Is SEO helping or harming creativity?

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Aidan Blundell, Head of SEO at [iProspect South Africa](#), weighs in on how creativity and SEO need to work together for content to be successful.

Many digital marketing professionals are of the opinion that SEO has a negative impact on creativity, whether creating an article, a piece of content or telling a story online. They believe that adhering to SEO rules and regulations can hamper the creative process, resulting in boring, regurgitated creative content similar to everything else to be found online.

This may have been true in the past, but today, content finds itself in a hugely competitive space. Content must be creative, exciting and entice the user, all the while building a brand. That requires creativity, quality content and great user experiences.

SEO then

In the past, quality content was not a necessity to get the job done online. Often just having a website was an edge over competitors. During the 2000s, the practice of SEO (good and bad tactics) contributed to the high volumes of low-quality content found online. It was simpler to influence rankings, so content was not created for humans, but more specifically for search engines. It was common practice to keyword-stuff content and focus on basic articles that got the job done from an SEO perspective, but was not particularly valuable to the user.

SEO now

Fast-forward to 2018, and things are very different. Basic algorithms are out of the window, with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning no longer something only seen in sci-fi movies. Machine learning forms an integral part of the Google algorithm that ranks a website (they call it [RankBrain](#)); it's a science of getting machines or computers to act without being explicitly programmed to do so. In the context of Google's algorithm, machine learning influences how websites are crawled and ranked.

The Google machine

Google's goal has always been to provide the best answer to a user's query. In the past, the way Google determined this could be manipulated quite easily, resulting in an uncreative, bad user experience. With the assistance of machine learning

and advances in their algorithm, Google now looks at web pages the way a user does, rendering a web page to read and experience it as we would. In doing this, it determines the level of quality for that page and ranks it accordingly.

Because Google understands users so well, SEO now needs to focus efforts on addressing users' wants and needs first and foremost, while making sure SEO elements are optimised. With the incorporation of machine learning into the Google algorithm, Google is taking their mantra of 'providing the best answer to a query' a lot more seriously. They understand that a good piece of content is not only about the subject matter of an article or what keywords are used in it, but also what value it has for the user. The more perceived value (coupled with topical relevance), the better the content will rank.

So, how do SEO and creativity work together?

In the past, SEO stifled the creative process, resulting in clumsy content pieces. Today, creativity is more important than ever as the easiest way to Google's heart is through creating content for the user. This means content needs to be appealing, creative and speak to the user's intent.

Through keyword research and other techniques, SEO can uncover important user questions – information which is passed on to creative teams tasked with crafting content. In this way, SEO informs creativity and helps it become discoverable. Including SEO in the creative process is the only way to rank well on Google these days. Creativity, in turn, enhances SEO, leading to a better user experience, which is vital for relevance and rankings.

When creativity and SEO work together in this way, your content's chances of success online are that much greater.

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