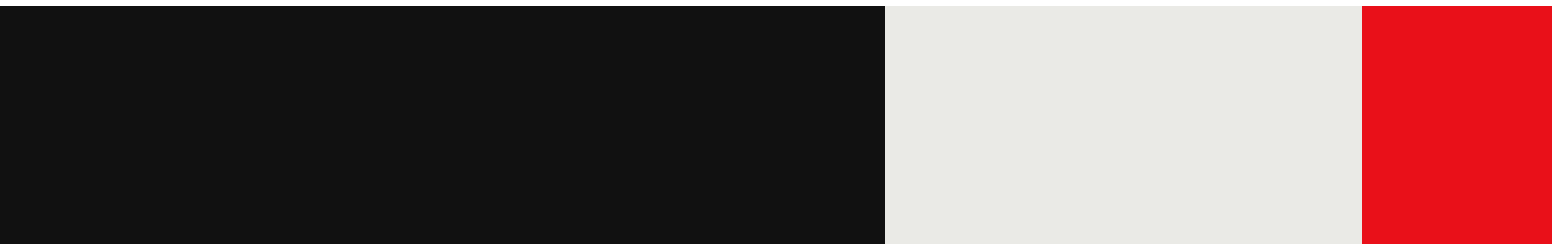


Google leak of alleged SEO documents shows importance of brand marketing, but don't ditch best practices

Article



Over the weekend, thousands of alleged [Google](#) Search API documents were leaked. The highly technical documents purport to cover Google's over 14,000 ranking factors, how link value and click behavior are evaluated, and how Google classifies smaller sites. But for the average marketer focused on building a brand, the news may be more exciting than actionable.

Don't overreact. "The leak is interesting to dig into, but there is too much unknown with the actual leaked information to make any decisions about SEO," said Lily Ray, vice president of SEO strategy and research at Amsive. "We don't know whether the attributes listed in the leak are actual ranking factors, or to what extent they are currently used, if at all.

"That said, the information is worth exploring, as it at least reveals some interesting naming conventions Google uses for its internal API documentation, including many buzzwords SEOs have discussed and debated for years."

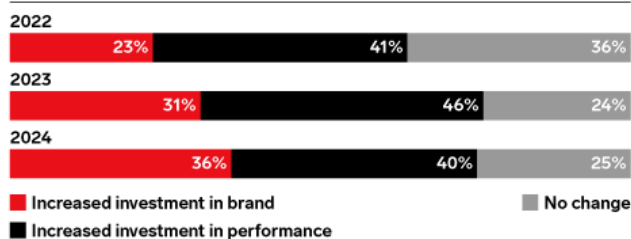
Instead of parsing over technical documents, brands should focus on making sure their basic SEO practices are strong, like making sure content matches search intent, including keywords and images, linking internally, and building strong URLs.

Brand matters. That was the biggest takeaway for Rand Fishkin, cofounder and CEO of SparkToro, who said the documents show it's difficult for small websites to game SEO in order to rise in Google's ranks. "If there was one universal piece of advice I had for marketers seeking to broadly improve their organic search rankings and traffic, it would be: 'Build a notable, popular, well-recognized brand in your space, outside of Google search,'" Fishkin wrote in a [blog post](#).

Some 36% of marketers worldwide are [increasing their investment in brand marketing](#), up from 31% in 2023 and 23% in 2022, according to a December 2023 study from WARC.

Increased Investment in Brand vs. Performance Marketing Over the Next Year According to Marketers Worldwide, 2022-2024

% of respondents



Note: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: WARC, "The Voice of the Marketer 2024," Dec 6, 2023

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Content is crucial. “From a strategic level, the leak further clarifies that SEO [experts] should work very closely with content strategy and user experience functions within an organization,” said Michael King, founder of iPullRank. In other words, good content will lead to searchers staying on brand sites when they get there, which will help with page rank.

Keep in mind: The leak, if credible, does show inconsistencies in Google’s messaging. “Google’s public statements probably aren’t intentional efforts to lie, but rather to deceive potential spammers (and many legitimate SEOs as well) to throw us off the scent of how to impact search results,” wrote King in a [blog post](#).

For SEOs and brand marketers alike, the leak emphasizes the importance of experimenting and iterating, rather than putting blind trust in Google. “If you were already doing SEO in the ways that great SEOs have been suggesting, then you're all set. If you have ignored SEO or ignored key components of SEO because Google's documentation instructed you otherwise, then you have a lot of work to do,” said King.

“Whether this confirms what you suspected or all of this is news to you, the fact that we can see clear-cut evidence of how Google works without the PR and communications varnish is unprecedented. This may not change how you strategize for SEO or how you create content, but it's important context that should shape your perspective,” wrote Garrett Sussman, demand generation manager for iPullRank on [LinkedIn](#).

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