



Marketing

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Chasing the Featured Snippet: the Good, Bad and Ugly

With Google adding more value to the search engine results page, is chasing ‘position zero’ a worthy SEO cause?

The top spot isn’t always the best.

Consider placement of items in grocery stores. The third and fourth shelves – those that are eye level for most people – get the most views and reaches. These locations are so powerful, in fact, that manufacturers often pay pricey slotting fees to get their goods displayed there.

Middle-level grocery store shelves are where the bestsellers sit. Top shelves aren’t the best place for brands wanting to make as many sales as possible. Instead, top shelves tend to hold regional and specialty goods that provide interest in the aisles and help stores differentiate themselves from the competition.

So, what do grocery stores have to do with content marketing for funeral homes? You probably see where this is going already: Sometimes, the top spot actually *isn’t the best spot* for search engine optimization.

I’m not talking about the first regular organic listing in search results. Statistics are pretty clear that this is a great place to land to get a click-through. Depending on the study, the first organic link usually gets about 31% to 33% of the traffic.

However, the first organic link that appears in the listings isn’t always the top spot on a search engine results

page. Increasingly, that will be Google’s Answer Box, which is also called the *featured snippet*.

If I could ask you to remember yet one more name for it, that’s *position zero*, and you might or might *not* want to chase it.

What Is the Featured Snippet?

Search “What does a funeral cost?” on Google to see a featured snippet in action. Here, position zero houses a box that offers a quick answer about the average cost of funerals. It shows up above paid ads, organic search results and maps.

The featured snippet is typically about 40 words of text and/or other media that Google feels best answers the question or intent of the search. Google presents the URL and link of the site along with the snippet it pulled from that link.

Only a minority of queries elicit a featured snippet, but the number has grown over the past few years. According to a study from Ahrefs in 2018, roughly 12% of searches had related featured snippets. In 2019, Moz noted that about 24% of queries returned snippets.

Google continues to generate more answer box results from queries, but most likely fewer than a

third of queries in 2020 are returning snippets.

The Good: Benefits of Landing the Featured Snippet

How does your funeral home land the featured snippet? You pose the most relevant question you can within your content and answer it immediately in around 40 words.

You can then expand on the topic or answer other questions; obviously you don’t want to create dozens of pages with only 40 words of text. Making a point to create content with the featured snippet in mind has some benefits, including:

- **Brand awareness.** Your funeral home’s website – and your content – gets placed front-and-center in search engine results pages. Even if you don’t get the click this time around, families who view these pages become more aware of what you have to offer.
- **Authority.** The fact that Google deems your answer the best also creates authority for your firm. That can drive greater awareness or help ensure someone looking for preneed (or at-need) services in the future comes to your page.
- **Increased traffic.** If you provide an answer that satisfies Google but still leaves someone wanting to learn

more, a featured snippet can drive a lot of traffic. According to Ahrefs, the featured snippet gets about 8.5% of traffic. The answer box doesn't draw more traffic on average than the top organic listing, but it does steal some of the page one thunder.

- **Increased conversions.** Featured snippets may draw more relevant traffic to your site, which can increase conversion rates. In one study by Search Engine Land, a site saw a 6% increase in conversion from traffic driven by its featured snippet.

The Bad: Featured Snippets Can Reduce Click-Through

However, the snippet is a double-edged sword. One of the biggest disadvantages is that it can drive up "zero clicks," which occur when someone conducts a search and doesn't click on any of the results. In 2016, mobile and desktop searches combined resulted in 44% zero clicks. In 2019, that number increased to just above 50%.

If you do *too good* a job of answering the query and don't entice the reader to click through and learn more, winning the featured snippet could diminish your on-page traffic.

Also remember that the answer box is Google's domain. It can go away or change at any time – and as early as 2017, Moz pointed out that existing featured snippets on many queries were being replaced with knowledge graphs.

The Ugly: When Featured Snippet Campaigns Wreck Your Content Marketing

Another disadvantage of featured snippets is that businesses are chasing them without fully understanding what they're for and how they should be integrated into a comprehensive content marketing strategy.

For example, it's critical to understand searcher intent. Consider the "People Also Ask" questions that appear when you search "funeral home":

- Do morticians live in the funeral home?
- Is a mortuary the same as a funeral home?



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- How do funeral homes work?

"People Also Ask" is another type of content Google provides on search engine results pages. It gathers questions related to the search query and provides them in a box with drop-down options that reveal the top answer (and link).

Some businesses are using the "People Also Ask" questions to help draw traffic or predict potential featured snippets. The thought is that if enough people ask these questions, Google might create an answer box around it.

It's not terrible logic, but it's easy to take this thought process too far. For example, some sites simply scrape all the "People Also Ask" questions and shove them into content along with answers.

But take a look at those questions again. They're not the types of questions you get from people looking for information about at-need or pre-need. In other words, writing an article about what is required to open a funeral home might generate additional traffic, but will it result in new clientele? Probably not.

Here are a few reasons content quality drops when businesses attempt to integrate answer-box marketing where it doesn't fit:

- **Content becomes less relevant.** We've already demonstrated that not all featured snippets are relevant. That's true even if the query is the same. Searching "funeral home options" brings up a featured snippet about types of funeral services. But your page might be about how you're the best funeral home option in town. You're targeting people searching for funeral home providers, not types of services, so shoving in a mini article about direct burial or direct cremation versus traditional services might make your page less relevant.
- **The flow of content is interrupted.** User experience is important to website performance. Scannable content,

various types of media and fast-loading sites are all critical. So is content that flows and is easy to understand. Shoving in questions and answers without considering your overall content strategy can create distractions that cause users to click away from your site.

- **Content doesn't serve its purpose.** Targeting featured snippets may be a good idea for some of your pages, but it won't necessarily work on all pages. Ask yourself what your content is for: It's not *always* to inform. In some situations, such as a preplanning landing page, the point is to persuade someone to take the next step. A series of informative Q&As may not be the best way to do that.

As with anything in the content marketing world, overall quality is important here. Quality *never* takes a backseat, even to the zero position on Google search engine results pages.

The point of your funeral home content marketing should never be solely to obtain the featured snippet. In fact, it's best to take the opposite approach: Create high-quality content that provides comprehensive answers to the questions and concerns of your target audience. If you're doing that right, the featured snippets will likely follow *when they're relevant and helpful*.

Remember, the zero spot is still pulling less traffic than the organic position one, and the best online marketing results come from integrated approaches that include organic SEO, paid search engine marketing, social media marketing, review marketing and other efforts.

If you're counting on a single tool such as the answer box to win the online marketing game, you're going to be out long before the final rounds begin. Instead, focus on a comprehensive approach with your funeral home SEO, one that promotes your firm best in a variety of ways. •