BrightEdge Point of View:

320 Character Descriptions in the Google SERPs

What changed and in what way did it change?

Google explained meta description best practices, before the recent change in snippet length, on its support blog: "The description attribute within the meta tag is a good way to provide a concise, human-readable summary of each page's content. Google will sometimes use the meta description of a page in search results snippets if we think it gives users a more accurate description than would be possible purely from the on-page content. Accurate meta descriptions can help improve your clickthrough; here are some guidelines for properly using the meta description."

In other words, Google was already moving away from emphasis on the meta description tag in favor of the visible, on-page content, probably because it ensures a more consistent and better quality user experience. Previously, the standard maximum length was 165 characters; now Google is showing an average of 320 characters for some of the results on the first page.

In a recent post on Search Engine Watch, it states that Google clarified: "We now display slightly longer snippets, which means we might display more of a meta description tag. However, we never had a limit on meta description tag length before, as we covered earlier this year. So, there's no need for publishers to suddenly expand their meta description tags, if they feel their current ones are adequate. As a reminder, our snippets are dynamically generated. Sometimes, they use what's in a meta description tag. More often, they are generated by showing content from the page itself and perhaps parts of the meta description tag as is appropriate for individual queries."

When did this happen?

This change started toward the end of November. Now about 53% of search results have these longer snippets in at least 1 of the top 10 results.

This screen shot highlights the description snippets of a Google search result and the length of the snippet shown:

## What are the SEO implications?

The longer snippets may decrease the results above the fold and may force more scrolling generally to see all of the results on page 1.

It may increase CTR on terms where you rank well. The top 3 listings, if they have the extended snippet, take up more space. Since most sites have optimized for the old standard of 165 characters, if you rank well and have a longer meta description, your listing will take up more vertical SERP real estate.

It may decrease CTR on certain types of queries. There's a possibility that a page will receive fewer clicks on less complex queries. If the snippet functions as a type of "answer box" there may be less reason to click through. In addition, larger snippets are taking up more SERP real estate so pages ranking below the fold may have a decreased CTR.

What should BrightEdge customers do?

To monitor and understand the impact of the change, we suggest customers create a StoryBuilder dashboard to look at overall CTR from Google Search Console (GSC) along with a chart from our Site Report, looking at your top pages and the CTR Week-over-Week.
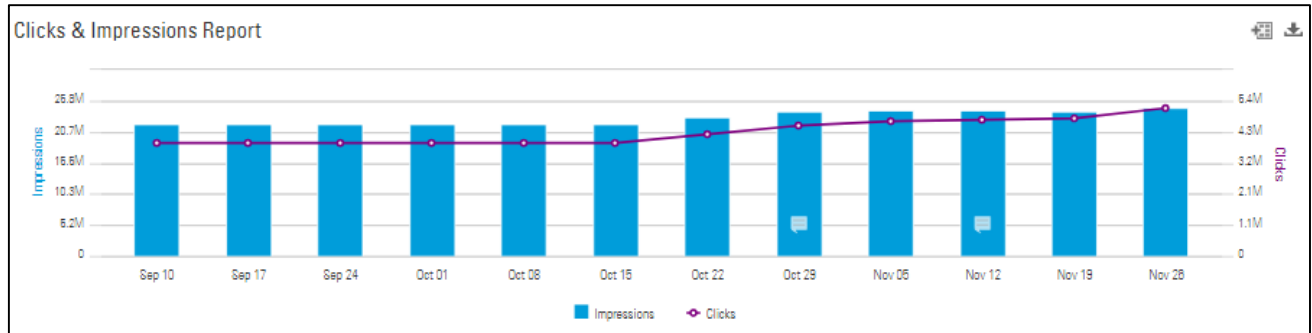
Google now searches pages for content that aligns best with a searcher's query and intent, and posts 300-ish characters of that, in lieu of meta description snippet. They call this a "dynamic process." That said, if you have a well-crafted meta description that clearly addresses the searcher's intent, in theory, Google should use that, even if it may create its own. This move is in keeping with Google's improved understanding of the context of the page and the search query.

How to prioritize your optimization in response to this change?

Looking at your "Defend" bucket in the Intent Signal dashboard within the BrightEdge platform, you'll see the keywords and corresponding pages that are most important to you – i.e. your biggest traffic drivers. Powered by visual parsing technology, Intent Signal is the only solution that can intelligently parse out the ranking elements on the SERP and tell you if a keyword has organic web listings shown above the fold-line (be it Desktop, Tablet, or Smartphone), and whether your content is one of those that is shown above the fold line. Find out what Intent Signal is and what it does here.
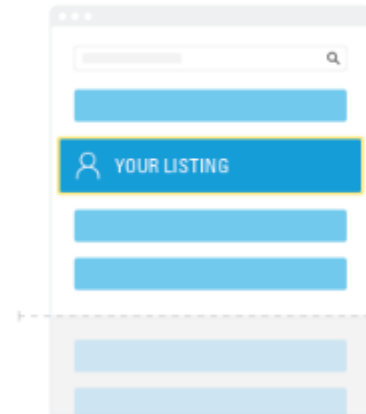
Keywords to Defend

What are "Defend" keywords?

"Defend" keywords are where your listing already ranks above the fold, and the keyword has organic listings above the fold.

What action should you take?

The goal is to preserve your string position. Create Anomaly Detection rules to be alerted if any ranking drops for this keyword group.

All Tracked Keywords - Top Pages to Defend

Keyword	Monthly Search Volume	Blended Rank	Organic Listings Above Fold	Page Ranked Above Fold	Page URL
steph curry shoes	60,500	2	Yes	Yes	https://www.underarmour.com/en-us/stephen-curry-shoes
stephen curry shoes	60,500	3	Yes	Yes	https://www.underarmour.com/en-us/stephen-curry-shoes
curry shoes	40,500	2	Yes	Yes	https://www.underarmour.com/en-us/stephen-curry-shoes
curry 3	27,100	1	Yes	Yes	https://www.underarmour.com/en-us/mens-ua-curry-3-basketball-shoes/pcid1269279

The longer meta description snippet will create competitive advantages to pages with the most relevant content in relationship to the search query.

The Takeaway

Continue to follow SEO best practices for creating deep, relevant content. Top-ranking pages are showing an average of 2300 words. Pay particular attention to your opening paragraphs and make sure they are keyword rich.

Watch your winning listings like a hawk with Anomaly Detection, which alerts you when your content drops below the fold. Consider weaving in longer meta description, as you optimize the content for the "Keywords to Optimize," or create new content for the "Keywords for Content Creation," based on the Intent Signal dashboard.

If you would like to discuss the topic, please call your Customer Success manager or call us at 800-678-8023.

About BrightEdge

BrightEdge, the global leader in enterprise organic search and content performance, empowers marketers to transform online content into business results, such as traffic, conversions, and revenue. The BrightEdge S3 platform is powered by a sophisticated deep learning engine and is the only company capable of web-wide, real-time measurement of content engagement across all digital channels, including search, social, and mobile. BrightEdge's 1,500+ customers include global brands such as 3M, Microsoft, and Nike, as well as 57 of the Fortune 100. The company has eight offices worldwide and is headquartered in Foster City, California.