



**Catalyst POV on Google Freshness Algorithm**  
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## What is it?

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On November 3rd, 2011 Google announced a change to their web search algorithm. The change is nicknamed, "Freshness" and impacts 35% of all searchers and noticeably impacts 6-10% of all searches.

Freshness is an attempt by Google to improve their search results for queries that are time sensitive. For example, if you search for [NFL Scores] you most likely want to see results from last night's games as opposed to games a month old. In addition to the hyper-time-sensitive content, Google is also paying special attention to date specific content where the best results could be a week or a few weeks old.

## How does it Work

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### **The first step Google must take is in understanding the intention of the searcher**

For a query like [oil change] it may not be necessary for me to see the most recent videos uploaded to YouTube about oil changes. A good tutorial from a year ago would be just fine, but for hot topics like [Dancing with the stars] a video from last season wouldn't be what I am looking for.

To determine whether the query is time sensitive or not Google compares the query to its trending data at <http://www.google.com/trends>. They can also analyze the conversations and content being shared on social networks like Twitter, Facebook and Google+.

### **The second step Google must take is to make sure their index has the most recent content**

Last year Google completed an infrastructure upgrade known as Caffeine. The purpose of the upgrade was to allow content to be discovered and made available to users at a much faster pace.

The Caffeine powered infrastructure supports a number of technologies that allow content to be discovered, organized and delivered to users in near real time.

#### **Chrome:**

The first technology is the Chrome browser. While the official "Googlebot" spider is still actively crawling links on pages, users surfing the web using Chrome are able to report newly discovered URLs back to Google's central computers, initiating a content crawl.

#### **RSS:**

The second technology Google is using to discover fresh content is RSS feeds. Most commonly associated with blogs, an RSS feed is a listing of new pages added to the site. Much in the same way that an XML-sitemap tells Google how to crawl your site, an RSS feed provides Google with a structured list of newly added pages.

In 2007, Google acquired FeedBurner which manages the RSS feeds of a large percentage of the Internet's blogs. By monitoring new posts through FeedBurner, Google is fed the freshest content within minutes of posting.

## What is the Impact?

### A change in the Search Engine Result Page's Interface

The search results have been updated to include what some are calling, "Fresh Links". They are like sitelinks, but instead of linking to important pages within the site they link to the most recent content related to a query.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "football". The search bar contains "football" and the results show "About 1,340,000,000 results (0.31 seconds)". The first result is "NFL.com - Official Site of the National Football League" with the URL "www.nfl.com/". Below the URL is a snippet: "The official source for NFL news, video highlights, fantasy football, game-day coverage, schedules, stats, scores and more." There are also several news snippets: "Week 10: Ravens, 49ers locked in tie for No. 2 behind Packers - 2 hours ago", "Waking from dreams: Eagles fans irate after MNF loss to Bears - 2 hours ago", and "Angelo: Bears will wait and see' in Forte contract situation - 10 hours ago". At the bottom, there is a "Share" section with "Schedule - Fantasy - Scores - NFL Teams" and a profile picture of Chris Voss with the text "Chris Voss shared this on Google+ · Oct 9, 2011". On the left side of the search results, there is a vertical menu with "Maps", "Videos", "News", and "Shopping". A blue callout box with a white border and a tail pointing to the first result contains the text: "Fresh links have a strong correlation with RSS feed".

### Takeaway:

If one of your target keyphases now has freshlinks added to the page, you may experience a change in click through rate. For a #1 result, the traffic going to the homepage may drop, but traffic going directly to sub-pages will rise.

If you are in the #2 or lower position, you will likely see a drop off traffic as you listings will be pushed down the page resulting in a lower click through rate.

## Recommendations

### A need for content strategy

If there is no content strategy in place, now is a good time to develop one. Google is placing a premium on fresh content and websites that regularly produce relevant content around time sensitive queries will see improved rankings and increased traffic.

If your website does not have a blog, or if you have one and don't use it, now is the time to activate it. Most blog content management systems come with a built in RSS feed that you can use with FeedBurner to let Google know when new content is live.

### **A need for Social SEO Strategy**

Google has mentioned that they will be relying on social networks like Google+ to source content from. As of November 7th 2011, brands can now create profiles on Google+. This marks the beginning of a very serious need for brands to connect their social strategy with their SEO strategy, not just because Google is feeding their Freshness algorithm with Google+ content, but because social signals are now an important part of SEO across the board.

### **Monitor Your Rankings**

Make sure that any raises or drops in your rankings are correctly attributed to the algorithm change. You should pull a ranking report as soon as possible to see if there were any movers or shakers. Identify the keywords in transit and do a manual check to see if freshlinks exist. Annotate the changes so that you can both explain and properly attribute the impact on traffic. Also, make sure you annotate it within your analytics platform so that you don't forget what happened come next year when you are comparing year over year data.

## **Conclusion**

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According to BrandWatch, the Freshness algorithm change is having a positive impact on news sites, broadcast sites, video portals and brand sites. The losers are a mix of sites without a strong correlation.

Even though 35% of searches are affected, the actual number of keywords affected is much smaller since a single keyword may have many searches performed daily. It is best to watch your rankings and site analytics to see what keywords may have impacted your business, and what recommendations may need to be acted on.

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### **About Catalyst Online**

Catalyst Online is a leading search engine marketing agency headquartered in Boston, MA. We have been a pioneer in developing strategic search marketing services since 1998. Our clients include many of the world's top companies.

At Catalyst Online, we pride ourselves on thought innovation through industry and product expertise. Our service offerings include: search engine optimization (SEO), paid search marketing, content strategy, digital asset optimization, mobile search, e-retail optimization, global search, competitive reporting, and more.

Catalyst Online is part of GroupM, the leading global media investment management group. The focus of GroupM is the intelligent application of physical and intellectual scale to benefit trading, innovation, and new communication services, to bring competitive advantage to our clients and our companies.

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