



Optimizing Your Website for Rich Results

Video: What Are Rich Results?

The search landscape has changed dramatically in the past several years.

One of the big changes is the introduction of rich results, sometimes referred to as rich snippets, also known as SERP features. In order to understand rich results and the role they play in SEO today, let's take a step back and define a few terms.

What are SERPs?

SERPs (Search Engines Results Pages) are Google's response to a user's search query. (Source: Backlinko)

In the early days of search, SERPs just contained the classic "10 blue links."

These were purely organic search results and simply contained links to a web page. But today, SERPs are much more nuanced as Google has become more sophisticated and developed new ways of displaying information in order to better aid searchers.

SERPs can include:

- Organic results
- Paid ads
- Featured snippets
- Knowledge graphs
- Rich results

SERPs are important for SEO because they determine how your site appears on Google.

More importantly, they decide how your site appears on Google's first page.

The majority of SERPs include some type of rich results.

>5% Less than 5% of search results have no SERP features at all. (Source: SEMrush sensor data)

Take a look at these two SERPs side-by-side.

This example shows the difference between a SERP with rich results and one without.

The SERP with rich results looks much more dynamic and visually appealing, and it offers different ways to access information about the product the user is searching for.

What are rich results?

Visually enhanced search results that provide supplemental information to the title, URL, and meta description of a web page.

Rich results can only appear for pages with certain types of information.

Google generates rich results by pulling information from a page's structured data, which is only available for



certain types of content. There are many different types of rich results, and you can find a full list in the Google search gallery documentation linked in the resources section. Not every type of rich result is going to be relevant to your business, so just focus on the ones that are.

Common rich results to optimize for include:

Image packs

Local packs

Reviews

Recipes

Site links

Image Pack

Image packs are results displayed as a horizontal row of images which click through to a Google Images search.

To optimize your image content, follow these best practices.

Include a descriptive file name for your image and detailed alt text, make sure your image URL is readable, optimize your image's size, and include a title attribute.

To learn more about how to optimize your images for search engines, check out the resources section.

Local Pack

Local packs contain the three physical locations that Google deems most relevant to the search query.

Local SEO has changed a lot in the past few years, and local features are rapidly evolving.

If you have a brick-and-mortar business, it's important to be familiar with Google's local features. One of the key actions is to create a "Google My Business" profile and make sure it's up to date with your business's hours of operation, location, and so on.

Local SEO is an entire discipline within itself, so check out the resources section to learn more.

Reviews

Review stars and ratings data can be displayed for products, recipes, and other relevant items.

Results with review stars have a higher click-through rate, so it's worth investing in if it's relevant to your business.

It can differ a great deal by industry, but the best practice is to include structured data on your site. Learn more about structured data in the resources section.

Recipes

For recipe searches, a carousel of recipes is displayed including rating information and ingredients.

How to optimize to appear in recipes

If you're running a food-related website, the recipes rich result is a great opportunity to increase your visibility in SERPs and your click-through rate. This is done using structured data.



Site Links

When someone searches for an exact domain, Google can display an expanded list of up to 10 site links.

Site links can benefit your site by generating a higher clickthrough rate and getting users to the page they're looking for faster.

Since site links appear for branded search terms, they're more likely to show up for large sites with a recognizable brand and higher traffic. If this is relevant to your organization, you can use structured data to optimize for this type of result.

There are many more types of rich results, but some of them aren't within your control as a website owner.

For example, for its Knowledge Panel, Google tends to pull data from its own index and from private data partnerships. For that reason, appearing in this type of rich result is out of reach for most websites. Other results like ads and shopping are paid for, so you can't get placement there organically.

Optimizing your website for rich results can help improve your click-through rate.

Since rich results are more visually engaging, users are more likely to click on them than the classic blue links.

That being said, it's also important to understand the SERP landscape for your industry and the keywords you're trying to rank for. If the SERPs are filled with rich results from highly authoritative sources or rich results you can't optimize for, then it might be worth going after a different keyword. When doing your keyword research, take note of what's on the first page of Google and, if there are any rich results you could be optimizing for, keep those in mind.

Rich results in SERPs is an evolution of on-page SEO. Once you feel confident that your pages are optimized in all the traditional ways, optimizing for rich results can take your site to the next level.

Video: What Is Structured Data?

Why is structured data important for SEO?

Structured data helps Google to better understand the contents of your pages and what your website is all about so it can provide more relevant, helpful results to searchers. Google's goal is to provide results that match a searcher's intent – results that are contextualized to their particular query, location, and preferences. Since one of the main goals of SEO is to optimize your site for search engines to more effectively crawl and index, structured data is another tool in your SEO toolset that helps you accomplish this.

What is structured data?

A standardized format for providing information about a page and classifying the page content (Source: Google).

Structured data is a markup language.

A markup language is computer code that can be written, read, and understood by humans. HTML is an example of a common markup language that most marketers have at least some familiarity with.

Like HTML, structured data communicates content in an organized way so that search engines can display that content in an attractive manner in SERPs.

When talking about structured data, the phrase "marking up" often comes up.



"Marking up" structured data means creating the structured data code.

How Google Uses Structured Data

"Google uses structured data that it finds on the web to understand the content of the page, as well as to gather information about the web and the world in general."

Source: Google Search Central

Google uses the information it finds in structured data to create rich results in SERPs.

Structured data makes it easier for Google to understand what images and content are about so it can accurately display that content in search results. The way in which these results are visually displayed are called "rich results" or "rich snippets." You can learn more about rich results in the resources section below.

There are no guarantees that Google will create a rich snippet of your page even when you've added structured data.

Using structured data only makes a web page eligible for rich results.

Structured data is a tool you can use to tell Google detailed information about the contents of your web pages.

The primary source of structured data markup is Schema.org.

What is Schema.org?

Schema.org is the organization that creates the standardized language and rules used for structured data.

You can search Schema.org to find the specific markup you need for your particular page.

Schema.org contains a large collection of different code examples which website owners can then adapt to their particular preferences. For example, if you have a website that sells computers, you can find code on Schema.org that allows you to show the price, stock levels, reviews, and ratings for your products.

Schema.org is accepted and understood by Google, which is why we recommend using it.

Google supports adding schema markup using a few different formats.

The recommended format is called JSON-LD.

What is JSON-LD?

JSON-LD is a script that can be placed within a web page to communicate structured data to search engines.

There are other formats for adding structured data, but JSON-LD is recommended.

It's not only Google's preferred format, but it's also less complicated than other methods. That's because with JSON-LD, all you need to do is place the script somewhere in the code of your web page.

Three Ways to Implement Structured Data

Work with a developer

Use a plugin

Add it manually



Structured data is primarily implemented by developers.

Since it involves writing and editing code, many marketers prefer to enlist the help of a web developer to do this job. However, if you're a marketer without any development resources, you can still take advantage of the benefits of structured data. Not all Schema markups are built the same: some are simpler to implement on your own, while others require more work with extra properties that are either required or recommended. A good guideline to follow is: the more recommended properties there are in a markup, the more likely you'll want to work with a developer.

Add structured data markup to your site using plugins.

If you use WordPress as your CMS, there are multiple plugins available that allow you to add structured data to your pages automatically.

If you don't have a developer or the option to use a plugin, you can also add schema markup to your pages manually.

This does require a bit of technical skill, so if you're very uncomfortable with coding then we recommend outsourcing to a developer. If you do feel comfortable getting your hands in a bit of code, implementing schema markup can be quite straightforward.

Steps to add structured data to a page:

In the head HTML of your web page, add a script element set to JSON-LD.

Inside the script element, tell Google you're using Schema.org structured data.

Based on the type of content you're describing, tell Google which kind of structured data you're using.

Add all the required and recommended properties to give Google more information about the content being described.

Here's an example of completed schema markup. (Source: Rice Media)

Adding structured data may sound complicated, but fortunately there are tools to help.

You can use an online schema generator to do a lot of this work for you: simply pick the type of markup you want to create, enter the relevant information, and copy and paste the code into the head HTML of your page. We've linked a schema generator in the resources section below which will help speed up the process and make it much easier.

Google has a helpful tutorial that guides you step-by-step through the process of manually adding structured data markup to a page, which is also linked in the resources section. We recommend going through that tutorial so you can get a feel for adding structured data before implementing it on your own site.

Test Your Structured Data

Make sure to test your page by using Google's Rich Results Test and Structured Data Testing Tool.

Using Google's structured data testing tool, make sure you've included the correct properties and you don't have any errors.

You can either enter a code snippet if your page is still in progress or provide a URL for a published page.

Google's Rich Results Test tool will tell you if you've included all the necessary information to make your page



eligible for rich results. You can also use either a code snippet or URL for this test. One helpful feature of this tool is that it allows you to preview how your page will appear in search results.

Video: Optimizing Featured Snippets

As Google gets better and better at understanding search intent, it wants to give searchers an IMMEDIATE answer to their questions - an answer so immediate, searchers won't even have to browse through the search results to get it. That answer comes in the form of a featured snippet.

What IS a featured snippet? Let's ask Google ...

Google says, "A featured snippet is a summary of an answer to a user's query, which is displayed on top of Google search results. It's extracted from a webpage and includes the page's title and URL."

Wait a minute ... featured snippets show up ABOVE the #1-ranked spot? As if it wasn't hard enough to rank #1! :)

But it's a bit more complicated than that. Google pulls featured snippet answers from one of the pages that ranks on page one of search results, but the page that wins the featured snippet ISN'T NECESSARILY the #1 result. This leaves the door wide open for content that ISN'T in the #1 spot to actually appear ABOVE the #1 spot.

That means it pays to know how to optimize your content not only for search, but for the newer organic search features like featured snippets.

There are three reasons you should care about featured snippets. For one, featured snippets show up for a lot of the terms your target customers are searching for. Google tends to serve up featured snippets for "Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How" queries, which are the types of queries your online content tries to answer. They also tend to show up for high-traffic terms and overarching topics.

For two, featured snippets often show up first for voice search results. In fact, 71% of search queries that triggered featured snippets on desktop led to the featured snippet result showing up first in voice search results. This is important because voice searches could become 50% of all mobile searches by 2020, a prediction reported by both Google and Bing.

Three: If you don't have an effective strategy for capturing how customers are changing the way they search, you will fail to attract them. Search is evolving, and the featured snippet feature is now taking significant organic search traffic on desktop, mobile, and voice search. As your customer adapts, so should you.

So - how can YOU optimize your own blog content for Google's featured snippet?

Your best chance at capturing the featured snippet is by optimizing blog posts that already rank in the top five positions in search results. Google tends to pick content from those spots over other spots further down on the page, making these the lowest hanging fruit.

So the first thing you'll want to do is to use Google Search Console to figure out whether any of your current blog posts rank in positions one through five for any significant keywords. Make a list of these high-ranking posts along with the keywords they rank for.

Next, open up a new incognito window in your browser and search for that keyword to see if Google serves up a featured snippet in search results. You want to prioritize the posts that are ranking for keywords that serve featured snippets, so put a checkmark next to the ones that do. But even if there ISN'T a featured snippet showing up for that query, keep in mind that Google is adding new snippets all the time, so you may want to check back in the future.



Next, optimize these posts for the featured snippet. Google favors content that best answers the search query in a simple, concise format. In fact, **FORMAT** is the most important factor here. Google uses an algorithm to extract content for snippets, so if the text isn't formatted cleanly, it won't understand what's going on and will skip that result.

If the keyword your post is ranking for is serving up a featured snippet in a **LIST-BASED** format, make sure your content includes a list that is clearly labeled with headers. You might even add a short list version of your larger blog post at the top of the page to make it even easier for Google to identify it for a snippet. List seven steps or fewer if you can - Google will cut you off at eight steps in the snippet anyway.

You can do the same for a featured snippet in a **PARAGRAPH** format: Write a short answer to your target query and put it in a module above the rest of your post. Google tends to prefer when featured snippets are fewer than about 50 words. As for what to write in there, take note of the content that's winning the snippet right now to get an **IDEA** of what the search engine is looking for - but don't copy it word-for-word. Instead, try and **IMPROVE** on what's already in there.

Once you've made these changes, submit the URLs to Google to be re-crawled. Measure the results by the number of clicks from the results page, the change in click-through rate, and the impact on the blog post's organic traffic. Keep in mind that because snippets are an algorithmic feature by Google, results will vary from day to day. We recommend you track your new snippets every day for around four weeks to account for appearances, disappearances, and content switching.