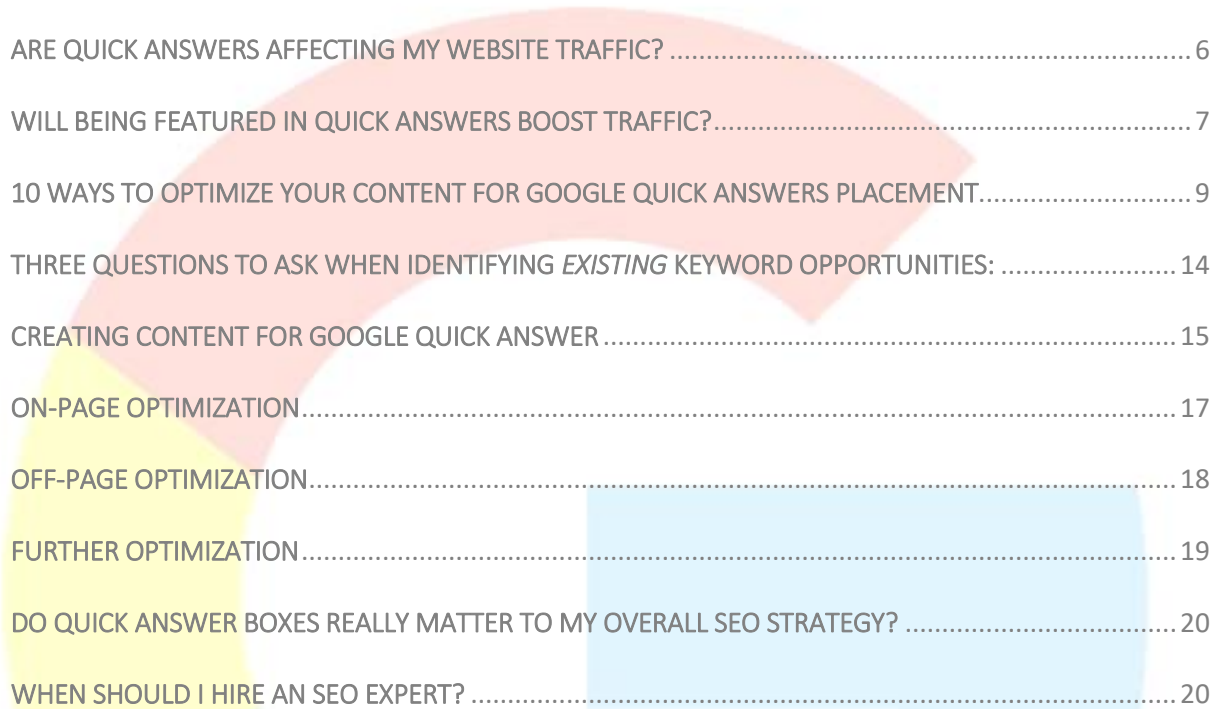# OPTIMIZING YOUR WEBSITE FOR GOOGLE QUICK ANSWER BOXES

A whitepaper from:

METAMEND
ONLINE MARKETING EXPERTS

**METAMEND**
ONLINE MARKETING EXPERTS

Contents

INTRODUCTION

For the person doing the Googling, Google Quick Answer Boxes are great—they provide concise, simple answers to a wide range of search queries and places them right at the top of the search engine's first page.

For the person trying to be found on Google, however, Google Quick Answer Boxes act as a bit of a road block. Fortunately, the good news is that as a small business owner, Quick Answers don't have to slow you down much, and you might even be able to use them to your advantage. Let's take a closer look.

WHAT IS A GOOGLE QUICK ANSWER?

Google Quick Answers outrank every other Google search result. They are short, quick answers to search queries that the search engine giant places at the top of its first page. If the question is as simple as a one word answer, the Quick Answer doesn't accompany a link (Google just informs you of the answer—have a nice day!)
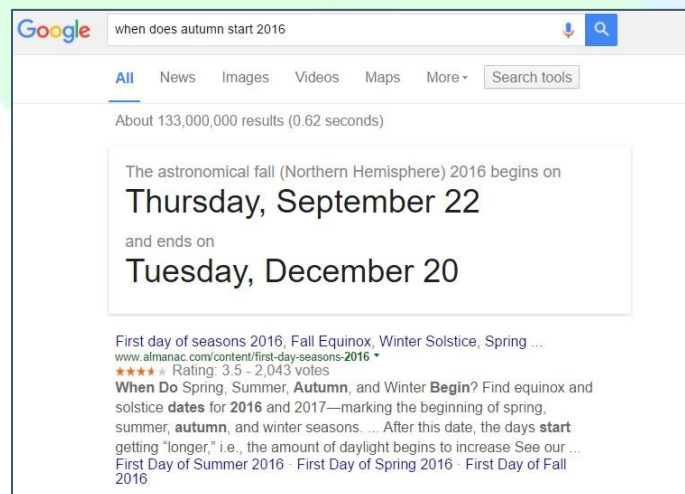
If the answer is more involved, a link to the source is included in the Quick Answer box. The text in the Quick Answer box is typically gleaned from a highly reputable, frequently visited web page.

The main components frequently found in a Quick Answer are:

➢ Text
➢ Title Tag
➢ URL
➢ Image

The Quick Answers are meant to provide users with instant gratification so to speak. They are more common when Google senses a question is being asked of it. The trigger words in most cases are "What is/Where is…" and "How do I…"

While the front page of Google is a highly coveted spot, the Google Quick Answer box can be considered the Holy Grail of SEO. There is, after all, only one spot available per search query.
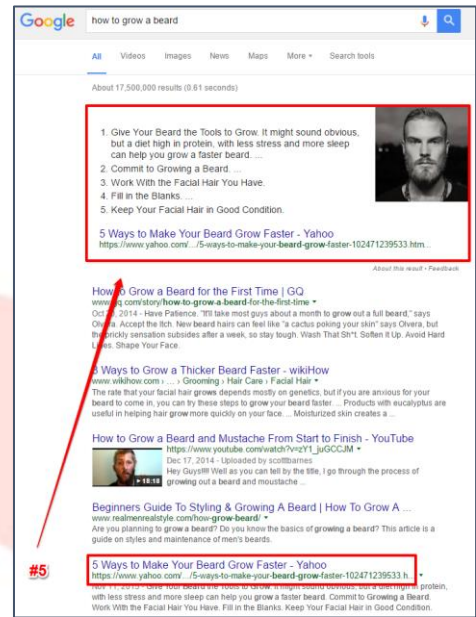
Google Quick Answers are also sometimes referred to as:

- Quick Answer Boxes

- Rich Answers

- Rich Answer Boxes

- Featured Snippets

- Google Answers

Spend any amount of time asking Google questions and you'll notice the same websites start to pop up with Quick Answers: Wikipedia, TripAdvisor, Yelp, Almanac, Yahoo Answers, National Geographic, etc. This is because all these sites are deemed trustworthy.

The top organic listing isn't necessarily the site Google selects to be featured in a Quick Answer. The following example shows the Quick Answer was taken from the site with a #5 organic position for "how to grow a beard".

ARE QUICK ANSWERS AFFECTING MY WEBSITE TRAFFIC?

Quick Answers are often just two or three sentence summaries taken from popular web pages. Their prominence at the top of search results typically means web surfers no longer have to click into websites—their questions are solved instantly so they can head on back to the party or get on with the debate, or go back to doing whatever else it was that prompted their internet search in the first place.

With this in mind, the big concern with Quick Answers is some experts believe they may be dissuading web users from clicking into websites, affecting their overall traffic. Therefore, people miss out on learning more about a potential brand or small business offering, and the website owner misses out on a potential sale.

This concern is based on some truth—some people will take their answer and run. At the same time, web users are a curious bunch, keenly interested in getting the full answer, learning more, and comparing people's thoughts and opinions.

Just think about it, how closely do you read the online comments on new stories or Facebook feeds? It's human nature to want to compare notes with other people. It's tough to take one person's word for it, or in this case, one website's two sentences of information. Relying on a Quick Answer is great if you're in a hurry, but it's akin to not shopping around. Therefore, for the majority of curious web surfers, the sites appearing just underneath the Quick Answer box are just as likely to get clicked on as the referring Quick Answer link.

At Metamend, we believe Quick Answers are more beneficial than harmful to small businesses. The key, of course, is optimizing the content of your website to complement, and maybe even one day become, the featured content in a Quick Answer box. If your website can rank within the top five search results of the box, you have a one in five chance of being the link people click on to learn more about their desired topic.

Think of it this way: if you shoot for the Quick Answer Box, and miss by just a little bit, you'll still end up among the top-rated Google search results. Not bad at all!

WILL A FEATURED IN QUICK ANSWERS BOOST TRAFFIC?

In short, yes.

By having the highly coveted top position in the SERPs as a Quick Answer, it's reported to increase traffic by 15 – 30%! Also, by being featured in a Quick Answer, searchers will interpret this as a glowing Google endorsement of your site.

This more than makes up for those who get their quick answer and leave.

Adobe mentioned they have seen a (net) 17% increase in traffic from being featured in a Quick Answer. This resulted in millions of extra site visitors.
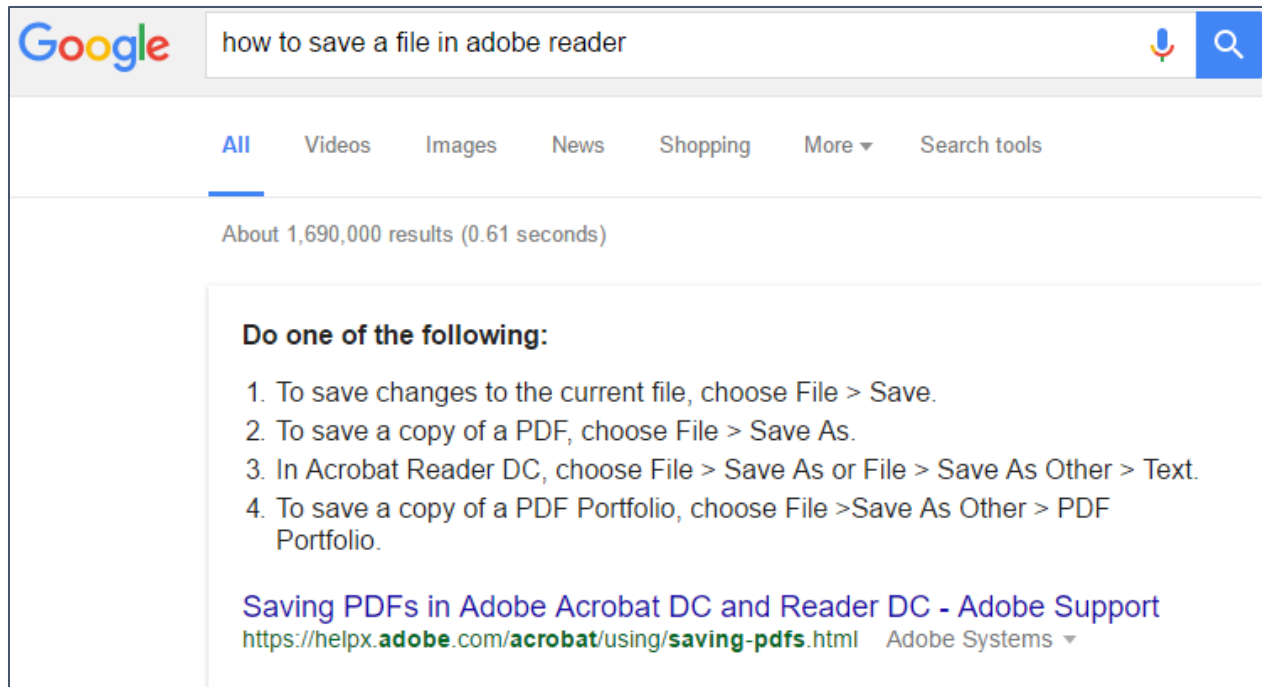
(Above: Example Quick Answer from Adobe.com)

Adobe says: *"Pages that Google selects for Quick Answers on our site are high authority pages with quality, well-structured content that is theme-relevant and optimized for a great user experience. This content also answers specific questions that closely match the query."*

10 WAYS TO OPTIMIZE WEBSITE CONTENT FOR GOOGLE QUICK ANSWERS PLACEMENT

It's a bit of a fine art to rank and be featured in a Quick Answer. There really are not any official rules or exact steps to follow. From various case studies and what brands have shared, here is what has worked so far:

1. **Take steps to be listed on the first page of Google.** You're likely already aiming for this, but it should be pointed out that sites on the first page of Google have a better chance of landing in the Quick Box. (especially those in the top 5 positions)

2. **Ensure the search query is in a header on the page.** If you'd like to be featured in an Quick Answer for "how to create a will", ensure that term is included as a heading (h1, h2, h3 etc).

3. **Directly below the header, include your *Featured Snippet* content in a <p> (paragraph) tag.** Aim to keep your answer under 60 words in length. Google prefers pages which are well structured and organized for a Quick Answer Box.

4. **Provide meaningful, well-written, concise content on your webpages.** This is going to be the easiest step, however daunting it might sound. Strive to have the magic number of words on each page. The average is around 1,500 per topic, whereas the cut off is upwards of 2,000.

5. **Structure the page with a positive UX (user experience) in mind.** While using on site optimization best practices, you should also have the content flow naturally for the end user.

   Keep plenty of white space, use concise paragraphs, bullet points and answer the "how-to" question as you would in person.

6. **Linking.** This is a part of step 1 in that you need some quality backlinks to your site and page to help it rank on the first page of Google. They are a great way to show Google that your site is reliable, popular and informative. The majority of sites featured in a Quick Answer have backlinks from 1000+ referring domains. Read that again, it's not just 1000 backlinks from a handful of domains, it's *1000 different domains linking back to your site*.

   Also, create internal links to other pages on your site and to external 3rd party (authoritative) sites.

7. **Make sure visitors are engaged with and spending time on your page.** If Google can see—through high user-engagement numbers—that your site is a popular source of information, it's more likely to rank you higher.

    Pay attention to your **bounce back rates**, and if they're high, you'll need to address why people aren't sticking around.

    > **Hint:**
    > It could be slow load times, flashy ads, outdated design, a confusing layout, or not enough information for people to stay and read.

8. **Include additional multimedia.** Create attractive videos, images, PDF downloads and links to other relevant topics.

9. **Use structured data / schema markup.** Google tends to reward sites which have implemented structured data / schema markup wherever possible. Anything you can do to help Google more fully understand what your page is all about, will go a long way.

10. **Include a "how-to" list.** The content you will find in a Quick Answer is either in the form of a: paragraph, list (bullet or numbered), or tablet snippet.

82% of the time, you will notice paragraph definitions. How-to lists appear 11% of the time. 7% is attributed to table snippets.

These 10 points give you the gist of how to get a Quick Answers placement. Below, we've elaborated on the more important aspects.

IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES

Brainstorm and conduct an in-depth Google search for topics which your customers would find interesting. A great tool for keyword ideas and monthly search volume is the Google Keyword Planner.

Simply select your industry/category as make sure to "only include keywords containing":

- How

- When

- Why
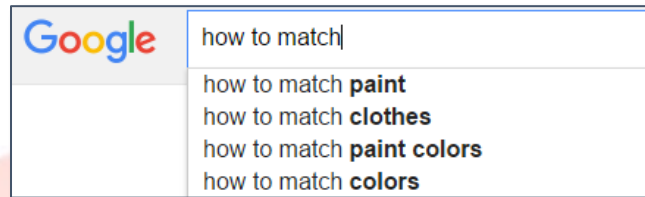
Another Google-y way to find keywords is to make use of Google's "autocomplete" search feature. Simply start typing a search query to view Google's suggestions.

Scroll to the bottom of the search results page to find:
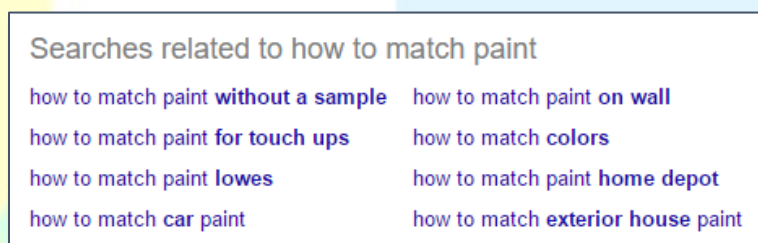
Those keywords/topics should already have a Quick Answer Box or ones which could make use of a Quick Answer.

For topics that already have a Quick Answer, investigate which site it's from. See if you can create content which better answers that query.

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN IDENTIFYING *EXISTING* KEYWORD OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Which keywords/queries are you currently ranking for? (Check your keyword ranking data in Google Webmaster Tools.)

2. Of those, are any of them of a conversational nature? How, When, Why, etc.

3. If so, are those ranking among the top 5 positions on Google? Great! Move to on-site optimization & page structure.

If you are ranking for a particular "how-to" query but not in a top 5 position, focus on your ranked page. Work on optimizing your content, add more backlinks from authoritative sites and more on-site user interaction.

Do some digging. Google your company and ask Google questions relating to your industry to discover what comes up and what doesn't.

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For example, if you're a real estate agent, try Googling common questions visitors to your city would care about. If nothing comes up in a Quick Answer, this is a great topic to answer on your blog.

You can also take advantage of current events and news stories in a strategic way by relating your timely content to what people are Googling right now. For example, a store selling wedding dresses may want to publish a blog post about the best dress selections for the current season of the reality show, The Bachelorette, and publish their ideas around the time the season finale of the reality TV show airs.

CREATING CONTENT FOR GOOGLE QUICK ANSWER

Once you have identified a query to write content around and create an answer for, focus on structuring it properly. Google always reminds webmasters to structure content and sites with UX (user experience) in mind.

Know what your customer is seeking and make that content as easily accessible as possible for them. If it's a "how-to" query, ensure you structure it with easy to follow bullet points or numbered lists. While you're at it, why not include a video or image?

Next, utilize structured data from **Schema.org** to mark-up your content for the search engines.

13 SUPER STYLISH WAYS TO TIE A SCARF

DIY FASHION, GUIDES, HOW-TO'S, POPULAR POST - FEATURED | 49 COMMENTS
SEPTEMBER 9, 2015 BY STEPHANIE GERBER

Total 1.5k | Facebook | Tweet | Pin | Email

Scarves might just be my favorite accessory. If I had to shop for just one thing for the rest of my life (why would someone that do me?) it might be scarves. Scarves don't judge you, they don't miraculously shrink when you're pregnant, and they have a tendency to stick around. But how to tie a scarf? That's another story! We asked our friends for their favorite methods and came up with 13 different scarf tying ideas. Some are classics and some will be your new favorite thing.

13 ways TO TIE A SCARF

13 How to Tie a Scarf? Tutorials

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"On-page markup enables search engines to understand the information on web pages and provide richer search results in order to make it easier for users to find relevant information on the web. Markup can also enable new tools and applications that make use of the structure."

– Schema.org

Write in a natural way and use entities (people, place, object, verbs) whenever you can.

Lastly, you will obviously want to follow SEO best practices for on-page optimization of the page. Items such as:

- ✓ Meta Title
- ✓ Meta Description
- ✓ Headings (h1, h2, h3, etc.)
- ✓ Image ALT Text
- ✓ Internal & External Linking
- ✓ Placement of Target Keywords Within the Content

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ON-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

1. **Go for a positive user experience.** This involves keeping the content scan-able. Most site visitors have short attention spans and eyes will start to glaze over if it's just an unorganized block of text.

   With this in mind:
   - ✓ Have plenty of white space
   - ✓ Short paragraphs
   - ✓ Use headings
   - ✓ Use bulleted lists

2. It's best for the Meta Title and <H1> tag to **match the Quick Answer query as closely as possible**.

3. **Use the first paragraph to answer the query**. Shoot for under 40 words. If it's a "how-to" query, use <ol> ordered lists (numbered lists) instead of <ul> unordered lists (bulleted lists).

4. **Include a "Related Links / Resources" section at the bottom of the page**. This will help Google see your site as authoritative on the query and as a better option for the Quick Answer Box.

> RELATED: How to stop Facebook's new targeted ads from following you around the web

5. As mentioned previously, think of including a **video, images and/or PDF downloads** to support your answer to the query.

OFF-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

Creating a great piece of content with the best answer to the query is the most important part of being featured in a Quick Answer.

That said, there are still a few off-page techniques to utilize:

1. **Earn backlinks to your site.**

    As mentioned, the majority of the sites featured in the Google Quick Answer Box have links from 1000+ referring domains. If you have a say on the anchor text, try to have it match the query. There are many sites which you can view your number of backlinks with.

    The example below is from majestic.com. Look at "referring domains", not "external backlinks".

External Backlinks	Referring Domains
1,318,100	11,128

    > **Pro Tip:**
    >
    > The best site to obtain a link from is Wikipedia.org, with regards to the Quick Answer Box.

2. **Share your page with others on social media**.

    Google loves sites which users are engaging with and talking about. By promoting the link to your page that answers the Quick Answer query, you will have many new eyes on the page, reading and hopefully sharing it with their followers.

3. **Ensure you use the "fetch" feature in Google Webmaster Tools**.

> Your page should be submitted for indexing as well as in the XML sitemap.
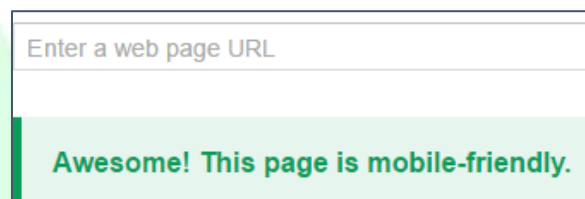
FURTHER OPTIMIZATION

1. **Speed up your site.**

   Google and site visitors much prefer a site which loads as quickly as possible. Shoot for sub 2 seconds load time.

2. **Make your site mobile-friendly**.

   The majority of site visitors are browsing via mobile devices. You will want to structure your site so it looks fantastic on mobile devices. To test, try https://www.google.ca/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/:

   Enter a web page URL

   Awesome! This page is mobile-friendly.

 OK, you might not beat out Wikipedia or Yelp on this one, but by trying you've at least generated some new content for your website, and half the battle of SEO is coming up with original ideas! In other words, if you aim to fill a void in the inter-webs, you're on a fast-track to eventually answering *someone*'s search query.

DO QUICK ANSWER BOXES REALLY MATTER TO MY OVERALL SEO STRATEGY?

At the end of the day, Quick Answer boxes are just another piece of the larger SEO puzzle. If you're doing everything you can to optimize your website for search engines, you're already on your way to being optimized enough to land in the Quick Answer Box.

WHEN SHOULD I HIRE AN SEO EXPERT?

SEO experts employ countless techniques that assist your business in being highly visible in search engine results, including:

- Creating easy-to-read web pages with clear headlines, short paragraphs, bulleted lists, graphics, and videos.

- Creating content that asks a question at the start and then provides the answer within the same blog post. This structure makes it easier for Google to culminate data.

- Adding links within your pages to related pages on your site and external sites as well.

- Performing on-page optimization of the page.

- Adding structured markup to the content.

- Adding a "Related Articles" or a "For Further Reading" list of articles to conclude each page.

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This is all just the tip of the iceberg. There are many more technical ways to inch your website closer to being a Google Quick Answer. We encourage you to get in touch with a reputable SEO firm to start a conversation about what you can do on your own, and what you might want to outsource. Be sure to ask them about some of the ideas the Search Engine Journal highlights in their recent post,

Optimize Your Site for Google Answer Box.

It's a whole new world out there!

Metamend is an SEO and online marketing agency with clients around the globe. We are more than happy to answer any questions you have regarding your current or future SEO strategy.

Request a quote today to get started!