The
EAT
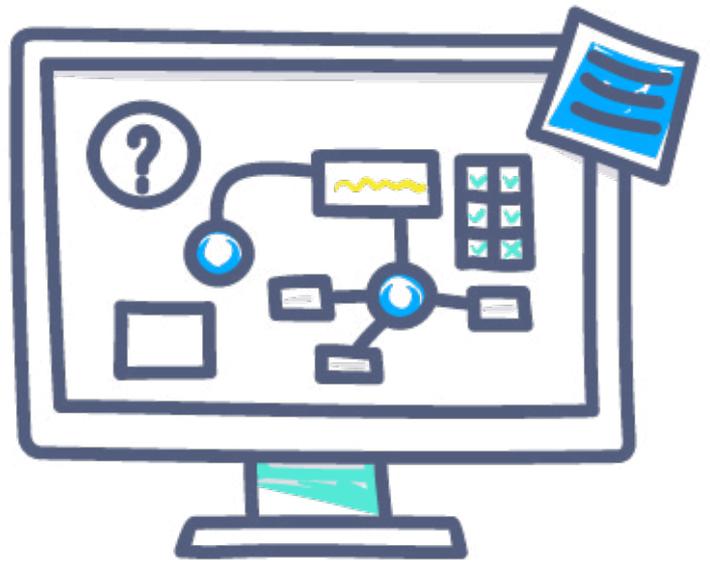# Guide

The standard for SEO has advanced.

EAT (a core update) rocked some big name brands, and this guide exists to make sure it doesn't happen to you.

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In 2018, Google sanctioned a core algorithm update. Its goal? To serve users the best quality content on search engine results pages. EAT, an acronym for "expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness", is a metric evaluated by Google to determine page rank which is at the heart of their algorithm update.

"Websites or pages without some form of beneficial purpose, including pages that are created with no attempt to help users, or pages that potentially spread hate, cause harm, or misinform or deceive users, should receive the **Lowest** rating."

Google's 'Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines'.

Many respectable websites with good content were hit by this update. Was yours?

What is EAT?

If you're at all familiar with Google's core algorithm updates, you'll agree Google's statement sounds familiar...

Isn't it a new version of Google Panda?

Panda, a core update carried out in February 2011, was intended to reward high-quality websites and diminish the presence of low-quality sites in Google's organic search results. Panda aimed to lower the rank of "low-quality sites" or "thin sites", in particular "content farms", and return higher-quality sites near the top, essentially serving the best quality content in its SERPs.

So, what's different?

Panda relied heavily on thin and low-quality content, identifying and penalising black-hat SEO techniques such as duplicate content, or mismatched information. EAT is already more advanced.

In Google's mind, any webpage that lacks expertise, authority and trust is a low-quality page. In order to be deemed high-quality, Google states that "websites need enough expertise to be authoritative and trustworthy on their topic."

The following sites in particular must be written by accredited, qualified experts:

- Medical
- Financial
- Legal

i.e. Pages that offer advice or information that have the potential to have a negative impact on a person's health, happiness or wealth.

These pages in particular (medical/financial/legal) are subject to YMYL. A supplementary evaluator, also known as Medic, that has heightened the need for EAT. YMYL stands for 'Your Money or Your Life' and explains queries that involve your money (finances), and your life (health and wellbeing).

It is important for Google to tighten up on these queries because non-authoritative and non-factual sites giving bad advice can strongly affect a person, especially if they are prominent on SERPs.

So, whilst the EAT guidelines declare search evaluators do not discriminate against authors who do not have formal qualifications for some topics, it is essential for YMYL sites.

But, why?

Google's mission statement is fairly bold:

"...to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

Over the years, Google has changed significantly to better serve its user and deliver the information they require. What used to just be a list of links to webpages now contains maps, videos, biographies, calculators, translations, the knowledge graph and a whole host of other elements. However, to answer the vast majority of informational searches no matter how they present it, ultimately, Google relies on other people's content.

People increasingly rely on Google for important life information:

80% growth in mobile searches for "__ should I __" in the past two years.

Think with Google
Google data, U.S., Mobile, Jan-Sept. 2017 vs. Jan-Sept. 2015

For such important queries, Google need to serve the best and most reliable content for their users. So as good SEOs (*cough, like ourselves*) have managed to get websites to rank at the top of Google for a number of queries, Google needs to be able to distinguish what information is really the most accurate and trustworthy.
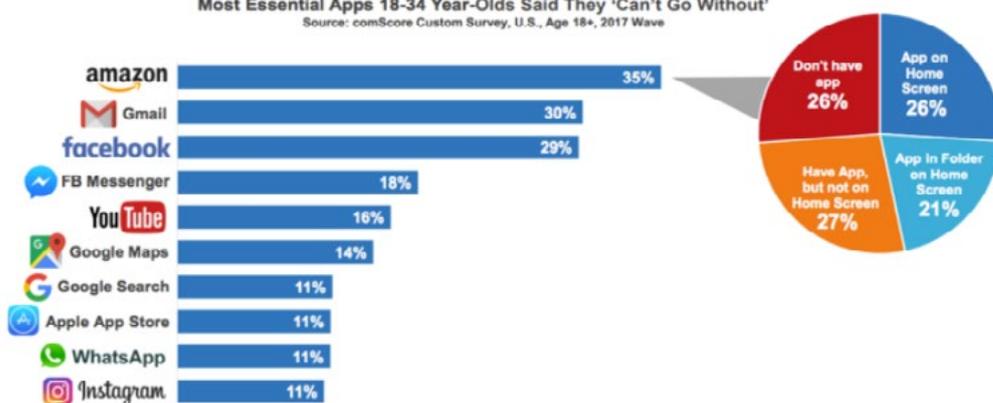
And that makes sense. Regarding health, do you want to hear advice from a junior copywriter who has written an article on a well respected site so they can earn a backlink to a product, or do you want to read advice from a medical professional?

Google needs to be able to distinguish what information is really the most accurate and trustworthy

However, there may be another reason...

Google search and ads are where Google make its money (a staggering $116 billion in 2018). However, despite ever increasing revenues from advertising, Google has a battle on their hands. Facebook is taking the fight to YouTube, with a dedicated video platform aptly named "Facebook Watch", and a 2017 study showed that 18-34 year olds said that Amazon was the app they couldn't live without.

Most Essential Apps 18-34 Year-Olds Said They 'Can't Go Without'
Source: comScore Custom Survey, U.S., Age 18+, 2017 Wave

App	%
amazon	35%
Gmail	30%
facebook	29%
FB Messenger	18%
YouTube	16%
Google Maps	14%
Google Search	11%
Apple App Store	11%
WhatsApp	11%
Instagram	11%

Don't have app 26%
App on Home Screen 26%
Have App, but not on Home Screen 27%
App in Folder on Home Screen 21%

* Survey respondents were asked to select their top 3 'most essential' apps (i.e. the apps they couldn't go without) of the apps they own.

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Google needs to give better, more relevant and more trustworthy results to compete with sites that are stealing traffic, and its revenue as a result. By providing a good experience where users can trust that they are going to find the highest quality and most relevant results, Google hope to entice users back.

EXAMPLE:

Shoppers already automatically go to Amazon to find a product. To defend against YMYL sites like 'NHS Directory' for health services, or 'Money Saving Expert' for finance snatching any more direct traffic, Google needs to remain the "go-to" search engine. EAT is how they set about ensuring that.

The EAT Roadmap

A breakdown and a few quick insights into Google's Search Quality Guidelines. We've read it, so you don't have to..

If we want to know what Google deems as good content, then the best place to start is the Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines.

However, at 164 pages long it's an arduous read.

This is an important document. Not only does it uncover what optimisation Google is currently looking for, it shows how they would like Google's search engine to behave. By taking the points in this document into consideration and putting the advice to practice will not only increase your chances of ranking now, but futureproof your content for future algorithm updates so this doesn't happen:

Estimated Traffic *i*

This example is from a very well-known insurance comparison site who were creating irrelevant and low quality content to earn backlinks, funneling them to a core product page through an image link. This tactic did not convey expertise, authority or trust and they were heavily penalised for it.

How to EAT Your Content

So, of course, the big question is how can you show your content is expert, authoritative and trustworthy?

Conveying expertise through:

- Detailed, thorough content
- Fully-referenced sources
- Content written by experienced individuals
- No errors – and up to date content

Provide high-quality, unique insight about a variety of relevant topics, and always cite secondary sources which demonstrates high quality research. Think: does the content we've written lean upon individuals' unique insight and knowledge?

Conveying authority through:

- Author bios
- Author's reputation

These two factors are important. The Search Quality Guidelines specifically state to look out for:

- The expertise of the creator of the MC [Main Content].
- The authoritativeness of the MC creator, the MC itself, and the website.
- The trustworthiness of the MC creator, the MC itself, and the website

Display authors' relevant qualifications or awards (MSc, PhD, OBE etc.) in content, and use renowned writers with an extensive, loyal social following.

Main Content is Google's term for the content on the page that is relevant to the query. This is all the content on a page that is the reason for the page existing for a user.
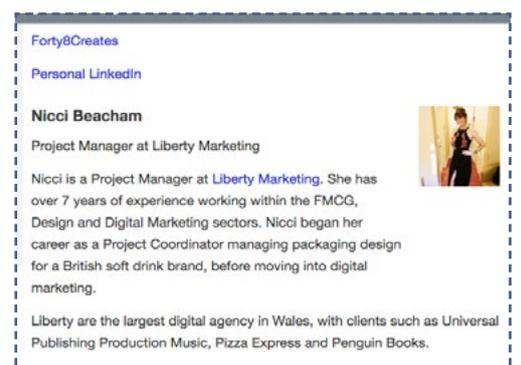
Erica Julson

MS, RDN, CLT

[in] [f] [twitter] [instagram]

Erica is a registered dietitian and blogger with a passion for functional nutrition and online entrepreneurship. She runs two websites, Functional Nutrition Answers and The Unconventional RD, where she shares nutrition articles and helps other wellness professionals create passive income online. Erica earned her Bachelors in Psychobiology from UCLA and her Masters in Nutritional Science from CSULA. She also has additional training in adverse food reactions. When she's not at the computer writing, Erica can be found in the kitchen, rocking out to good music and cooking up a storm.

The example above is an Author Bio from the website Healthline.com. The bio conveys all EAT factors and reassures the user that the content written by this person is likely to be accurate and useful. It also contains links to social profiles (including LinkedIn) to reinforce expertise and trust.

Conveying expertise through:

- Reassuring, matter-of-fact tone of voice
- Engaged communities
- Customer service information
- Case studies

An example may be pages containing verified user reviews and/or a Q&A section where the website owner is helpful and responds to all questions. Both elements are going to convey trust for a user.
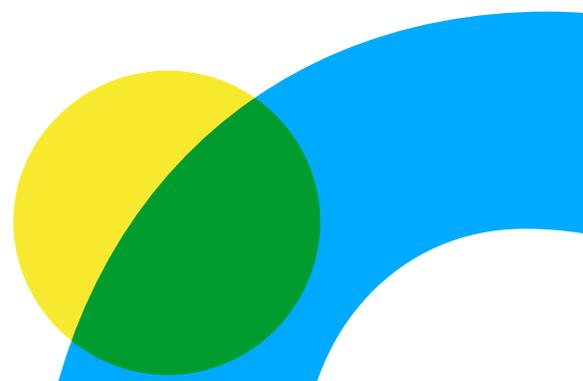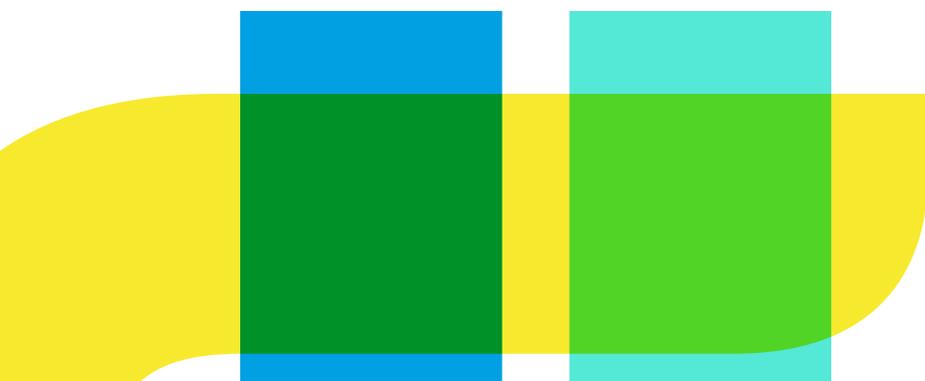
Offsite EAT

It's not just onsite factors that convey your content's EAT. There are several offsite elements that will influence this.

Links

Whilst this isn't a new concept at all, links are crucial to being able to convey EAT in your website and content. Links and mentions from relevant and high-quality websites are a vote of confidence, and the association to your website will be a boost.

Author features and mentions

If the person responsible for writing content on your website is featured in other publications and is writing content for other relevant and authoritative websites, then that association is going to benefit your content.

Reviews

As well as reviews on your page, positive reviews for your business and services/products on respected third party websites will help show trust. This is highlighted within the guidelines:

"...find out what real users, as well as experts, think about a website. Look for reviews, references, recommendations by experts, news articles, and other credible information created/written by individuals about the website.

Stores frequently have user ratings, which can help you understand a store's reputation based on the reports of people who actually shop there. We consider a large number of positive user reviews as evidence of positive reputation.

When a high level of authoritativeness or expertise is needed, the reputation of a website should be judged on what expert opinions have to say. Recommendations from expert sources, such as professional societies, are strong evidence of very positive reputation."

Social gravitas

Again, this is nothing new and not solely useful for EAT purposes, but if real people are talking about you, or sharing your content on social then it reinforces trust in your brand.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

The update has been substantial, but it hasn't fundamentally shifted what SEO is and what your approach to SEO should be. Regardless of the update, you should want your content to show expertise, authority and trustworthiness; it'll be much more effective for building relationships with current and potential customers, and attracting links.

However, you shouldn't underestimate this update as the factors previously mentioned are likely to become more important. So, it'll be worth checking the following in an audit:

Analytics

Have you had a drop in traffic since August 2018? Can you identify the pages and see any EAT related reasons?

About Us

Is your information up-to-date? Do other pages to help customers (delivery, FAQs etc.) have relevant and useful info?

Author Profiles

Share their expertise and experience. Are your content contributors featured on other relevant/authoritative sites?

Content Upcycling

Updating content and displaying the new date, plus adding in missing elements will help under-performing content.

Link Audit

Are there relevant and authoritative domains pointing to your content? Do poor quality links need disavowing?

Content Strategy

Create purposeful, unique content that is going to show both users and Google why your content is trustworthy.

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Because we believe digital marketing shouldn't be complicated, wasteful or boring.
**We're educators, creators and problem solvers.
We help you do digital better.**

We now offer EAT audits, and industry-specific EAT workshops.

We can help get your historic content up to speed and work with you to ensure future content ticks all the boxes.

Get in touch today...

info@libertymarketing.co.uk

029 2076 6467