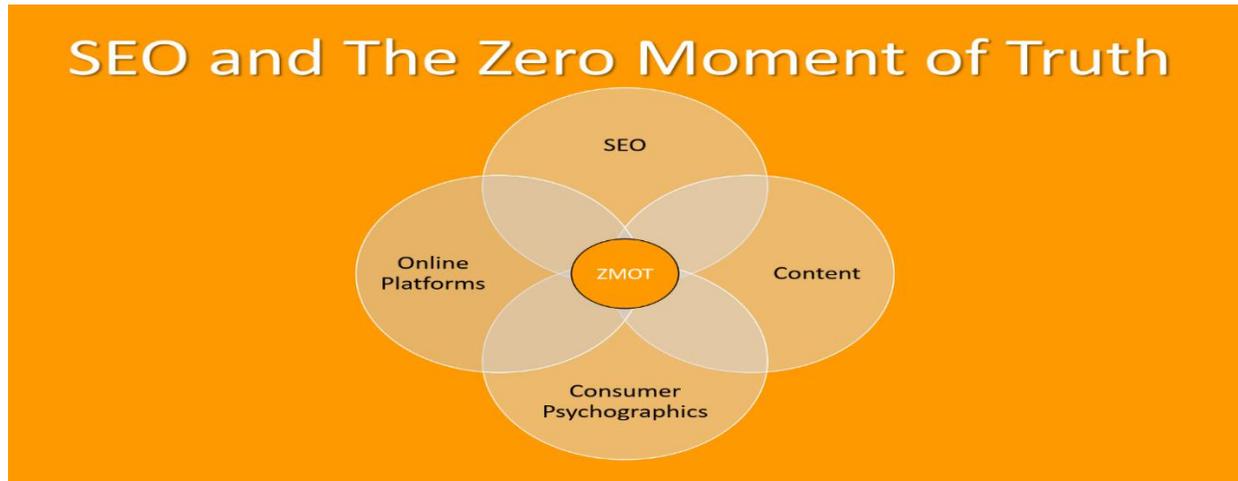


SEO & The Zero Moment of Truth

Digital marketing expert and consultant Bob Grigsby discusses how the customer journey has changed in the digital age and recommends ways to reach consumers at each stage of the journey via SEO and ZMOT.



“80% of success is showing up.” - Woody Allen

Fifteen years ago, the marketing messages we received were all thrust at us via TV, radio, print, PR and word of mouth.

Now, everything has changed. We no longer take the marketing messages delivered to us at face value. We take matters into our own hands and seek out information on the products we wish to purchase.

For digital marketers, every one of these search moments is an opportunity to help shape the decisions customers make.

In this summary guide, I take a look at these crucial moments of truth and how we as marketers can capitalize on them for your benefit. In particular, I look at one of the newer additions to this thinking — what Google is calling the [Zero Moment of Truth \(ZMOT\)](#) — and how our always-on internet connections and mobile devices are driving purchase decisions as never before.

Moments of Truth

In 1981, the then-CEO of the struggling Scandinavian Airlines suggested a change to the prevailing customer service philosophy, which became known

as [Moments of Truth](#). These moments were focused on really dealing with the **emotional** needs of the airline's customers during customer service interactions.

The company could experience thousands of these moments throughout any given day, and a positive interaction could result in a favorable feeling towards the brand and continued loyalty. Customer loyalty would then lead to profits in subsequent interactions. Increased customer service focusing on *emotionally charged* moments led to more brand loyalty and further business. Soon, the airline was struggling no more.

Fast forward 36 years, and the only thing that has changed is *everything*. Customer touch points with brands have multiplied: smartphones, social media, search engines, reviews, live chat, email, phone or in person. There are now many more *moments of truth*, and dealing with the **emotional needs** of the customer is more important than ever over multiple touch points.

People expect answers quickly, via multiple channels. And we — as marketers, businesses and brands — *must* provide the information they seek.

First Moments of Truth

The First Moment of Truth (FMOT) is a concept [proposed by Procter & Gamble in 2005](#). If you're unsure what P&G is, the company owns a [portfolio of brands](#) that you will most certainly know, some of which are products that you likely buy and have in your home right now.

The FMOT relates to that moment when a potential customer experiences a product on a store shelf (physical or digital in 2017). In this *micro-moment*, the brand has the best possible chance of creating an unplanned or impulse purchase and converting a browser into a buyer. Impulse purchases are largely emotionally driven, so this is achieved by appealing to the customer's senses, values and emotions at the point of sale (POS).

If you have ever wondered why the supermarket moves everything around, then you will find answers in the [studies conducted into impulse or unplanned purchases](#). Certainly, there are indications that reducing shopper efficiency results in more time in store, more product interaction and more unplanned or impulse purchases.

In our modern marketing environment, the First Moment of Truth is not restricted to viewing products on shelves. It could also occur in a variety of instances, such as:

- A customer viewing a range of products on a website, store shelf or in a POS display.
- A potential diner viewing a restaurant menu in the window.
- A customer visiting the website of a potential service provider for the first time.
- A traveler looking for hotel ratings and reviews for a trip away.
- An office manager comparing prices for a printer or toner.

It's important to realize that this is not the beginning of this customer's journey, and the first moment of truth is essentially crunch time. This is where the presales marketing and branding rubber hits the road. In most cases, a user would have been exposed to a stimulus — whether that is through advertising or even possibly word of mouth — that set up the FMOT.

Second Moment of Truth

The second moment of truth is when the customer **uses** your product. Whether this is eating the meal that sounded so good on the menu (FMOT) or shaving with the shaving foam that promises no skin irritation.

This is where your product or service *has to* deliver on the promises made by your marketing. Fail at the second moment of truth, and your chances of repeat customers are slim.

Third Moment of Truth

This is the moment of advocacy. Much like a typical sales funnel, we must go from awareness (stimulus) through to the sale, and ideally, to post-sale recommendation. This is where you transform a customer into a fan. This is where you build true brand loyalty.

In the real world, generating advocacy often requires a business process to stimulate those happy customers to review you or share positive feelings on your social media channels or industry review sites.

The Zero Moment of Truth

Whether we are shopping for cars, homes, hobbies or holiday gifts, the internet has changed how we decide what to buy. Now, after the initial stimulus and before users reach the First Moment of Truth, they will encounter multiple decision-making moments that Google calls the “Zero Moment of Truth,” or ZMOT for short.

The Zero Moment of Truth was initially conceived on the back of a study conducted by Google in 2011. The study determined that the customer journey is changing:

- 50 percent of shoppers used a search engine to research a product or brand
- 38 percent comparison shopped online (reviews, prices and so on)
- 36 percent checked out the brand/manufacturer’s website
- 31 percent read online endorsements, reviews or recommendations

This was in 2011, and with smartphone adoption has only grown ever since. In fact, a follow-up study in 2014 showed that users are grabbing their smartphone to research a product even earlier now, and there are even more touch points on the way to a purchase.

The Zero Moment of Truth is this new moment that sits between a stimulus (ad) and the FMOT. Let’s say a mother sees an ad detailing how important an eye test is for children. Where in the past she might call the optician from the ad directly, today she would pull out her smartphone and begin to research the best brands, prices, reviews and (in the case of local) business locations.

The ZMOT can happen on search engines and social networks, and the net result is a more confident and well-informed purchase decision.

The 2011 study indicated that 79 percent of consumers use a smartphone to help with shopping, and [83 percent of mothers claim to do online research after seeing a TV ad](#). Given the age of these stats and the [stratospheric rise](#) of smartphones and the mobile internet, we can only imagine these statistics are conservative at best.

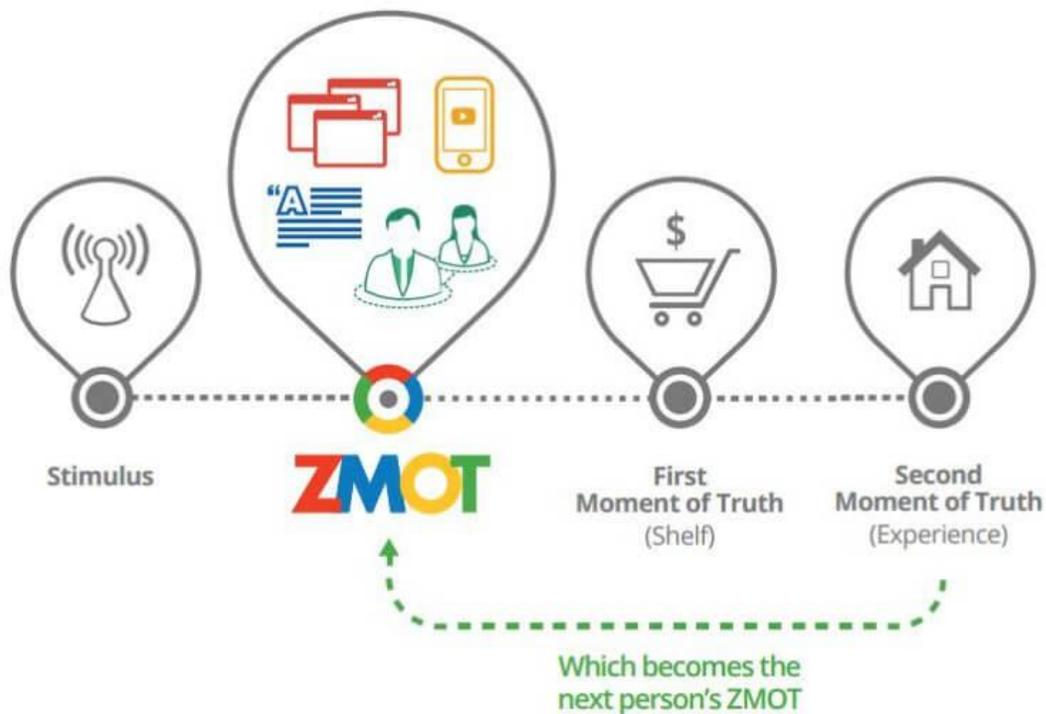
The takeaway here is that users now conduct research, read reviews, compare brands, talk to friends, watch videos, interact on socially driven sites

(from Facebook to Trip Advisor), read news and even visit brand websites to make decisions — and all of this is done at the Zero Moment of Truth.

A New Marketing Model

The basic concept here is that the customer journey is now broken into hundreds of micro-moments. Want-to-know moments, want-to-go moments, want-to-do and want-to-buy moments. What is the best mortgage product in 2017? What is the best dog shampoo? What is the best USA mountain bike brand? Where do I find a Realtor? Where can I buy a guitar tuner?

The following diagram shows where the ZMOT exists in this newly proposed model:



It is these micro-moments that represent the Zero Moment of Truth and present an opportunity for your brand to get in front of a potential customer. As an example: This morning, while researching investment properties for a friend, I came across a website detailing how to build wealth through investment property. The website is published by a company that produces a range of videos which show how it all works.

I am now aware of these videos, and if the company is as savvy as their content marketing would suggest, then I will likely see remarketing efforts and offers to drive me towards their digital courses and the First Moment of Truth when I decide whether to buy.

In fact, I will likely go away and conduct further ZMOT research. I will search for the brand. I will read up on the specific products. I will look for reviews. I will look for customer testimonials (on the brand site but also on specific forums where I feel they may be more trustworthy). I will look for alternatives. And, being a bit (okay a lot) of a geek, I will likely look into the science and studies that back up the claims made by the product.

My ZMOT for this product will be a fairly lengthy research process. I could imagine a few hours and lots of reading. For some purchases, this will be much quicker. For major purchases — from technology to Real Estate — it may be a process that takes place for days, weeks or even months.

In addition to the studies, it would be foolish to ignore the fact that Google is in direct control of what must be the greatest consumer insight platform the world has ever seen: [billions of queries every single day](#) along the entire spectrum of the customer journey.

While some of this information is available via tools like [Google Trends](#), [Google Insights](#) and the [Google Keyword Planner](#), we can only imagine the analysis done by Google itself to better hone its ad products. As such, we must pay attention to these studies and determine what we can do to better help the products, businesses and brands we service as digital marketers in this fast-paced environment.

Users no longer wait for what they need. We can search, educate ourselves and make purchases at any time. Patience is at an all-time low, and we can act immediately and expect to find relevant, useful content to aid us in our decision-making process. It is these *micro-moments* that shape our needs and inform our purchase decisions. Businesses that do the best job of helping users in these Zero Moments of Truth will beat out the competition.

What do we do, as digital marketers, to leverage this information? How do we help our prospective customers reach their goals (ideally with our products)? How do we ensure that we understand the customer journey and that we are there during the multiple touch points that help a consumer make a purchase decision? It's about SEO and Content marketing...!

SEO, Content Marketing & Moments of Truth

In simple terms, this is a game of content marketing. Customers have questions, and we must have the answers.

In reality, delivering those answers may need a more nuanced approach, and we must use the armaments provided to us to promote our content. The exact approach will vary depending upon business, location and too many variables to cover here — social media, search ads, display ads and content amplification are at least a start in the right direction.

However, we can loosely categorize the types of content that our users need at each stage of this new user journey and buying cycle. We can then take this framework to research the specific questions that your prospects have at each stage of this newly revised customer journey model.

The Zero Moment Of Truth

Content at the Zero Moment of Truth needs to be *self-serve* information regarding your product, industry, category and service. You need to understand the needs of your audience, and then present this in a format they can easily access. For example:

- Customer questions in content or video formats
- Content on your website, blogs, email campaigns
- Content on popular social media sites

This kind of content predominantly answers questions, e.g., What is the best Home Loan? What is the best TV brand? Do I need therapy?

At this stage, being present in multiple locations and formats is how you win the ZMOT.

The First Moment of Truth

At this point, the consumer has likely got a solid idea of what they are looking for, and content should support and reinforce the purchase decision. Such content might include:

- Product Specifics — Delivery, specifications, FAQ and so on.

- Special Offers — Clinch that deal when the customer is primed with a special offer.
- Reviews — [80 percent of consumers trust online reviews](#) as much as personal recommendations.
- Testimonials — Real customers talking about your products.
- Case Studies — Show how your product made the difference it promises.
- Social Media Engagement — Actively responding on social channels is critical here.
- Customer Support — Allow your prospects to easily ask questions via your website (real-time chat, support forms and so on).

When we are looking at credibility, it is significantly important to review the landscape and understand all the potential locations for presenting a positive reputation. Again, this will be completely unique depending on your location and industry, so you have to get inside your customer's head and start looking around ([Customer profiling](#) is a must here).

The Second Moment of Truth

The second moment of truth relates to your customer using your product or service and ideally, having a great experience. Their experience can easily create negative or positive feedback that feeds into the Zero Moment of Truth for future customers, so it is critical to support and encourage advocacy at this stage.

Here are some content types that can support the Second Moment of Truth:

- Product FAQ — Help customers with common questions or problems
- User Guides — The more complex the product, the more support you should provide here
- Social Media — Be sure to be active and direct them to your FAQ/Guides
- How-To Guides — Support customers in the advanced use of your products
- Questionnaires — These can help mine feedback for future improvements and improve all your moment of truth marketing

The second moment of truth is all about helping your customer have a smooth experience with your product, whether that is a razor or a holiday gift, a burger or a mountain bike. Be there to answer all questions and support those users, and you are ensuring a positive second moment of truth (and brand experience).

The Third Moment of Truth

The third moment of truth is after the experience. This is when you move a customer towards becoming a true fan and advocate of your brand. Some nurturing is needed here, and instances of stellar customer support can help.

Let me give you an example: One of my clients is a “lifestyle” Realtor and her priority is to match her clients’ lifestyle to the perfect community and home by assessing her clients’ needs and tailoring her services to their “individual” lifestyle goals. She knows that it is the sense of community, the feel of the neighborhood, the quality of the schools, the nightlife, and the proximity of family that are the important factors when it comes to finding a home for her clients. That a home should support the life her clients want to live.

This Third Moment of Truth comes when they go online and advocate for her with a positive message about their experience and provide stellar 5-Star reviews of her on Zillow; which becomes the next homebuyer’s ZMOT. The more clients who write agent reviews, provide agent ratings, and/or mention her professionalism and services online, the more information the next homebuyer has to consider in their own ZMOT purchase decision.

SEO Jargon Terms

Anchor Text - Anchor text comes into play when you are including links on your website. Whether you are linking to another webpage or linking off your website to an external domain, it is important that you use anchor text. Anchor text is the clickable text in a hyperlink.

Crawler / Crawling - Search engines use automated programs to discover and catalog the content and hyperlinks of websites. This process is called crawling and the automated program is called a crawler, bot or spider.

External Links – Any links on a webpage that point to a page on a different website.

HTML - HTML stands for Hypertext Markup Language and is the programming code used by developers to structure a website and communicate how images and content should be displayed.

Inbound Links – Links on external websites that point to your website.

Indexed - After a website has been discovered by the search engine, all or a portion of its content is added to the engine's catalog. The site's contents have been 'Indexed'.

Internal Links – Links within your website that point to other pages within your website.

Keyword - Describes the words entered into a search engine to initiate a search. Keywords can be a single word or a string of words, AKA phrases.

Long Tail Keyword – Longer keyword phrases that people type into search engines.



QUICK TIP

70% of Overall Search Traffic Comes From Long Tail Keywords.

SEO & ZMOT

SEO has become such an umbrella term of late that it can be tough to frame where SEO fits into the picture. My vision of SEO includes how potential customers interact with search engines. How do they search for your products or services? How do they search for the problems, wants or needs your products or services solve? How do they look at you from a credibility perspective?

What we like to do at Context Consulting is own all of this. Own everything that could factor in a ZMOT or FMOT decision for our clients. A major tool for this is to create customer profiles. In these profiles, we consider all of the search terms that users would possibly use during all stages of the buying cycle. All of the search terms that customers would use for a ZMOT or FMOT search.

Why is SEO Important?

SEO is important because it helps your website stand out in a sea of similar search results.

Imagine your store is located on a busy commercial street where every other store offers the same services as you. If a customer were to come to your street looking for your services, how would they choose which store to enter? They would likely choose the first one they saw, unless another store stood out for a different reason.

Of course, you want their business, so what can you do to stand out? If possible, you would want to move your store closer to the beginning of the street so that yours is the first store they see. Sometimes, moving is too challenging. Instead, you could add a sign out front advertising your services or repaint your storefront to be more appealing. The goal is to make the right adjustments to your store that will make it stand out to visitors.

In this scenario, your street is a search engine results page, your storefront is your website and the things you do to improve it are Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

Organic vs. Paid Advertising

When you conduct a search on Google, Bing or Yahoo, you will likely see that the top result is an “Ad”. This means someone paid money in Google AdWords to show up in that first-place position. With the right budget and message, anyone can do this, however, it does not replace the need for organic or natural SEO.

Paid advertising, or search engine marketing (SEM), can complement SEO, but it can never take its place.

A solid SEO strategy and a strong paid search strategy should work together seamlessly to cover each other’s weaknesses. But they don’t affect each other directly because they focus on different factors influencing search engine performance.

All About Algorithms

Search Algorithm: The unique formula used by search engines for ranking the results of a search query.

Did you know that each year, [Google changes its search algorithm around 500-600 times](#)? They are continually making these changes in order to give the user the best possible results. Many of these changes are minor, yet every now and then a major change rolls out.

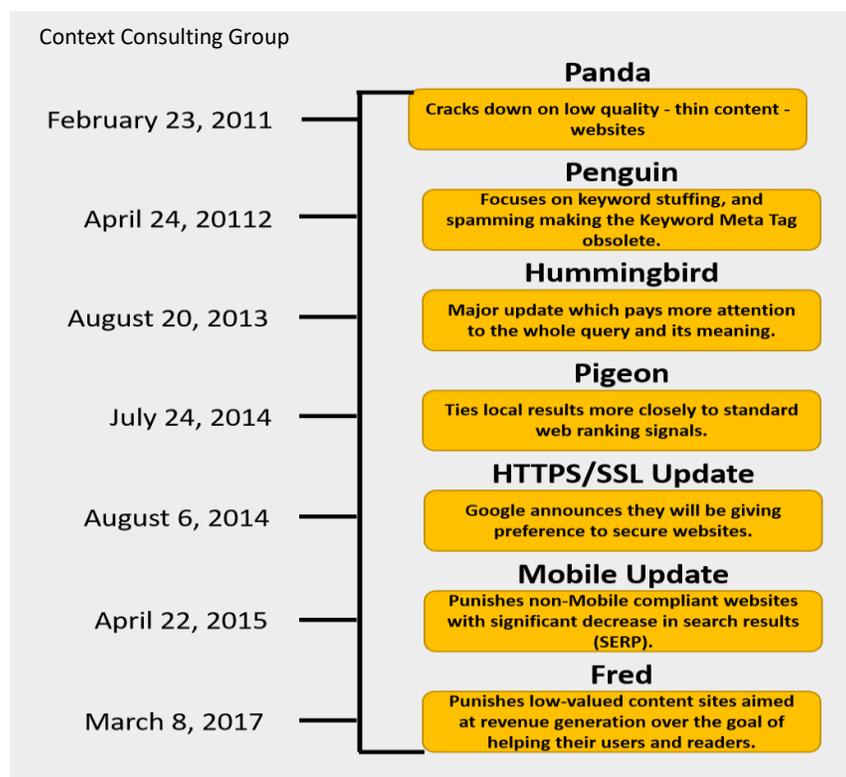
How Do Algorithms Calculate Rank?

Search algorithms use a unique set of data to determine which website result should rise to the top of the list.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of factors that go into each algorithm and Google keeps pretty tight-lipped about the exact details of how it works.

Again, we can return to this “80 percent of success is simply turning up” idea that, to a large degree, SEO and SEM is built upon. I like to go further than that, though. Turning up is no good if your website doesn’t deliver what your customer is looking for and wants. Ensure that you are there to nail the 80 percent, but then ensure that people are saying great things about you to get that other 20 percent dialed in. Use the search engine to help you research your customers.

Use the search engine to get a clear understanding of everywhere you need to be. Then, ensure you turn up and look good. Forget 80 percent — you want 100 percent marketing to really win big at the SEO ZMOT and beyond.



Mobile Optimization

By now, this should be pretty obvious, but having a mobile-optimized site and ensuring you provide a solid experience on mobile devices should be at the forefront of your SEO ZMOT strategies.

Turning up is half the battle, but if users are then put off by content that is not optimized for their device, then you will lose the chance to influence those users — perhaps forever!

Embrace The Pre-Journey

Ads are no longer as effective as they once were. They have a purpose, and that purpose can be to act as a stimulus. But without fully embracing the pre-purchase journey (or “ZMOT,” for the cool kids), your efforts here will fail to reach their true potential.

Ultimately, to win at the ZMOT, you must provide the information your prospects need — and you must provide it *where* they are looking for it and *in a format* they can easily access across multiple screens and devices.

The ZMOT For Local Businesses

We work with business of all shapes and sizes. A single-location business. A multi-location business with national coverage. Whatever your size, moments of truth matter.

Whether you are a Realtor in the Iowa City Metro area or a music shop, your customers are looking for you and searching around for the problems you help solve. You may not be able to rank organically for big questions, but you can certainly rank around ZMOT questions like “lifestyle Realtor” in the Iowa City Metro or “music” in Coralville.

Remember, this visibility is not restricted to your own site. Simply considering all the ways a consumer may compare providers and ensuring you are presenting a solid reputation will often put you head and shoulders above the competition.

Reviews. Testimonials. Business information. Opening hours. Phone numbers. These can all be ZMOT searches. This does not always have to be complicated. You must be absolutely certain that your technical SEO is dialed in and Google understands your business.

For instance, someone wanting to move to a new city will check out the lifestyle and amenities of that community *first*. The lifestyle they want to live is connected to the community they want to live in, and the home they want to buy. They know what they want and what they need. They now have the power to search the lifestyle of any community. And if you're a Realtor, you better show up in the search results for "Iowa City lifestyle" to capture that ZMOT.

If you want to get a little more sophisticated — search, social and display ads offer a wealth of opportunity. Whether you use paid ads to promote content that answers a potential customer question with a special offer at the end or you show a banner for your business with a special offer on an existing piece of content, you must think about your users. Consider where they are, and make sure you are there — ideally with the answers they are looking for, want, and need.

Remember: 80 percent of success is simply showing up at the moment of truth.

All of This Has Happened Before

In many ways, this is nothing new. We have always had a sales funnel. We have always had the consideration stage. We have always researched products.

However, the Zero Moment of Truth provides a useful tool for thinking about the customer journey and unearthing SEO ways we can help and market to our customers earlier in the buying cycle.

The dwell time at Zero Moment of Truth is longer than ever before. The touch points are more numerous. The opportunity is clear. Are you showing up at ZMOT searches for your customers and are you capturing them?

Summary

It's important to clearly understand what has changed here and how the internet and mobile devices have streamlined access to information.

Previously, we would have seen an advertisement (stimulus) and then moved directly to the product or service (FMOT). We would have visited the car dealership. We would have had to trust the salesman.

Now, we don't need to trust the experts. We can be the experts. We can conduct our own research. Find the best price. Find the best service, and then make a well-informed decision. We don't need to accept the price the car dealer offers us, as we have researched the real price that they will let the car go for, and we certainly don't need to take that 2005 model they are pushing, as we know that has a common transmission issue.

Google, Facebook and the big players here have not changed the game. We have changed the game. As consumers, we want better, and we now have the tools to do better. We have the tools to become more informed in our purchases. Products must be better. Businesses must be transparent. The weak will falter. The strong will prosper. And customers will grow ever smarter in their purchase research.

As digital marketers, we have a moral obligation to help our consumers in their quest for information. We have to be there at the Zero Moment of Truth, and we have to support users through the first, second and third moments to help create new moments of truth for new prospects.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bob Grigsby, MA

Bob Grigsby is an experienced digital marketing and SEO consultant based in Iowa City, IA. Bob focuses on strategy, audits, local SEO, technical SEO, ZMOT and passionately assisting business professionals and companies dominate search and social. Bob is managing partner of Context Consulting Group, LLC, a locally owned independent consulting firm serving business professionals and small businesses within the Greater Iowa City Metro area.



Context Consulting Group, LLC

319.936.7704

www.contextconsultinggroup.com