BY KELSEY COPYWRITER

WHEN (AND WHY) AI DOESN'T RANK

Whitepaper —— 2024

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

Does Google Prefer AI? 2

Why Use AI? 3

What Humans Do Differently 5

Best Practices to Leverage AI 7

Conclusion 9

About 10

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence (AI) isn't indicative of content quality — so what is, and why are writers and marketers hyped about the AI revolution?

In this report, I investigated the effect of AI on Google Search with 300 keywords related to B2B wealth management, remittances, payments, and consumer finance information. Selected keywords were filtered via Semrush for difficulty level, volume, and whether they were long or short-tailed.

I analyzed the top 10 results for each keyword and determined the likelihood by submitting links through two AI-detecting platforms, Kazan SEO and On-Page.ai. Furthermore, I took 14 keywords and their top results as a detailed cross-sectional analysis before and after the March 2024 Google Search algorithm update.[1]

While AI models can highlight some unique qualities of human-written content, it isn't a total solution to creating an effective content strategy.

1 **https://econsultancy.com/google-march-core-update-2024/**

Does Google Prefer AI?



Google's official stance is that AI-generated content isn't a problem[2] — so long as it is of good quality. Looking at Google Search's current algorithm, it appears that likely or pure-AI content can't meet this standard.

According to my dataset, **only 0.46%** of the 2,834 links collected before the March 2024 update were 100% likely to be AI-written. After the update, **almost half** of the results that were 70% or more likely to be AI moved down, and **25.32% of AI-likely results were removed from the top 10.**

In terms of rankings, the number is just as dismal. With this parameter, around 0.60% of all rank-one links were potentially written by AI.

In other words, 99.40% of all links in the first position for their relevant keyword were likely to be written by people.

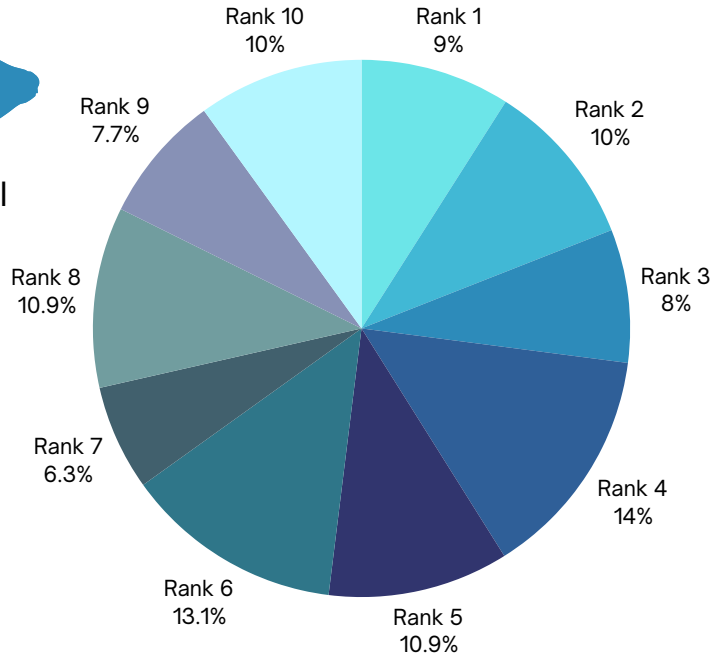
But not every article needs to reach #1, right?

2 https://developers.google.com/search/blog/2023/02/google-search-and-ai-content

Why Use AI?

I looked at every link with content that appeared to be 50% or more likely to have been written by AI, **with the most common ranking for AI being 4 and 6.**





Despite the effectiveness of AI being negligible, why do so many marketers and writers use it? A 2024 report from Semrush found that **71% of marketers using AI believe it to be effective**.[3] Respondents highlighted several benefits, including cost, quantity, and accelerated time from writing to distribution.

I asked fellow content creators in an open survey, and **90% said they use AI in their SEO content creation.** They highlighted several of the same benefits, including:

- **Streamlined content production (63.6%)**
- **Additional editing (45.5%)**
- **Content repurposing (45.5%)**

Few used AI for the writing portion of the content creation process, with the top three uses being used to research, outline, and repurpose content.

3 https://www.semrush.com/goodcontent/ai-content-marketing-report/

But there were also reasons to be cautious.

Both my study in the Semrush report, writers and marketers were most concerned over lower quality articles and lack of accuracy.

And there's a lot of truth to that. The current uptick in AI-content writing aids and the proliferation of generative AI content have created new challenges.

While AI can speed up several aspects of the writing process, especially in the pre-writing research stage, artificial intelligence has limitations.

AI is not particularly well-suited for:

- **Fact-checking**
- **In-depth, industry or audience-specific research**
- **Following client instructions**
- **Plagiarism detection**

Furthermore, AI can offer assistance with spelling and grammar reviews but is still prone to error.

The root of the issue is that AI doesn't think like a human being. It hones in on patterns and probabilities. And so, to understand how to use AI effectively, it's helpful to review how human beings and computers are pretty different.

What Humans Do Differently

One of the biggest misconceptions about AI and its subset, machine learning, is that the brain functions like a computer.

Artificial intelligence models are trained on large datasets and often depend on labeling information. While there is much to learn about the human brain, we know that it does more than this. We know, for example, that AI tends not to understand the context — even if its outputs align with accepted responses.

Humans process information differently. Our brains synthesize information and can, to some degree, fact-check using the context of broader knowledge about the world. We *understand* overall meaning based on context — something AI doesn't necessarily do.

Generally, artificial intelligence matches meaning to data points and uses probability to construct an answer from its database.

As a result, it's possible to trick or confuse AI. And there are many examples:

1. LabSix showed how manipulating a few pixels in the image of a 3D-printed turtle caused AI to mislabel it as a rifle.

2. Adding[4] stickers to street signs can cause AI to misidentify the sign.

3. AI may hallucinate[5]—or "makeup"[6]--- often nonsensical answers to fill in for database gaps.

4 https://www.semrush.com/goodcontent/ai-content-marketing-report/
5 https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/8578273
6 https://www.ibm.com/topics/ai-hallucinations

There are also other aspects of data collecting and writing that we do differently. Unlike AI, we can collaborate with team members, editors, and interviews. We can also better investigate why an individual, such as an interviewee or editor, gave a certain answer.

For instance, let's consider fact-checking. I recently employed Originality.ai as a fact-checker. Most "inaccuracies" were declarative sentences — even if they were original claims and even narrative phrases. Some of the "potentially false" claims included sentences like:

1. "You did everything by the book."
2. "Review technology specifications and use cases."
3. "The last thing you want to do is set up your tool and forget about it."

The algorithm deemed these quotes false because "they were not provided by sources" and then pulled random text in the opposite. For example three, it suggested that users should "set it up and forget it" according to Todoist and Microsoft Outlook—despite the fact the subject was accounting automation, which requires monitoring and optimization.

Due to our contextual thinking, human brains are still better at things like:

- ***When to "break the rules" of grammar or spelling***
- ***Maintaining brand tone and voice***
- ***Recognizing narrative flow***
- ***Whether or not research data or questions are relevant***
- ***Whether or not content plagiarized another article or used common knowledge***
- ***How accurate sources or quotes are***

Best Practices to Leverage AI

1. Use AI Ethically

Not all AI is made equal. There are horror stories of “AI solutions” in which the software is actually **dependent on manual labor** from developing nations. The **amount of energy AI** requires to function is alone a sustainability issue. The wrong content AI, in particular, could lead to **plagiarism and copyright infringement** lawsuits.

Therefore, looking for ethical AI programs that bake sustainability into their business model can help ensure responsible development without sacrificing your competitive edge.

2. Trust Your People

Your content creators are what make the content unique and successful. **At some point, the cost-savings from AI begin to flatline,** and you will need to hire or invest in writers who can take your content to the next level.

Human-written content is not more incorrect or ineffective than AI-driven content pieces. **Both can err, but only human-written content provides real-world insight and unique perspectives.** However, with the current limitations of generative AI, having content creators you can trust can boost your quality.



3. Keep Risk in Mind

There are a number of risks related to AI, including copyright infringement, lower-quality content, and inaccurate sourcing. When you build your process around these risks, you can manage your exposure without significantly slowing down your process.

4. Emphasize Customers over Competition

One of the primary drives for accepting AI is maintaining a competitive edge, which is entirely legitimate. **But it's important not to let the competition control your strategy.** Instead, it's helpful to look towards what your customers want—what are their questions and concerns, and how can you uniquely address them without oversaturating the algorithm?

This approach often requires more work on the front end—more communication with clients, customers, and shareholders. However, it can result in a stronger content strategy, in which **AI programs become tools to support your initiative, not the initiative itself.**

5. Focus on Quality

As one can see from the search results, quality matters. Google's policy continues to center around E-E-A-T, which is short for experience, expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness.

You can infuse even AI-written content with quality by having writers integrate interviews, surveys, original studies or ideas, varied content types, and other unique identifiers into your content pages.

Conclusion

AI isn't going away. At the same time, the industry needs a new paradigm to view these programs. **Artificial intelligence platforms today are tools, not replacements for content creators.**

Marketers and content writers can successfully leverage the speed of generative content services only when they understand the risks and limitations of these solutions.

Relying on AI for repurposing content, initial research queries, or extremely rough drafts enables marketers to streamline aspects of the content creation process. However, it would be good practice to emphasize quality through thorough human revisions, fact-checking processes, and customer-facing content research.

At the end of the day, our executive team or clients want results. They want to see rankings and traffic growth. They also want to know the reasons for slow or negative growth and what steps we will take to remedy them. AI cannot be the answer to all these questions. It must be in the infrastructure.



About Me

Hi, I'm Kelsey Ray Banerjee.

I'm a content writer **specializing in B2B fintech, finance, sustainability, and SaaS solutions.** Outside work, I am passionate about international finance, linguistics, martial arts, geopolitics, and geology. Having lived in the United States, Germany, and India, as well as visited over a dozen countries, I pride myself on adaptability.

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