THE NEXT GENERATION OF SEARCH: VOICE

OK GOOGLE, HOW CAN MY SITE BE THE SINGLE ANSWER?





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the nearly 20 year history of Google, there has never been a more intense period of innovation as what we have experienced in the last 3 years. Google (and to be fair, even Bing) have demonstrated incredible progress with building large knowledge graphs, understanding real world entities, moving from matching words to matching searcher intent and even employing machine learning at scale (in the case of Google with RankBrain).

Yet, despite this incredible progress in the underlying search algorithms and approaches to determining relevant results, the way searches have been conducted and consumed by searchers has remained largely unchanged until now. The "10-blue links" that searchers have been trained to consume for the last two decades are giving way to a brand new way of searching and discovering - an experience that is driven by the most natural of ways for humans to interact - by voice.

The growth in Voice Search is the MOST DISRUPTIVE opportunity for marketers today and it's critical to understand how this method of search and discovery will disrupt consumer buying cycles, the options consumers evaluate and even brand selection and preferences for years to come.

"WITH VOICE SEARCH YOU WIN OR LOSE. THERE IS NO SECOND PLACE."

This white paper covers seoClarity's research and insights into the essentials of Voice Search that marketers need to know to prepare. Using seoClarity's proprietary search landscape data, a set of billions of data points (Research Grid™) and shared experiences supporting over 2,500+ brands globally, we provide a comprehensive guide to winning the coming battle for being "the single answer".

THE ANSWER BOX AND VOICE SEARCH

At Google I/O in 2016, when the company unveiled its new Google Home device, they announced that over 20 percent of searches have voice intent.1 And, the number of voice searches is increasing every day. According to ComScore, 40 percent of adults use voice search once per day.² And, by 2020, 50 percent of all searches will be voice searches.³

This makes sense, particularly if you consider the benefits of voice search. We talk faster than we type. And, voice search allows us to find information when our hands or eyes are otherwise occupied. In fact, Google's Mariya Moeva shared that voice searches on Google are now 30 times more likely than text searches to be action queries.4

Because of the rise in voice search, Google has recognized the increasing need to improve the experience for consumers conducting these searches. Instead of simply displaying a list of 10 blue links, Google increasingly provides a single direct answer to queries. This makes sense since voice searches are often conducted when our hands and eyes are otherwise occupied (for instance, while driving). A standard SERP result would not be helpful in such situations. Rather, having the answer (which Google believes to be the best answer for the query) read out aloud provides immediate gratification and a much better use experience. Therefore, Google's response of creating the Answer Box is no accident.

Now, and for the foreseeable future, Google's Answer Box is the golden ticket in the organic search rankings sweepstakes. In addition to it being the only answer to voice search queries, it is the result that appears above all other results on the SERP, "ranking zero". Capturing the Google's Answer Box can mean a dramatic increase in traffic to your website, credibility and overall brand awareness.

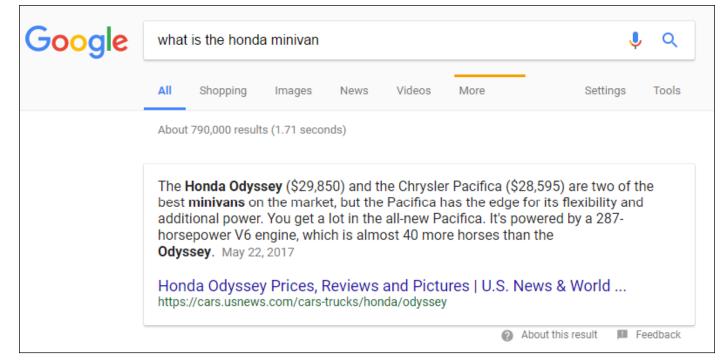
Here are a few important things to understand about voice search and the Answer Box.

- 1 iProspect, Google Home: Accelerating Voice Search Growth, 2016
- seoClarity, How to Prepare and Win the Coming Voice Search Battle, 2017.
- 3 Campaign, Just Say It: The Future of Search is Voice and Personal Digital Assistants, 2016.
- 4 Mariya Moeva, Virtual Keynote: Everything Mobile with Google's John Mueller and Mariya Moeva, 2016.

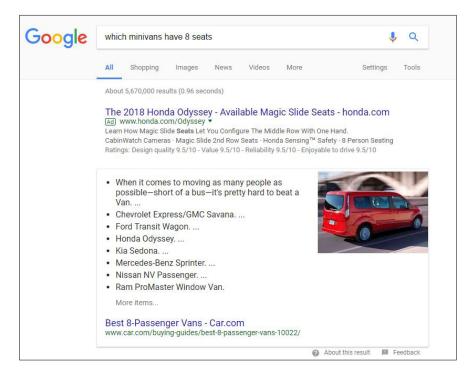
Google's Answer Box, or "featured snippet block," is the summary of an answer to a user's query that is displayed at the top of Google's search results. Powered by Google's Knowledge Graph and machine learning capabilities, it is Google's way of understanding the intent of the user and giving the best answer without requiring the user to leave Google to seek more information. Extracted from a webpage, the three types of snippets include paragraph, bullet pointed lists, and charts. The Answer Box may also feature embedded images and videos.

Additionally, the Answer Box is the single answer within voice search when using Google's Assistant and the Google Home device. The importance of this point can't be overstated. When you win the Answer Box, your result will be the one that is read to the user conducting the voice search.

In this paper, we will reveal research of nearly 40 million keywords and the impact of Google's top spot within these. The analysis of this data clearly shows the increase trend and importance of Google's approach to utilizing the Answer Box.



Basic Snippet



List Snippet

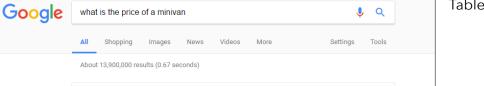
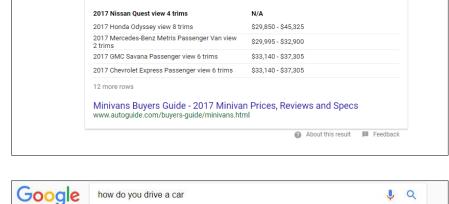
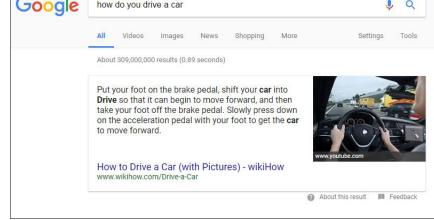


Table Snippet



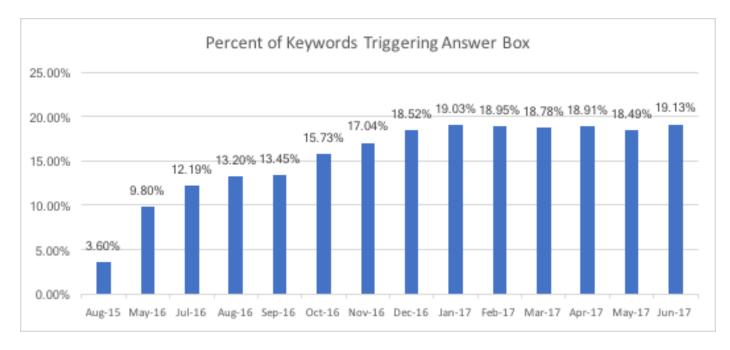
Find Your Next Car

Video Snippet



A RESEARCH REPORT OF GOOGLE'S ANSWER BOX (AKA FEATURED SNIPPETS)

seoClarity's Research Grid is a proprietary search landscape data set that tracks billions of data points going back multiple years. This data set provides a unique insight into the growth of the Answer Box results in Google's SERPs. We identified a sample of 40 million highly relevant keywords across a broad mix of industries for the purpose of this analysis.



Going back to August of 2015, a steady increase can be observed in the number of keywords triggering an Answer Box result. Keywords triggering the Answer Box nearly tripled in the first year from 3.6 percent of keywords tracked to 12.2 percent of keywords sampled from August 2015 to July 2016.

Then, from May 2016 to June 2017, the occurrence of Answer Box nearly doubled - going from 9.8 percent to 19.1 percent of keywords tracked. There was a slight decline in the early months of 2017, likely caused by the adjustments in the algorithm to address the widespread concerns raised around inaccurate results and spam observed by the active digital community.

Trigger Words	Count	% of Total
how	658,976	8.64%
what	3 82,224	5.01%
best	200,206	2.63%
the	75,025	0.98%
is	53,496	0.70%
where	43,178	0.57%
can	42,757	0.56%
top	42,277	0.55%
easy	31,178	0.41%
when	27,571	0.36%
why	25,980	0.34%
who	24,930	0.33%
new	24,779	0.33%
recipe	22,967	0.30%
good	22,807	0.30%
homes	21,132	0.28%
make	19,774	0.26%
does	19,449	0.26%
define	19,375	0.25%
free	18,315	0.24%
i	18,245	0.24%
list	17,136	0.22%
home	17,118	0.22%
types	16,575	0.22%
do	16,448	0.22%

As a next step in the research we took a deep dive into 7.6 million keywords in June 2017 that displayed an Answer Box on Google in the United States.

We discovered that over 20 percent of featured snippets are triggered by these top 25 words. The most frequently occurring terms are How, What, and Best showing us that brands should focus on content that answers queries with informational intent.

VOICE SEARCH IS EVER-EVOLVING

And with it, so will the Answer Box - it is the answer.

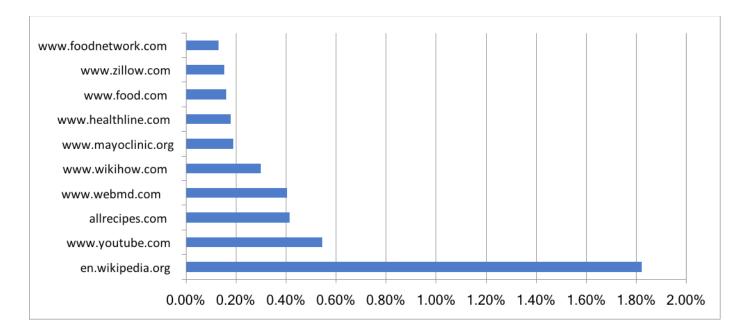
The Answer Box isn't static. It evolves. To get a perspective of the flexibility of the Answer Box, we researched the same sampling of 40 million keywords covering July 2016 through April 2017 and made some interesting discovery.

Zillow

We found that the top 10 domains have less than 5% share of the keyword sample we researched. This means that there is an opportunity to earn the Answer Box for your focused keyword set.

In fact, April 2017 was the first month that **Zillow.com**, a seoClarity client, showed in the top 10 domains to trigger an Answer Box.

TOP 10 DOMAINS WINNING THE ANSWER BOX:



WHY IS THE GOOGLE ANSWER BOX SO IMPORTANT?

Not only is the Google Answer box at the very first spot, above standard organic results, but also has a unique presentation format that immediately sets it apart from the remainder of the page. This instantly increases the credibility and authority of the brand providing the answer to the user's query. Consequently, Google's Answer Box may be the only search result viewed by the user. And, perhaps most importantly, it is the only answer read in response to a voice search. Not only does Google's Answer Box dominate the SERP, it also boosts organic traffic, leverages mid- to long-range keywords, and focuses on the searcher's intent.

Given the great importance of the Answer Box, brands should be focused on delivering the best search experience rather than worrying about any specific tactic to trick the algorithms. It's valuable to think about the shopper's journey. Shoppers at different stages of their journey are searching for different things. So, it is crucial that brands provide content that meet shoppers' needs wherever they are in their journey. When you are able to capture Google's top result for searches along the shopper's journey, you will maximize your brand's credibility and authority.

1. GOOGLE'S ANSWER BOX IS THE SINGLE ANSWER (ON VOICE AND PERSONAL ASSISTANTS)

• For Google Home and Google Assistant, it's the single answer that responds to the queries. In voice search, the coveted 10 blue links reduces to a single answer, the Answer Box response.

2. GOOGLE'S ANSWER BOX DOMINATES THE SERP

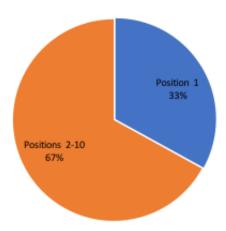
• The Answer Box takes up valuable space and pushes other results down the page, regardless of how hard you worked to earn the top rankings for your set of focused keywords.

- On mobile devices, the Answer Box owns a quarter of the screen real estate prior to scrolling.
- Our research shows that being in the first position of standard organic searches on desktop SERPs receives a 19.3 percent click through and mobile receives 27.7 percent.⁵ This means that the introduction of Google's Answer Box is potentially acquiring traffic that would otherwise go to other websites.

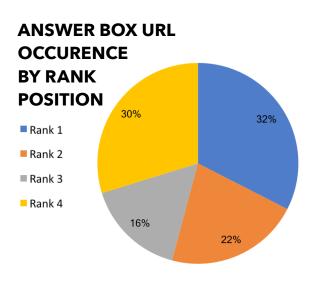
3. GOOGLE'S ANSWER BOX BOOSTS ORGANIC TRAFFIC

- Featuring a 2015 case study, Search Engine Land reported that the CTR on a key page increased from two percent to eight percent when an Answer Box was earned, with revenue from organic traffic increasing by 677 percent.⁶
- Ranking "zero" by capturing an Answer Box can mean increased traffic to your site, as well as an increase in perceived credibility, because you are helping the customer along their early stages of their buyers' journey.
- Nearly a third of the time (32.5 percent), the top ranking web result earned the Answer Box result as well leading to a greater share of visibility above the fold (the first view of search results).
- However, you don't have to rank first to have your content included in the Answer Box. If your content is structured correctly, you can beat brands that currently hold the top position. Astoundingly, 68 percent of Answer Box results came from sites outside the first organic position.
- But, the standard ranking factors are still quite important in that the better ranking position, the greater probability to earn the Answer Box result.

RANK POSITIONS FOLLOWING ANSWER BOX



[•] Yet, nearly a third of the results that are chosen for Answer Box from a lower rank position may be due to the lack of well optimized content from the top rank positions. This gives brands an opportunity to find all keywords where they are in the top three positions and where the Answer Box contains a URL ranked position four or lower and optimize that content to be easily understood and displayed in the Answer Box.



• Here's the further breakdown of percent of keywords by rank position within the top four positions:

4. GOOGLE'S ANSWER BOX LEVERAGES MID- TO LONG-TAIL **KEYWORDS**

- According to our research of 4 million keywords that trigger Answer Boxes, we saw that Answer Boxes are more frequently occurring for mid- to long tail- keywords, or those where the search volume range is less than 1,000. 7
- We also found that more than 65 percent of gueries that display Answer Boxes contain between 3 to 5 words.
- When we looked at searches in Japan, we saw that the results were similar to what we saw in the United States. Google's Answer Box Focuses on the Searcher's Intent
- There is an ongoing shift from the single-word keyword search to the more specific long-tail keywords to natural language.
- The broader implication is that SEO is shifting from keyword optimization to topic optimization. Topics better address the real needs of users and the vast variety of ways in which they search.
- This means that you need to understand your customer's intent and optimize for every stage in the buyer's journey.

⁵ seoClarity, seoClarity CTR Study: Mobile vs. Desktop, 2014.

⁶ Search Engine Land, SEO For Featured Snippets Leads to Big Gains, 2015.

VOICE SEARCH TAKEAWAYS

- Voice search users tend to use specific, long-tail search phrases. Instead of inquiring about a term or phrase, voice searchers typically ask proper questions. For example, when looking for places to dine out, desktop users might type "Italian restaurant." However, when using voice search, they're more likely to ask, "where's the nearest Italian restaurant?"
- Voice searchers also use language that's relevant to them. When speaking to their device, queries are more conversational, leaving it to the search engine to decipher the actual intent. For example, although on a desktop we might search for "house alarm problems," we're more likely to ask Google, "why does my house alarm goes off by itself?"
- Many more searches are targeted in the awareness and consideration phase. This is true even though both Amazon Echo and Google Home provide shopping assistance.
- Many voice searches have local intent. As much as 22 percent of voice queries inquire about local information such as directions, restaurants, shopping, local services, weather, local events, traffic, etc. The remainder of gueries is distributed between non-commercial gueries like personal assistant tasks, entertainment, and general searches. This makes local the biggest commercial intent among voice searches. As a result, you should incorporate new strategies to position your business in local voice search.
- Voice search is still messy and complex. Google's RankBrain algorithm leverages artificial intelligence to discover contextual connections between searches. Now, Google tries to understand "intent" based on context of the search (such as location, time of day, device used, previous searches, connected data from email and other assistant sources) instead of just plainly matching words from on a page. However, the machine is still learning. So, instead of trying to keep up with Google's algorithms, it is essential to understand what your audience needs and focus your optimization to your end user, not on chasing the latest algorithm shifts.

BEGIN BUILDING A MORE EFFECTIVE CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY

You can build a more effective content marketing strategy to win the Answer Box by optimizing for topics that reflect the intent of your audience instead of just optimizing for keywords. When you focus your content strategies to the intent of your audience, it will better address the real needs of your customers.

Additionally, the content that you create should solve challenges, or answer questions, that your audience most frequently has early in the customer journey. By targeting the awareness and consideration phases of their journey, you capture your audience earlier when they seek information that your product or service solves or delivers for them.

Given the abundance of content and the every changing and crowded SERP, it is also essential to connect with customers at the right moment of their journey.8 Google outlines the following moments that every content marketer should know:

	<u>~</u>		<u></u>
KNOW	DO	GO	BUY
Research & "H Person, Place, Definitions, Public	Things,	Local Physical world and getting to locations	Purchase Ready to purchase or conduct a transaction

- I-want-to-know moment
- I-want-to-do moment
- I-want-to-go moment
- I want-to-buy moment

⁸ Google, 4 New Moments Every Marketer Should Know, 2016.

Track performance

ANSWER BOX OPTIMIZATION CHECKLIST

Optimize to short attention spans-

It is essential for you to connect with customers at the right moment. Google outlines the following moments that every marketer should know: I-want-to-know moment; I-want-to-go moment; I-want-to-do moment; I want-to-buy moment.

Check out your competitors – Review where competitors have won the Answer Box for valuable opportunities for you to write content that you want to 'answer for.'

Create a FAQ page - Your FAQ page should provide answers to common questions that your users may ask. By figuring out what questions your customers are asking, you can create the type of content that they are most likely to find useful.

Answer the five W's & H - Be sure to answer the essential questions that everyone asks when collecting information or solving a problem: Who, What, Where, When, Why. And don't forget the all-important How. The data also showed some other important trigger words including Best, Can, Is, and Top.

Explain steps to complete tasks -

Focus on content that details steps and how to complete tasks that relate to your

product or service and also other explanations specifically for your product or service.

"How to" and "What Is" contain significant lead over other trigger words.

Highlight the best options for customers. Create buying guides that help aid the decision making process in list and bullet point type of format to demonstrate the best options for customers.

Include a definition statement - Placing a sentence that answers a question at the top of your content that answers the What question helps Google automatically find answers.

Focus on structuring content in a way that matches consumer intent – Use formats that work for your customers and structure the content to intent. Consider using tables, ordered lists, bullet points, and video.

Use schema markup - Always use the best SEO practices by placing your keywords and key phrases in your header, metadata, URL structures, and alt tags. Also use Schema markup. Schema structured data helps you highlight specific information for search engines. It tells Google what information means, not just what it says.

Produce in-depth content - In your SEO efforts, you must never forget that content is the most important thing. Be sure to create relevant content that provides in-depth answers to the questions your target audience asks.

Leverage seoClarity's Research Grid™ -

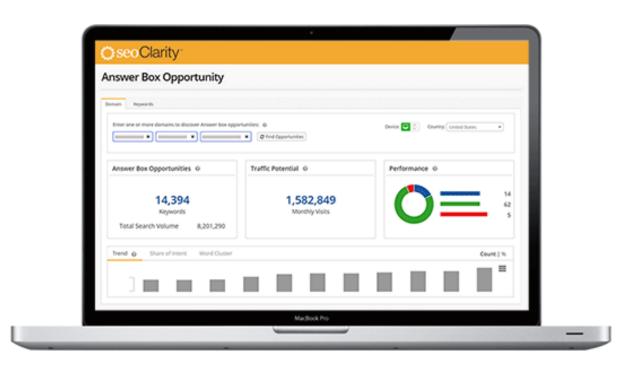
To help our clients explore and understand every content opportunity, we introduced the Research Grid™. It's the most up-to-date and in-depth solution to provide insights on content gaps, opportunities, and performance for any domain, subdomain, and URL. It's designed to help optimize and create content that is proven to perform. Built on the Clarity Grid, it provides instant access to trillions of data points.



Leverage seoClarity's Answer Box Opportunity analysis - The only one of its kind in the marketplace, it allows you to see the site that currently owns the Answer Box within your industry. Leverage the insights and understand the opportunities to easily create and optimize content that can compete for that Answer Box.

Understand the search intent - It is important to understand the intent behind the keywords that trigger a Unversial Rank Type, including video PLA, "People Also Ask," and local. Look at high-ranking pages for keywords that have awareness and consideration intent on behalf of the person conducting the search. Thinking about the awareness and consideration phases of the buyer's journey, and optimizing content to answer those questions or respond to the pains your audience have, will help you capture the Answer Box for desktop and voice search.

Track performance - As always, it is essential that you track performance against your strategy and objectives.



NEXT STEPS

Given the overwhelming abundance of content and Google's habit of regularly optimizing to deliver searchers the best experience, it is essential that you start deploying content strategies that are designed to earn the Google Answer Box on desktop and mobile.

By targeting search intent, instead of just keywords, you have the power to create content that solves challenges or answers questions that your audience has during the awareness and consideration phases of the buying cycle. Consequently, your optimized content will improve your chance of taking over the Answer Box.

At seoClarity, we have insights founded upon a depth and breadth of data that is unparalleled in the industry. To learn how we help you improve your content strategy and increase your search visibility, email sales@seoclarity.net or visit www.seoClarity.net to setup a free demo to see our work in action.

SCHEDULE 15 MINUTES TO SEE
YOUR SITE'S ANSWER BOX OPPORTUNITIES ►

