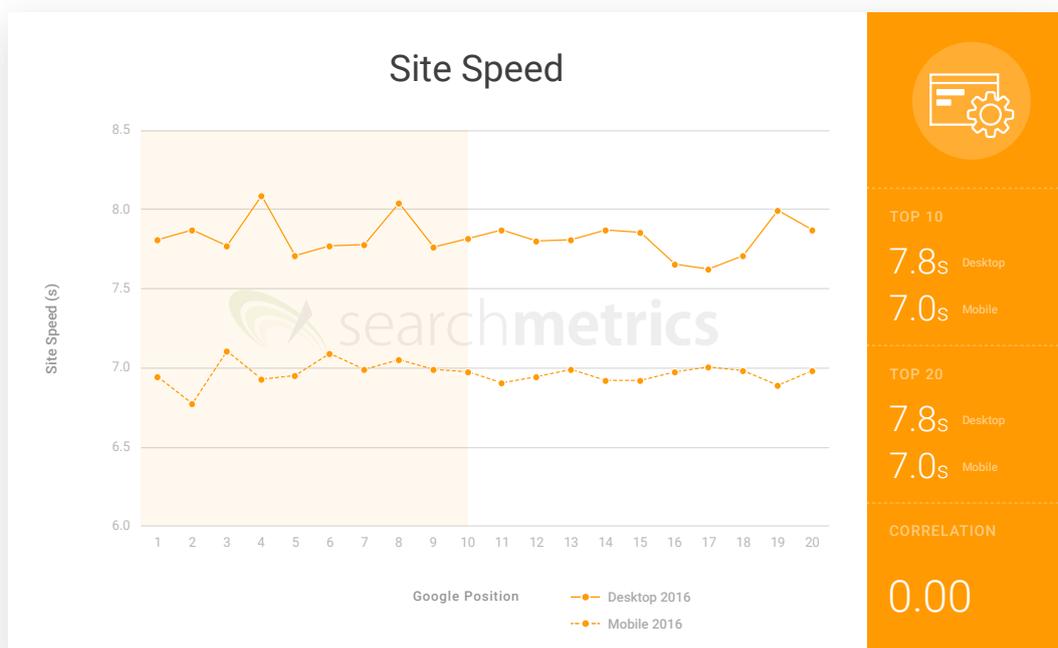
## 2. Relevant content as the key to success

The new challenge facing marketers is how to identify users' questions and how to provide suitable answers that are presented in both the right scope and the right format. Search engines are now able to recognize, on the basis of the search query, whether a short or a long answer is most suitable, and whether images or videos would provide added value. For example, the search query "how to tie a Windsor knot" automatically returns images with instructions and videos.

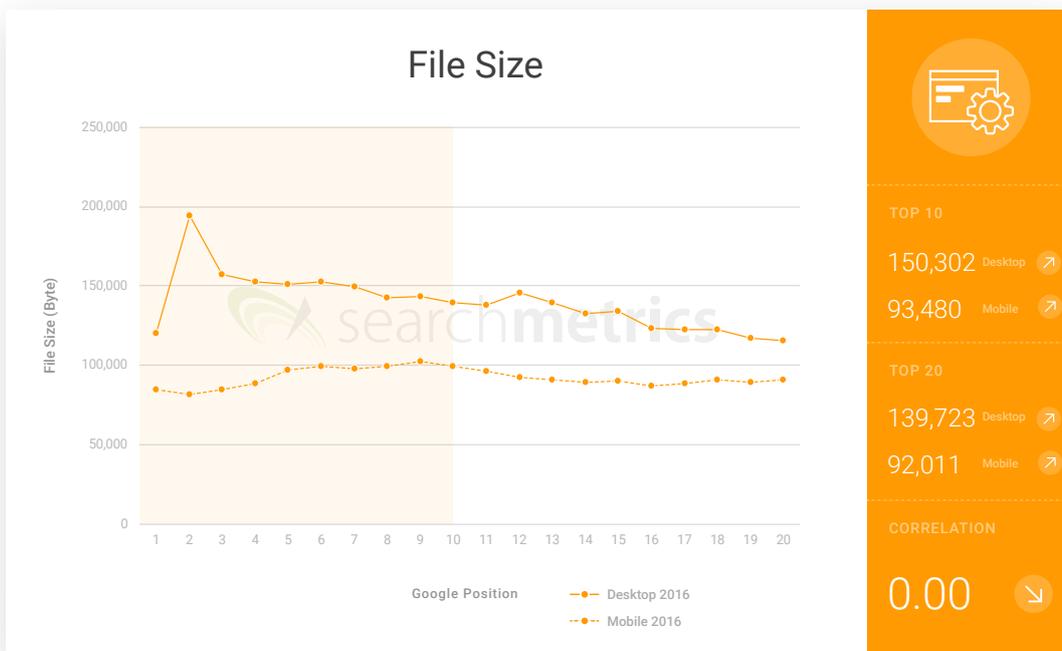
The Searchmetrics study confirms the conclusion that search algorithms adapt to the context of the search query. This is particularly evident in the results for mobile rankings. On mobile devices, landing pages with lower word counts, smaller file sizes and faster site speeds are shown in the search results.



For mobile search, pages with lower word counts perform better.



Site speed is a decisive factor for achieving a good mobile ranking.



The algorithm for mobile rankings prefers pages with a smaller file size.

## Nine tips for content creation:

1. Cover topics in an in-depth and comprehensive way
2. Mixture of short paragraphs, overviews and detailed content
3. Use a range of content formats (text, images, video and audio)
4. Logical document architecture: H1 for title, H2 for sub-headings
5. Copy with paragraphs and highlighted points
6. Use elements like bullet points to provide structure
7. Adapt the tonality for your target audiences
8. Provide answers to frequently asked questions (also considering voice search)
9. Use internal links to connect the different areas of the website

## 3. Achieving relevance with personalization

One possibility of increasing relevance and added value for the user is to personalize your website. New and returning visitors can be greeted in different ways. Users who are recognized by the website can also be given additional, more detailed information. Having users sign in with a login turns the website into a personalized source of content. This improves the user experience and enhances the user's interaction with the website. This leads to people becoming regular visitors and sends positive signals to the search engine.

- identification of users via the targeted use of cookies
- comprehensive personalization for users who sign in with a login
- high interaction level by providing content tailored to individual requirements
- using tracking codes to display a variety of different content.

## 4. Technical implementation remains an important factor

Technical implementation is one part of SEO which is often neglected. However, technical implementation is – and will continue to be – an important factor. Good technical maintenance remains a fundamental prerequisite for a high ranking. Here are some of the most important technical factors:

- Use one H1 title per page, use H2 titles as sub-headings
- Check and improve site speed
- Ensure the crawlability of all content
- HTTPS is now standard
- Check that all links work

If your customer journey analysis has established that mobile devices are particularly important, then there are additional points which should be checked. As this is now the case for the majority of companies, here are the most important factors:

- Optimize the page's loading time e.g. by using Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP)
- Analyze and optimize the page's mobile-friendliness (e.g. adjust font sizes and word count, avoid the use of Flash)
- Apply logical markup, e.g. by using structured data (Schema.org), Rich Snippets, Rich Cards, Product Feeds etc.

**Looking for even more tips on how to improve your ranking or have other questions you'd like to ask?**

**In their seminar, “SEO Trends for 2017”, Searchmetrics and Namics reveal even more valuable tips and tricks, showing you how you can improve your ranking.**

**We use real-life examples to demonstrate how to make effective changes, and we show you solutions for the challenges you are currently facing.**

**9 February 2017, 2.30 p.m.**

**We look forward to seeing you there!**

**[Register now for our free webinar “SEO Trends for 2017”!](#)**

# Contact

**You want to achieve an excellent search engine ranking in 2017?  
Just get started – our experts will be pleased to help.**



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