



Preparing your SEO for the future of digital experiences.

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WHITE PAPER

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Introduction.

Although you might be satisfied with your SEO strategy in the present moment, are you ready for the future? The world is constantly changing and if your brand doesn't adapt, you'll fall behind.

With the help of Tom Shapiro, CEO of Stratabeat, we'll walk you through high-level, strategic tips to proactively prepare your SEO for 2020 and beyond. For more information check out this [on-demand webinar](#).

The new world of voice search.



Increasingly, the digital world is being seen as a way of staying connected to everyone and everything; this is a shift away from the traditional perspective that views the digital world as primarily a source of information. One of the ways we see this embodied is in voice search technologies such as Google Assistant, Alexa, Siri, Cortana, and more.

With huge brands like Apple and Microsoft making voice search a high priority, expect to see more voice-activated devices and voice-based consumer activity. Google Assistant is already on more than [400 million devices](#), Microsoft Cortana has more than [100 million monthly users](#), and [tens of millions of Alexa-powered devices were sold](#) by Amazon over the 2017 holiday period alone.

Currently, [20% of mobile searches](#) are already voice driven. However, in 2020, [50% of all searches](#) will likely be driven by voice.

The shift from text to voice is a logical one; we speak 3x faster than we type. From a cognitive fluency perspective, anything that is easier for the brain to process is more enjoyable for the user. Faster interaction can also lead to greater engagement, a plus for both marketer and user.

A direct outcome of this will be the explosion of the voice recognition market. Existing technologies will be improved and new technologies will be developed. By 2019, the voice recognition market is projected to be a [\\$601 million industry](#).

Optimize for conversational language

In order to customize your SEO for the conquering of voice recognition software, optimize for conversational language. If your web pages read like an encyclopedia, you should build in conversational language, as well, so that voice-activated devices can pick up on the language and serve it up to voice activated device users accordingly.

To help you determine the conversational language for which to optimize your website, make use of tools such as [BuzzSumo Question Analyzer](#), which enables you to identify the most commonly asked questions online across hundreds of thousands of forums, Amazon, Reddit, Quora, and Q&A websites.

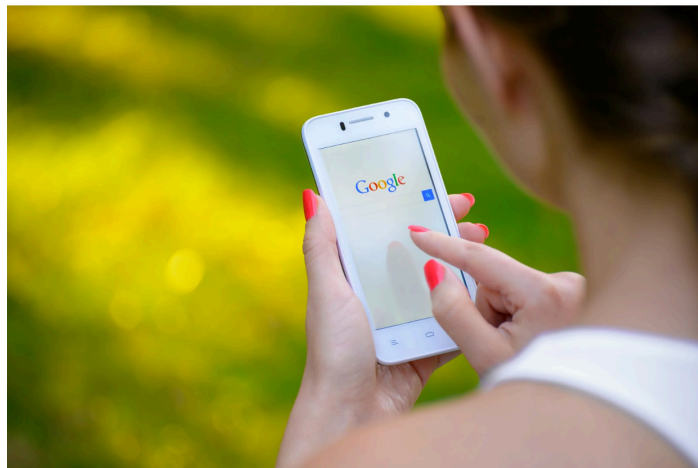
With voice search, speed is a priority. Make sure that your web pages load lightning fast. And use HTTPS to secure your site -- Google is increasingly favoring HTTPS websites over HTTP.

With voice search, we believe that [structured data](#) will take on added importance, and so you'll want to ensure that your site is structured appropriately. You can use tools such as [Yext](#) to structure the data in your website across 100+ services, including Google, Apple, and Bing. Or structure the data by following [Google's guidelines](#) and take advantage of [Google's structured data markup helper tool](#). When your structured data is in place, use a testing tool such as the [Google Structured Data Testing Tool](#) to ensure that the search engines will be reading your content properly.

With web-based search, the search engines deliver a wide variety of answers for you to choose from. Voice search, however, is all about the device delivering the one best answer. What this means from an SEO perspective is that you'll need to pick your battles and then go all out to win and dominate in those niches.

Instead of trying to win broadly, you are going to want to go narrow and deep. It won't be enough to be "good." You should strive to be "the best."

Mobile-first.



Most internet traffic is coming from mobile sources. This is nothing new. Already today, [71% of digital time](#) is being spent on mobile. More than [50% of all Google searches are on mobile](#). Depending on the industry, this percentage may be much higher. For example, [72% of food and beverage searches](#) and 68% of health-related searches are already on mobile. For certain industries, mobile searches are lower, but they are growing. If most of your searches are coming via mobile, you need to examine how much time is devoted to mobile-specific SEO strategies. With [Google's announcement](#) that it is moving to a [mobile-first indexing model](#), it's actually important to focus on your mobile-specific SEO even if your specific audience is late to the mobile party.

For Generation Z, digital dependence is a way of life. When asked how long Gen Zers could comfortably go without using the internet, [69% said they couldn't go more than 2-8 hours](#). In just a few years, the workforce will include a generation that hasn't grown up with or has any inclination towards desktop computing.

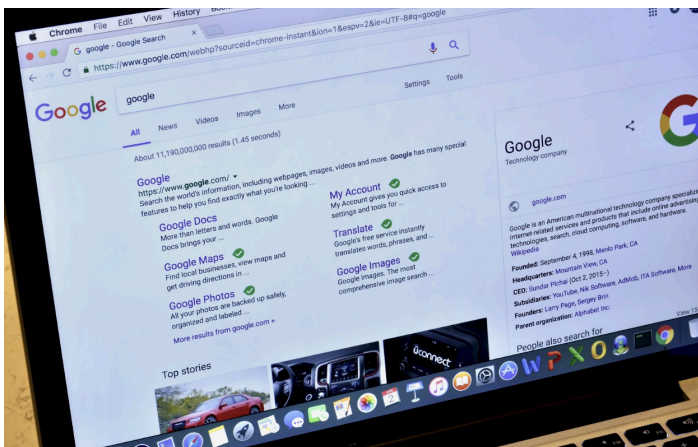
Want to experience the Gen Z way of life? Go exclusively mobile for an entire week. You'll be able to see what the brand experience is like and get a new perspective on how to enhance it.

To optimize for mobile, make use of responsive web design, which is [Google's stated preference](#) for handling mobile

websites. Display content that's important for SEO in your mobile version of the site. Ensure a good mobile experience. Do things like avoiding the use of Flash and pop-ups. In addition, pay attention to page load time, as smartphones often have connectivity factors that cause load times to be longer than on a desktop. Optimize your images. Use tools such as [WP Engine's Speed Tool](#) to identify any obstacles to faster loading pages in your website.

You can test the mobile friendliness of your website using [Google's Mobile-Friendly Test tool](#). You can test the responsiveness of your website using a tool such as [Browserstack](#), [CrossBrowser Testing](#), or [Google Resizer](#).

The Google universe.



Google has been a giant in the search space for many years. However, what's worth noting is the evolution of the SERP (Search Engine Results Page). The SERP is going through a transformation. Google makes much of its profits from monetization of search; in 2017 Google's annual revenue was more than \$109.6 billion, with the vast majority of this attributable to paid search. Although historically Google has focused its monetization efforts on AdWords, we are going to see more monetization efforts moving forward within the organic search real estate in the SERP.

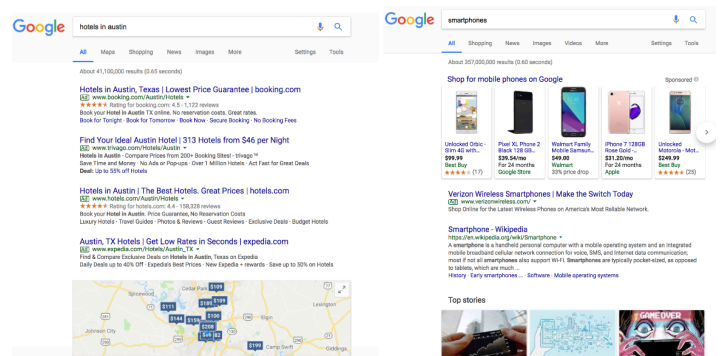
Optimizing the SERP

Depending on what you're searching for, you'll get different types of results in the SERP. A hotel search will typically result in a SERP that includes AdWords, map, and direct bookings

(including various filtering options). A smartphone search will produce a SERP including a shopping feed, top stories, "refine by brand" and related searches. A CRM software search will produce a SERP filled with a Knowledge Graph, AdWords, "people also ask" box and related searches.

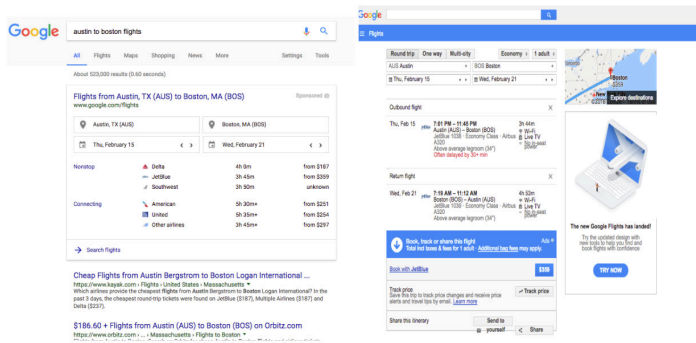
To be successful in SEO, it is critical that brands understand the different SERP features appearing for their priority search terms because that is the reality of how to reach the right audience. The approach should not just be to optimize content and keywords, you also need to understand the entire makeup of your SERPs and strategize accordingly.

"You're seeing Google taking over different features in the SERPs...the SERPs are transforming from a Search Engine Results Page to its own website."
 -Tom Shapiro, CEO of Stratabeat



The SERP has become a website

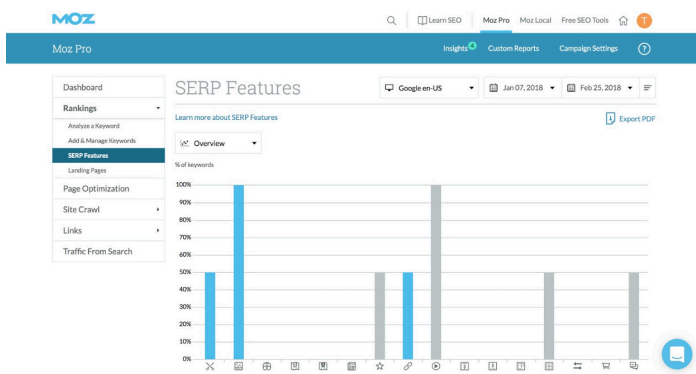
It's in Google's best interest to keep you in the search results as long as possible. It used to be that Google would serve up ten listings, you'd click on a listing, and it'd take you to a third party website immediately. That's no longer the case. According to [Moz](#), 34% of searches do not result in a click. This is because *Google is trying to answer your intent within the search engine itself.*



An example of this is a SERP showing results for an “Austin to Boston flights” search. Google is serving up options to the query to enable the searcher to explore various flight options, filter on dates, filter on nonstop vs. connecting flights as well as one-way vs. round trip, highlight the seat class, and select and book a flight. Google is now tapping into the organic area of the SERP and turning the SERP into a mini, industry-specific website.

This is going to result in many new corporate partnerships with Google. Brands looking for greater visibility in the SERP are going to want to strategize with Google to figure out how to serve up the best answers for relevant queries while still providing convenient and easy experiences within the SERP itself.

In order to examine and understand the SERP features for your keywords, the “SERP Features” option within Moz Pro is helpful. You’ll be able to see the specific features being displayed in the search results, whether featured snippets, news, images, videos, carousels, maps, related questions, related results, local packs, etc. for the keywords you are interested in.



Take action

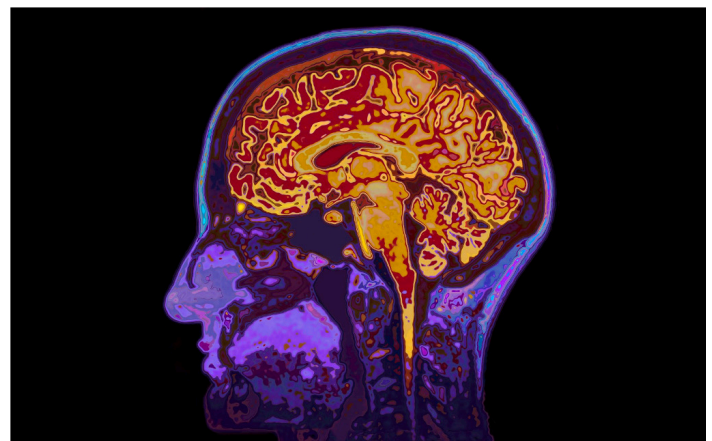
If this has not yet occurred with your specific industry (like it has in the airline industry), you may want to get ahead of the trend and start planning your longer-term strategy. Monitor the SERPs for your related keyword queries, document the types of content being displayed, take note of noticeable changes in content types, and develop a customized SERP strategy accordingly. In addition, be aware of any corporate partnerships with Google in your space, or in the case that your business is large enough, reach out directly to Google to start exploring a potential collaboration.

How AI is transforming organic search.

More advanced, artificial intelligence (AI) software has the ability to revolutionize the way search engines process and rank search results. As we get closer to 2020, they will only get more sophisticated.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai has stated that advances in machine-learning technology would soon have an impact on all Google products and services—across the board. Pichai underscored the importance of this new focus, stating, “We are rethinking everything we are doing.”

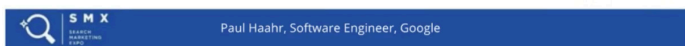
Google RankBrain



RankBrain is Google’s machine-learning artificial intelligence system that’s used to help process its search results.

Interpreting Live Experiments

- Both pages P_1 and P_2 answer user's need
 - For P_1 , answer is on the page
 - For P_2 , answer is on the page and in the snippet
 - Algorithm A puts P_1 before $P_2 \Rightarrow$ user clicks on $P_1 \Rightarrow$ "good"
 - Algorithm B puts P_2 before $P_1 \Rightarrow$ no click \Rightarrow "bad"
- Do we really think A is better than B?



RankBrain is influencing every search result you see. RankBrain attempts to generate more intelligent search results and bring more context to the results. The algorithm takes into account the searcher's experience with the search result, including the click-through rate (CTR), prioritizing a high CTR. RankBrain now forces you to focus just as much on the CTR of your search results and the post-click experience overall as on the SEO tactics involved in securing a listing in the first place.

According to Greg Corrado, a senior research scientist at Google, among the search algorithm's 200 or so ranking signals, RankBrain is the third most important organic signal.

"Google RankBrain contributes to the ranking of every query."

-Jeff Dean, Senior Fellow, Google

Increasing your CTR

People read through the SERP quickly. They tend not to read word for word but rather skim through the listings. On top of this, the human mind wanders approximately 30% to 70% of the time, according to psychologist and University of California Santa Barbara professor Jonathan Schooler.

These factors make it increasingly difficult for you to "win the click" of someone searching and coming upon a SERP where you occupy one or more of the search results. There are a number of tactics that you can take, though, to increase the likelihood that more searchers click on your SERP listing and increase your CTR.

For example, surprise the audience with differentiated messaging. According to the neuroscientist Gregory Berns at Emory University, the mind loves surprise. Just as web users experience "banner blindness," searchers can easily gloss over many SERP listings when they sound similar. Surprise helps you

to break through the mind's prediction engine and to grab the attention of the searcher. This will make it more likely that amid all of a searcher's scanning and mind wandering tendencies, they take notice of your specific SERP listings and click-through on your listing instead of the others on the page.

Strengthen the Post-Click Experience

Post-click, encourage engagement and focus on providing the best possible experience for the searcher. This is obviously going to be different based on the specific search, but the point is that a high CTR of your search listings and high post-click engagement metrics are going to help you to rank better in Google.

To ensure that the digital experience post-click is enjoyable, you need a site that provides relevant and useful information in line with the query intent, and is engaging, lightning-fast, secure, and scalable. WP Engine's digital experience platform uses the power of top notch technology, agile infrastructure, and actionable insights to help you create a site that loads quickly, with minimal page load time.

HTTP vs HTTPS

Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS) is the secure version of HTTP, the protocol over which data is sent between your browser and the website that you are connected to. The 'S' at the end of HTTPS stands for 'Secure'. It means all communications between your browser and the website are encrypted. HTTPS is often used to protect confidential online transactions like online banking and online shopping order forms.

Google, though, is pushing all websites, regardless of the content in the site, to move to HTTPS. The company plans to display a "not secure" warning in its Chrome browser on all HTTP pages later this year.

That Google is so adamant about HTTPS is a good indication that moving to HTTPS would be a good idea for any business. It's not just for security reasons, which alone should be sufficient. For any doubters, there are clear SEO reasons, as well, to move to HTTPS.

In a [study](#) of approximately 600,000 keywords across 100 ranking positions by SEMRush, HTTPS was found to be an organic search ranking factor, more important than even keyword density on the page or the inclusion of the keyword in the page title or body copy. The study found that the higher the

SERP position, the higher the percentage of listings were HTTPS. This was especially true of high volume keywords.

According to studies by Moz, more than 50% of Google first-page organic results are HTTPS, and the trend is increasing at a torrid rate. When Moz had originally looked at the rankings of HTTPS pages nine months earlier, the percentage was closer to 30%.

The SEMRush study highlighted that long-tail keywords (keywords with multiple words in the query phrase) had a lower percentage of high-ranking HTTPS pages than short-tail keywords. This means that if you are interested in ranking for long-tail terms, now is a good opportunity to migrate to HTTPS to get out ahead of the competition before Google turns its attention to the long-tail when factoring HTTPS.

To protect site visitors from eavesdroppers, WP Engine recommends SSL/TLS certificates for all sites. SSL/TLS certificates enable visitors to connect to your site with HTTPS. To help make this process painless for our customers, the WP Engine platform will automatically install and renew Let's Encrypt certificates.

How ubiquitous screens will change the search landscape.

The digital world will not be contained to our desktops and phones. Computing is on the edge of appearing anytime and anywhere. Imagine a world where screens are almost everywhere you go and almost everywhere you look. The "Internet of Things" enables direct integration of the physical world into computer-based systems. With the internet already incorporated into everyday objects like refrigerators and a pair of glasses, it's time to think about the impact this is going to have on SEO.

Niche SEO

The future of digital experiences and the rise of ubiquitous screens means the move towards a hyper contextualization of SEO. When you are able to use the screen on your refrigerator to search for food, or the holographic display from your glasses to search for quick instructions while on a factory assembly

line, or the screen on your car dashboard to search for local restaurants, companies will need to rethink their SEO strategies to reach you and answer the intent of your contextualized queries. For example, in the case of the car dashboard, a restaurant may need to customize its web experience to focus on directions, convenience, and routes on/off local highways, whereas the corresponding desktop experience might focus primarily on branding, the chefs, menu, photos of meals, Instagram integration, etc. Welcome to the rise of niche SEO.



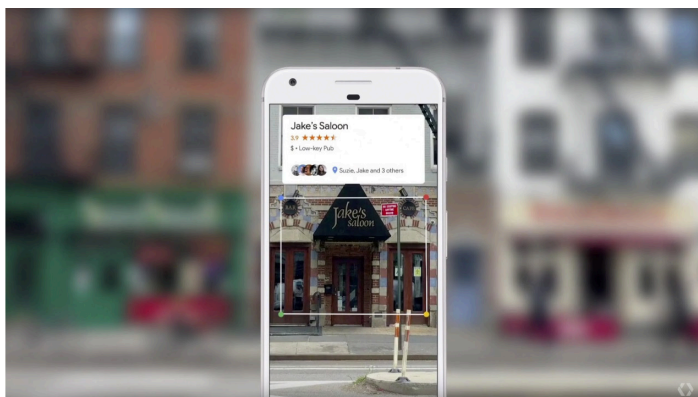
AR and SEO

In conjunction with the rise of niche SEO, there will be a shift towards augmented reality. Although virtual reality will be part of the future of digital experiences, augmented reality (AR) will be more immediate. IDC Research predicts AR to become a \$215 billion market by 2021. Google, Microsoft, Facebook, and Apple are already investing in, experimenting with, and implementing these technologies.

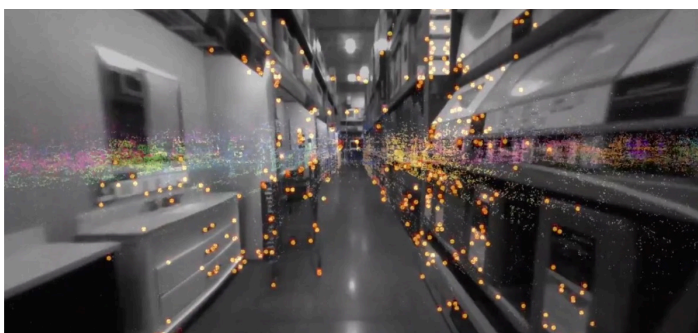
"All of Google was built because we started understanding text and web pages. So the fact that computers can understand images and videos has profound implications for our core mission,"

-Sundar Pichai, CEO, Google

This inflection point in which we start to integrate vision and text search is evident in technology that has already been introduced. Google Lens, an app designed to display relevant information using visual analysis, was quietly rolled out to Google Photos and then to Google Assistant in 2017.



When pointing your phone at a restaurant, product on a retail shelf, open spaces, etc., Google Lens will overlay the photo visual with relevant information, including search results. Google's AR technology doesn't stop there. [Google ARCore](#) helps brands shape new AR experiences by blending the digital and physical worlds. [Google Expeditions](#) is already in action, bringing AR into the classroom.



Google Visual Positioning Service (VPS) transforms search from outside a building's walls into a tool to help you find products and information within the store's walls. VPS gives you a 'GPS-like' turn-by-turn navigation experience when you're indoors. Now, with VPS, you'll never get lost inside an IKEA. You'll be able to walk into the store, conduct a search, and get step-by-step instructions on how to find exactly what you are looking for, along with augmented product information when you do find it. [Lowe's](#) is already testing the solution in 400 stores across the country.

What to do

Search is going to expand into many different environments and AR is going to revolutionize search innovation within traditional search criteria as well. Look at your own industry, keywords, and target audience and strategize as to where that hypercontextualization of SEO is going to occur.

Alternative strategies (beyond Google).

When thinking of SEO, most companies think strictly of Google. However, Google is not the only place you can optimize. Preparing for the future means deciding where you'll win and where your strategy will be successful. You should go beyond Google to capitalize on the entirety of opportunities offered by SEO. To that end, it's beneficial to develop a secondary platform strategy.

Amazon



If you sell any type of product, Amazon is a great place to start. Fifty-five percent (55%) of product searches [start on Amazon](#). With Amazon's pace of innovation, that's only going to accelerate.

Bing

Bing is often overlooked in the market. However, previously we mentioned the increasing presence and importance of voice search in the market. Bing powers all voice-based searches for Alexa where the result is not an Amazon product page.

YouTube

YouTube is the second largest search engine by volume. Host videos in YouTube to increase your online visibility. In addition, if the SERP for your industry queries is populated with videos, YouTube is a great opportunity for you to capitalize on the opportunity for occupying incremental real estate on the SERP.

Quora

Quora is a Q&A website, intended to allow people with knowledge to answer questions posed by members of the community. According to SimilarWeb, the site attracts more than 515 million visits monthly. If you can answer questions that are posed by your prospective customers in the site, Quora is worth a look, as the Q&A sessions can also wind up ranking in the Google SERP.

Pinterest

Pinterest is great for selling anything that is visual in nature and directed at consumers. Pinterest has a lot of traction in the ecommerce world; many ecommerce sales start with Pinterest searches.

Key takeaways.

- Voice-based searches are going to become more prevalent
- Mobile searches continue to increase
- Google is reshaping the SERP with more features intended to keep you within the SERP itself
- Google now factors post-click and CTR into SEO rankings
- To rank well in the future, migrate your website from HTTP to HTTPS
- Ubiquitous screens are paving the way for niche SEO
- Alternative platforms beyond Google are good opportunities to gain incremental visibility online

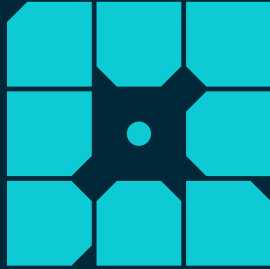
About the author.



Tom Shapiro

Tom Shapiro is CEO of [Stratabeat](#), a B2B branding, web design, and marketing agency. Shapiro's thoughts have been published widely, including Chief Marketer, CMO.com, CNN.com, Forbes, MarketingProfs, and National Center for the Middle Market. Shapiro's book, "[Rethink Your Marketing](#)," was published in 2017.

[@TomShapiro](#)



About WP Engine.

WP Engine is the world's leading WordPress digital experience platform that gives companies of all sizes the agility, performance, intelligence, and integrations they need to drive their business forward faster. WP Engine's combination of tech innovation and an award-winning team of WordPress experts are trusted by over 70,000 companies across 130 countries to provide counsel and support, helping brands create world-class digital experiences. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas, and has offices in San Francisco, California; San Antonio, Texas; London, England; Limerick, Ireland, and Brisbane, Australia.

www.wpengine.com

