

Local SEO Strategies to Capitalize on Voice Search



A Digital Marketing Depot Whitepaper





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Apple has Siri, and Microsoft has Cortana; soon, Google will have Google Home. Voice search is here, and it's here to stay. In fact, 60% of consumers are already using voice search, according to the Local Search Association.

National brands that market locally must adapt their SEO strategies to capitalize on the unique intent behind voice searches. The words and phrases spoken by consumers are different than the keywords they type, even when the need is the same. It's up to local search marketers to ensure their location data is clean, optimized, and accessible to these new search engine technologies.

This whitepaper, based on a webcast from Digital Marketing Depot, explores the growth of voice search and provides marketers the local SEO best practices necessary to tap into the voice search opportunity.

Thanks to the original contributors: Sophia Elson, Marketing Director, MindMeld; Steve Beatty, Head of Owned Media, iProspect; and Tyler Ludwig, Director of Product, Rio SEO. To view the on-demand version of this webcast, please visit: <http://digitalmarketingdepot.com/webcast/local-seo-strategies-capitalize-voice-search>

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Voice Adoption Skyrockets

Science fiction enthusiasts have long dreamed of intelligent, voice-powered computing. Thanks to recent breakthroughs in AI technology, the prospect of a smart, conversational user interface is no longer fiction.

Automated speech recognition (ASR) accuracy has jumped from 70% in 2010 to 90% in 2016. It's now comparable to humans' ability to recognize speech, according to voice-driven AI technology vendor MindMeld. Speech recognition provides the foundation for natural language understanding, which is the component that seeks to understand the meaning behind words.

ASR and natural language understanding are powering technologies like Amazon's Echo, Apple's Siri and Google Now. Just two years ago, the use of voice technology was negligible. Now, it is exploding, and this trend is only going to continue.

- One-fifth of Google searches and a quarter of Bing queries now come from voice.
- Apple's Siri receives 2 billion voice queries every week.
- By 2020, more than 200 billion searches per month will be driven by voice (comScore).
- According to eMarketer, 50% of all searches will be voice queries by 2020.
- Amazon's voice-enabled Bluetooth speaker Echo had sales of 4 million units by the end of March 2016, with 1 million sold in the first quarter of 2016 alone.

The more people use technology like voice assistance, the more data is generated for these systems to train on. This drives a virtuous circle, facilitating further product improvements which then drive increased usage and lead to more success in the market.

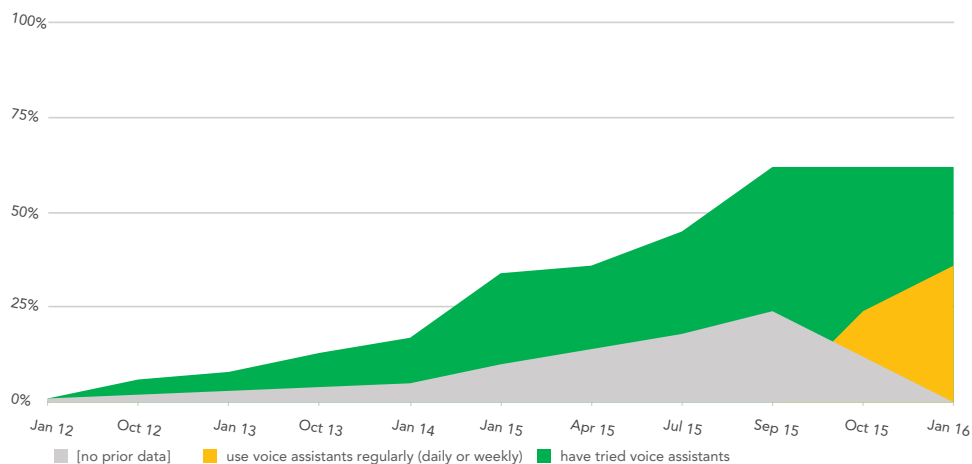
MindMeld Research Highlights

MindMeld conducted research into the proliferation of voice assistance with two online surveys of 1,800 smartphone users in Q4 2015 and Q1 2016. All respondents were over the age of 18, with equal numbers of male and female respondents, geographically distributed across the United States.

Here are some of the key findings:

- **Adoption:** 2015 marked the tipping point in voice assistant adoption. At the beginning of the year, 44% of smartphone users had tried voice. By the end of the year, that number had risen to 61%.

US smartphone users
& their experience with smartphone voice assistants



- **Age groups:** Voice use is pervasive across all age groups. While respondents in the older age groups were most likely not to have tried voice, half of smartphone users over the age of 65 said they had tried the voice assistance on their smartphones.
- **Frequency:** The frequency of use is going up fast. In Q1 2016, 55% of respondents said they used voice search or commands regularly, compared with 49% in Q4 2015, a rise of 6 percentage points from one quarter to the next.
- **Satisfaction:** While there is still some room for improvement, 48% of users said they were satisfied with voice assistance, compared with 13% who were dissatisfied.
- **Drivers:** The ability to be hands-free is the main usage driver. Some 61% of respondents said they used voice search and commands because it is useful when their hands or vision are occupied. The second most popular reason was that it gets results faster (voice search performs roughly three times the speed of many traditional app and website searches, according to MindMeld). Third, 24% of users said they used voice because it is hard to type on certain devices.
- **Location:** Somewhat surprisingly, the home dominates voice use. Some 43% of respondents use voice features predominantly at home, compared with 36% in the car, 19% on the go, and 3% at work. Voice is being fused into the central aspects of daily life.

Where Are We Heading?

Major software companies are betting big on voice. At Microsoft's annual developers conference in March 2016, CEO Satya Nadella described human language as "the new user interface." And at a Recode conference in May 2016, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos said the Alexa voice assistant, packaged inside the Echo Speaker, could become the fourth pillar of Amazon (after its retail marketplace, Amazon Prime, and Amazon Web Services).

Voice and natural language technology are spreading outside the confines of traditional smartphone assistance, as evidenced by the fact that Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri are now open to third-party developers. There are also increasing numbers of messaging bots based on the same technologies as voice assistance.

Brands as diverse as WholeFoods, Domino's, Macy's, H&M and Sephora are seeing exciting opportunities in natural language and making their first investments. As the technology continues to evolve, forward-thinking marketers need to pay close attention and consider building voice into their marketing strategy.

Building a Voice Strategy

The local-mobile trend must be central to a brand's voice strategies. BIA/Kelsey estimates that by 2019, 141 billion local searches will be made via mobile each year. Customers want accurate, local information delivered to their devices in real time and this will apply just as much to voice queries as to text. With voice consumption skyrocketing across a number of platforms, marketers need to be able to understand their users' declared and inferred intent, especially as it relates to where they are physically located.

Brands need to think about what kind of localized content they are creating and whether they can actually capture users looking for nearby stores using a voice command, as voice queries may differ from text commands. Proximity relevancy will come to be as important as keyword relevancy, as marketers seek to understand where users are and how that affects their intent. Location data will be essential for bridging the gap between voice commands and delivering people the content and information they need.

Amazon has already enabled voice ordering of products. Capital One bank has made it possible to do online banking and pay off credit cards with voice commands. Forward-thinking brands are starting to plan for a space where there is no longer a phone in someone's hand; the focus is on voice command and brand building experiences, based on consumer need.

Here are the key steps to follow as you begin to plan, create and implement your voice strategy:

1. What is the Local Opportunity?

Consider the following:

- Does your brand need local voice content right now?
- Do you have the IT, content and UX resources to build a good voice experience?
- Do you have a local technology stack (CMS) to scale local voice content to cities, zip codes, and neighborhoods?

Then:

- Build out content experiences, optimize recommendations, potential opportunity with keywords, and then work internally with IT teams and UX teams to ensure they are building that into the experience.
- Optimize for keywords “near me” and “nearby,” and ensure listings information (NAP -- name, address and phone) is correct and readily available. Use your standard scheme of tagging, using item props to define content in potential pages or Web applications so these different engines can access that information and deliver that local experience.
- Look at local content marketing opportunities including local stores, advocates, and influencers. Linking is still an important piece—get them talking about the experiences you are creating for your brand or local business.

2. Tying Voice Search to Local

- Broadcast your local identity far and wide. There are hundreds of sites in the local search ecosystem. Make sure your brand is everywhere, and maintain accurate listings data on all of them.
- Ensure each location has its own landing page. Even if users turn off tracking software, Google knows where they are and will tailor “near me” search results to that location. Tie this into organic search to provide an optimized experience for each individual market. A local landing page enables you to control how a consumer sees you if they visit your website outside of traditional e-commerce. Include reviews, which boost search rankings (Cortana and Alexa can pull data from those sources).
- Integrate conversational language into Web content, through reviews or nearby points of interest, tailoring how you speak to the customer in different parts of the country.

3. Capture Consumers in their Moments of Need

Google sees about 1.2 trillion searches per year worldwide, around 30% of which are locally oriented. Picture a person travelling in a car, asking to find a nearby restaurant to take a client for lunch. To capture these moments:

- Be present within in-car GPS providers. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are going to tie into the Apple or Android experience, including Google Go, Okay Google or Siri Search, from directly within your car.
- Identify sources for “personal assistants.” For example, Uber looks to optimize rides by identifying local points of interest, or using location data provided by brands to make sure you get there on time.
- Use reviews to your advantage. When looking for a product or service, customers look for the ones that have the best star rating or the most reviews. Consumers can read content, finding validation from other users who have used the company. Reviews also add organic value.
- Integrate local information across platforms and your native applications to solve customers’ needs when looking for your brand. When optimizing for that, include conversational language outside of traditional SEO.

4. Utilize Data to Optimize Your Efforts

- Google Search Console contains useful data from marketing at a desktop or mobile level, as well as in-app. Use it to identify what people are searching for and add conversational language or different content to those landing pages.

How this all comes together:

- User enters a voice search query: “Where can I find pet stores near me?”
- As with traditional SEO, marketers optimize for “Where can I find” (location layer), “pet stores” and “near me.”
- This leads to an embedded Google Maps result with a paid search result at the top and a list of nearby pet store locations.
- User clicks on the closest location and is presented with a Google Knowledge Card of a particular Petco store including reviews, opening times and a phone call button.
- Knowledge Card includes a link to a mobile-optimized local landing page that resides within the app.
- Brands can introduce social media feeds so the user can share their site. Keeping that customer throughout the entire journey while sticking to your brand makes it easy for them to actually visit your store and convert.



- Compare desktop and mobile queries. Google Chrome allows voice search on a desktop, which is different from a mobile experience. It is not necessarily tied to location, but does provide good insight into how you can optimize your content.
- Take a local lens to your Web analytics. Where are people actually searching for your business and landing on your landing page? This helps you know where your customers are, where you can optimize against, and where you can apply hyper local content.
- Discover how your brand is represented on various networks and make sure the brand message is consistent and listings accurate.

Conclusion

As voice consumption becomes more popular, marketers cannot afford to ignore this growing trend. Brands must be able to capture customers looking for their products or services, whether they search via mobile or desktop, from home or on the go, via text or voice. This will become one of the major ways consumers search for products. Brands must make sure they optimize for it and build a robust voice strategy into their marketing plans.

About Rio SEO

Rio SEO simplifies complex local search marketing to convert searches into sales. We partner with global, multi-location brands to optimize local listings and content across every major search engine, on every device. With scalable, cost-efficient search solutions on a full-service platform, we do more than list your business – we give it prime real estate.

Rio SEO works with major brands to increase local site visibility and drive local revenue. We partner with more than 100 retailers and service providers with 50+ locations and proudly maintain a 93 percent client retention rate. Our customers love us because we get results. To learn how Rio SEO can drive search to sales, please visit us at <http://www.rioseo.com>.

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