

Beyond the chat: AI and what it means for SEO

We've all seen the headlines. That Open AI's watershed breakthrough spells the end of the copywriter. That it's going to radicalise content creation as we know it, making things easier, quicker and more efficient. But what about the inherent risk of over-saturation of the same type of content and its impact on SEO? Here, Richard Hayes, search director at Catalyst tells you everything you need to know about harnessing the best of generative AI while ensuring an organic visibility advantage over the competition.

Ever since Open-AI launched its revolutionary new AI chatbot auto-generative system last November, it would seem that ChatGPT is all that anyone can talk about.

Widely revered as the most advanced AI programme of its kind to date, ChatGPT is able to provide a remarkable (though not entirely faultless) human-like approach to writing quality web articles and texts and even create poetry and code. It is a revolutionary tool that provides a direct, single-query response, saving users time and increasing convenience.

Cue an inevitable onslaught of discussion and debate about what this all means for the future business world, whether it presents the demise of the copywriter and if marketers should be quivering in their boots.

Amongst all this, the pros have certainly been many. The wide-bearing efficiencies to be afforded by pivoting to marketing automation, the opportunity to unburden marketing talent from the mundane and monotonous to free up their valuable time for more strategic and creative tasks, and the associated cost-efficiencies.

Alongside this too, many business leaders will be well-versed with the associated cons. Primarily, the fact that no robot to date – or, perhaps, ever – has the capacity to provide a genuine substitute for the creativity of the human brain. Further potential issues arise in the associated lack of empathy and the worrying risk of inherent bias.

Notably though, one major potential drawback if not managed correctly continues to fall under the radar: the impact on SEO.

As any business leader will know, a robust and effective SEO strategy is the holy grail of the modern marketing mix. Get it right and it can enable brands to boost their credibility, reach more people, gain a competitive advantage, maximise paid marketing (PPC) campaigns and deliver meaningful, quantifiable commercial impact.

Of course though, any SEO strategy is only as good as the content it is founded on. It hinges on a wider framework of regular, consistent web articles, blogs and social media posts purposefully created to contain the key words which are relevant for the brand and target demographic. Hereby, the ultimate goal of SEO is to generate organic traffic – getting searchers clicking through to the website.

The question then begs – what will happen if robots take over SEO-based copywriting? Inherently, any AI is trained only on pre-existing material, therefore it can only create new content that is similar to that work. This means that it cannot be impulsive or spontaneous, generate fresh ideas or invent anything. Thus, there lies the potential risk of oversaturation of the same content. Say, if all manufacturers use it to ‘write a blog on efficiencies in the manufacturing process’ without much personalisation, all blogs on this topic will be the same. Of course, most online articles are used to help SEO, so it remains to be seen how brands will gain an organic visibility advantage over competitors using this method.

Though we are still in the early stages of the conversation, the good news is that SEO professionals and marketers shouldn’t be daunted by this evolution.

Indeed, ChatGPT and other LLMs can be used to generate SEO content but that doesn't necessarily mean they should be – at least, not in its entirety. At the moment, Google algorithms is able to identify and penalise AI-generated content. This means, even when using AI to generate basic content to save time, there should always be some level of human intervention to develop it further for the audience and ensure some level of originality.

In other ways though, ChatGPT can be used to elevate copy further. It can be used, for example, to render the often mundane task of keyword research practically effortless. Users simply need to type in a few example target keywords, and ask for related ones. A short while later, it is able to produce a vast list of keywords and phrases – which, again, may still need adapting – something which would take much longer via a traditional manual research.

What's also great in terms of SEO-related potential is ChatGPT's ability to go beyond words and really drill down into the search intent – the need behind the search query – of the user. For example, users can copy-paste a list of search queries and ask for the intent of the query using the prompt, 'what is the user intent behind these queries?' This can ensure each piece of related content is able to answer the query better in order to shoot up the rankings.

Amid the age of the digital-first consumer, there is no refuting the importance of SEO in helping brands built credibility and trust with audiences, leading to long-term exponential growth. Therefore, it is incredibly important that brands do not rush into the latest copywriting opportunities afforded by AI without paying due diligence to the impact on SEO. Rather, leveraging this innovation will require a delicate balancing act between the old and the new, automation and human intervention to create content which converts.

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