

Annual Letter to SEO Investors

2024-2025

If you invest in stocks, you're probably familiar with the concept of shareholder letters. These are annual letters companies write to their shareholders to inform them about how the year went, what the biggest challenges were, and what's ahead for the next year.

One of the most famous examples are [Warren Buffett letters to the investors of Berkshire Hathaway](#). And you know what? I'm going to do the same—specifically for everyone investing in SEO to boost their website's search engine rankings.

Too much happens in a year in the SEO world, and you might not even be aware of all of it. But let's begin with a brief look back at 2024.

Looking Back at 2024

Since I started doing SEO, it feels like every year brings even more developments. And just think about everything that's happened in just four years. Ever since ChatGPT made generative AI accessible to all of us, it's almost impossible to take even a few weeks off without missing out on something important.

But isn't that just our daily life now? FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) everywhere you look. That's probably why Aleyda Solis named her newsletter after it.

2024 was no exception to the previous years—it's almost absurd how much can happen in just one year. ChatGPT 4.0, a new language model, Gemini 2.0, and now Sora can even create your own music video.

Do you remember how it all started? You probably don't anymore, but sometimes it's fascinating to look back at how much things can evolve in just one year. Take 2022, for example, and how quickly [image generation progressed](#).

We've come a long way from just creating content. But despite this, the last few years have seen more content generated on the internet than ever before. This has led some to ask: Is this really still useful? Are we [SEOs destroying the internet](#) with our endlessly long blog posts that are just marginally better than what's already ranking? But more on that in my preview of 2025.

This year, Google rolled out several updates to combat spam. However, the most interesting development was their return to an old but significant measure: ["Manual Action"](#). That means manual penalties. To my knowledge, we haven't seen this to such an extreme degree for quite some time.

What I understand from this is that Google doesn't seem to know exactly how to combat all the spam with algorithms alone without harming innocent businesses. And there are far more companies out there than you might imagine that rely on being found on Google to generate revenue in the first place.

In June, we also had the [big Google leak](#), which gave us insights into how their algorithm is programmed. That caused a lot of drama in the SEO world. But looking back, it really only confirmed things SEOs have been preaching for years. Now we just have the proof to back it up—which is nice, too.

What Happened to My 2024 Predictions?

At the beginning of 2024, I took a wild guess at what might happen throughout the year. But what's far more interesting than the prediction itself is looking back now, one year later, to see what actually came true. You can read the [full 2024 SEO predictions](#) in last year's article, but here, I'll focus solely on the results.

1. Large pages will continue to lose traffic in 2024

2024 was definitely the worst year yet for many large publishers. However, it didn't play out quite the way I had imagined at the beginning of the year. Google, in particular, pulled the plug with several manual actions, making it impossible to rank for just anything simply because of high domain authority. Many sites took a hit, including Forbes with their Forbes Advisor platform, which has led many to rethink their SEO strategies.

2. Domain authority will become less important

Continuing from the previous point, this naturally has an immediate impact on the significance of domain authority—at least in terms of what it's still worth. As Google increasingly focuses on understanding the specific topics of your website (Topical Authority), domain authority will no longer be universally effective. So, if you're building links, you should prioritize one thing above all: making them as relevant as possible. Whether it's to build your brand, generate traffic through the link, or most importantly, align 100% with your topic to strengthen your expertise.

3. Links from guest posts will lose value

Of all my predictions, this is probably the one I see the least evidence for. Guest posts are still highly valuable, and I've changed my opinion on this. However, not all guest posts are created equal. It's no longer just about the link you "need" to have but rather about what you write about. If a guest post provides you with an opportunity to showcase your expertise to an audience that cares, it will remain incredibly important in the future. Especially with the new ways artificial intelligence enables people to search the internet, being featured on major platforms and niche blogs in your field will only become more beneficial.

4. Social media shares will gain importance

I also believe this point is more significant for building your expertise and for artificial intelligence than for traditional search. It's about strengthening your brand. Would I bet everything on social media in 2025? No, we're not there yet.

5. Topical Authority will become increasingly important

This point is directly connected to the first two—large platforms and domain authority—and has undoubtedly become even more significant in 2024. In my opinion, topical authority is especially relevant for AI-driven search engines. The more comprehensively you cover a subject, the more likely AI search engines will prefer your site as a source.

Even with Google, this shift was very apparent when we take a closer look at the updates rolled out in 2024. Since it's not easy for an algorithm to determine whether someone is merely exploiting a well-known website to do something different or genuinely shifting focus to a new topic, Google increasingly has to rely on concepts like topical authority.

6. More content will be published, but of poorer quality

This trend was already so evident in 2023 that it couldn't have turned out any other way. In March, Google released a massive Core Update and a Spam Update simultaneously. There's more and more content online, and not all of it can rank anymore. That's why having a solid content strategy is so crucial.

What I did notice in 2024, however, is that AI has significantly improved, even when it comes to writing. People are also getting better at understanding how to use AI to produce higher-quality content, rather than just churning out massive amounts of meaningless material.

7. Google will make even more updates, but announce less

In 2024, Google took quite a while to roll out updates. By September, it seemed like we were having a relatively calm year—until the November Core Update and the December updates hit back-to-back. This year, Christmas wasn't exactly respected.

In the end, there weren't necessarily more updates, but there were a few very significant ones. And Google is still diligently announcing these updates. So, this prediction wasn't entirely accurate.

8. SGE will also come to Europe

That was definitely wishful thinking on my part. As far as I know, it has been spotted here and there but hasn't officially launched in Europe yet. Let's see if we'll have better luck in 2025.

9. Affiliate marketing will come back

So far, this trend hasn't materialized—in fact, quite the opposite. Affiliate marketing took an even bigger hit in 2024. The common argument is: why would anyone need a middleman when Google and AI can display everything directly?

I still believe there are good opportunities for affiliate sites, as long as they are highly specialized and build Topical Authority. People are increasingly looking for genuine reviews and honest feedback—because even on Amazon, you can't always trust that the top results aren't just cheap products from China.

What's no longer possible is making quick and easy money with affiliate marketing.

Running a successful affiliate site will continue to require significant effort, even with tools like ChatGPT and others.

Predictions for 2025

The coming year will certainly keep pace with the last. While I doubt we'll see another Google leak, the landscape remains exciting. Since the first ChatGPT boom, so much has happened in a single year that it's hard to keep up. But that's the beauty of it—there's always something new to learn. So here are my predictions for 2025.

Topical authority will become even more important

Let's start with my strongest opinion, one I've been standing behind all through 2024—and honestly, even more so now. Topical authority will become even more critical. I truly believe this is Google's only way to ensure that a source is trustworthy and has the necessary expertise. It also prevents websites from exploiting their authority to rank for unrelated topics.

This shift will also mark the end of domain authority as we know it. The authority of backlinks will become topic-specific. For example, if you launch a new category or subpage on your website, it might start with an authority of zero. In this scenario, we can no longer talk about the authority of the entire domain but only of specific topics.

In digital PR, it's no longer just about backlinks

Even if domain authority becomes a thing of the past, backlinks will still matter. But digital PR will no longer be just about getting backlinks.

If you've spent some time playing around with search engines based on large language models like ChatGPT Search, Perplexity, or AI overviews, you may have noticed that sources are pulled from all over the place. This kind of AI can much more easily identify where your business appears and make connections across different platforms.

It's not just your website that is looked at, but everything around it as well. While there doesn't always necessarily have to be a backlink, it's about the mention. I see this as part of building your brand—controlling how you appear in other media and hopefully getting a backlink in the process.

Content strategy will become more important than writing itself

All the content writers out there are probably going to hate me for saying this. But we're getting better and better at using LLMs to produce truly high-quality texts.

The more you understand about copywriting, the better the texts will become, that's for sure. So, all that expertise isn't wasted. In my opinion, this isn't the end of copywriters—quite the opposite. But tools like ChatGPT will become a part of their daily work.

Now that we can create content much faster, writing is no longer the bottleneck—the right strategy behind it is. Whether it's a Topical Authority strategy, which I strongly support, or something else, without a solid strategy, there's no point in publishing content at all.

And you know what SEOs are really good at? Developing content strategies—just saying.

We're heading toward the AI bubble

Just like the dot-com bubble in 2000, we're heading straight for an AI bubble. I mean, every tool these days has “artificial intelligence” slapped on it—but how much of it is actually useful?

Since I'm somewhat involved in the start-up scene in Switzerland, this stands out to me even more. At the Start-up Fights in Winterthur (Switzerland) in October, all I kept hearing

was: “We don’t do that anymore; AI does it.” Yet we’re still far from a world where we can spend our entire day having fun while AI handles everything.

And since even the dumbest start-ups feel the need to claim AI in their pitch, it’s just screaming for a bubble that’s bound to burst at some point. Personally, I’d rather invest in down-to-earth start-ups with boring products than in a start-up that’s plastered with “artificial intelligence” all over its pitch.

The next search engine hasn’t been invented yet

And it won’t be in 2025 either. Not ChatGPT Search, not Perplexity, maybe not even Google. I think everything we see as groundbreaking today—things we’re so sure will push Google out of the market—might just be gone in a few years.

Honestly, the search engine and the way we’ll conduct online research in the future haven’t been invented yet. Does that mean you should stop working on SEO? Absolutely not, because everything we’re doing now will still matter for whatever comes next.

And besides, who knows when that new search engine will appear? Do you really want to stop making money and just wait until it arrives?

Search results will change drastically

I believe the battle with the big sites isn’t over yet. I really feel for the smaller ones that are getting swept away, but we’re in the middle of a shift that’s far from finished. Google is working hard to revamp its search results, and some sites that currently rank well with absolute garbage are going to get crushed.

That's not necessarily a bad thing. Right now, some search results are honestly useless. I know there are many out there who blame SEOs for what you find today—and maybe they're right.

For many queries, it's already more effective to use ChatGPT than to read some poorly written, SEO-optimized text that never gets to the point. At some point, we'll have to adapt our content to this trend—more isn't always better, even if it ranks better for now.

Informative content will continue to shift to LLMs

As I mentioned earlier, I think there's way too much crap on the internet. And I'm not even talking about ChatGPT-generated texts. I mean the countless articles written just to rank.

Take, for example, a text about a specific topic that starts with a generic "What is..." introduction. That's not what people are actually looking for. Or recipe websites with long intros about the author's life story, where it's nearly impossible to find the recipe itself—especially with all the pop-up ads.

Yes, that's SEO-optimized content. And these kinds of search queries will slowly but surely move toward LLMs (currently ChatGPT). With LLMs, I get a straight answer to what I want—not everything imaginable, written just to outword the competition.

Will SEO die in 2025?

This entire prediction might sound a bit extreme, and you might be thinking, "Well, should I even invest in SEO anymore?"

And of course, as an SEO expert, I'll say: absolutely!

But I'll also be honest with you—not in every kind of SEO.

When we do SEO, it's really about aligning your offering with the demand. It's about figuring out how to position you and your business online in your market. How your website can be found. How you can communicate more clearly about what you offer and optimize your site to do so.

On top of that, we can structure your website better, make it more readable for algorithms, decide who finds and reads it, and where it should show up (on Google, on ChatGPT, etc.).

I've said it often over the past year—we need a new name for SEO. Because real SEO is so much more than writing pointless blog posts that tell you a whole story about Röstli before even getting to the ingredients.

If you want to hear more from me and my thoughts throughout the year, you should subscribe to my newsletter. It's called Google hates you. Why? You'll find out in one of the welcome emails: <https://danileitner.ch/en/google-hates-you-newsletter/>

Greifensee, 12.01.2025

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