What is Schema and Why Do I Care?

What You Need to Know

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You may have noticed the Google search results are changing.

A handful of years ago, all you would see would be a simple list of ten blue links. If you searched for a local business, there might be a map, too.

Now, the Google search engine result pages (known as SERPs for short) look vastly different. There are carousels of images, boxes on the side, maps, stars, and expandable question boxes to explore.

If your business cares at all about SEO, and every business should, these changing search results may scare you. They take up a lot of space at the top of the search results, pushing your regular blue links further down the page.
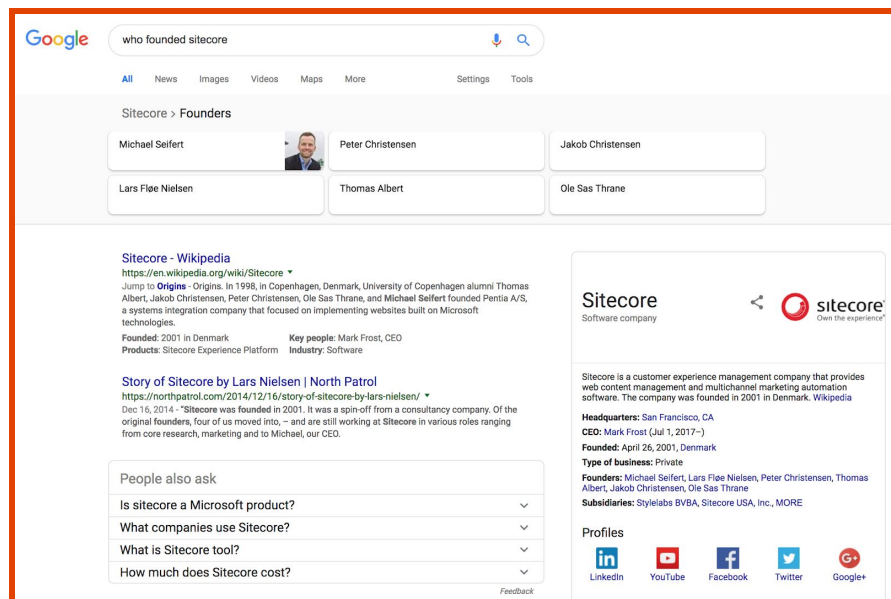
You may have also noticed Google often displays information from a website directly in the search results. Google shows job posts, company information, recipes, and more.
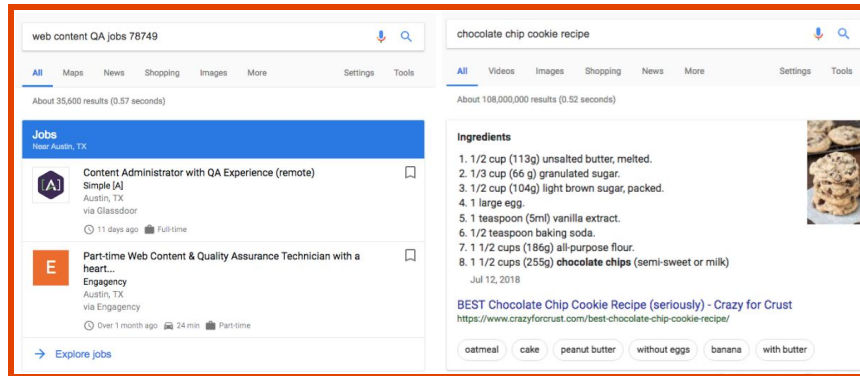
How is Google getting this information?

Part of it comes from the brilliance of Google's algorithm. Google is constantly scouring the web and finding new ways to display that information to searchers.

The other part comes from schema markup. **Schema markup** is code these companies place on their websites to help Google find that information. The easier their information is to find, the more likely Google is to show their website in one of those special search results.

The more present you are in the search results, the more brand awareness, site traffic, and sales your website can enjoy. In other words, schema is good for SEO, and it's good for your business.

Let's dig into exactly what schema is, why you should care, and the powerful results it can drive for your Sitecore website.

What is schema markup?

Schema markup, sometimes referred to as structured data markup, is a vocabulary search engines use to read and understand web content. Back in 2011, the world's biggest search engines, including Google, Yahoo, Bing and Yandex, met up to standardize this vocabulary and form Schema.org.

With schema, you use a standard set of properties, as defined by this language, to describe the content on a page on your website. Then you place the code in the HTML for that page. The code is not visible to your site visitors, but the search engines will see it when they scan your website.

Search engines are getting smarter every day, but it's a tall order to scan a web page and understand what the images, text, and video represent, and how they all relate to each other.

Use schema, and search engines can more clearly grasp what your website is all about, since you're speaking their language. With more context, it's easier for them to display your website in the search results for relevant keywords, or feature you in a special search result like the ones we showed above.

There are three standard formats to schema markup: JSON-LD, Microdata, and RDFa. Google recommends using JSON-LD, which is why we'll use that in our examples throughout the rest of the guide.

>> Schema in action

Here's an example of how schema works. Engagency is currently hiring for a QA technician. Because we used schema markup, Google displays our job in relevant searches, like "QA jobs near me" for Austin-based searchers.
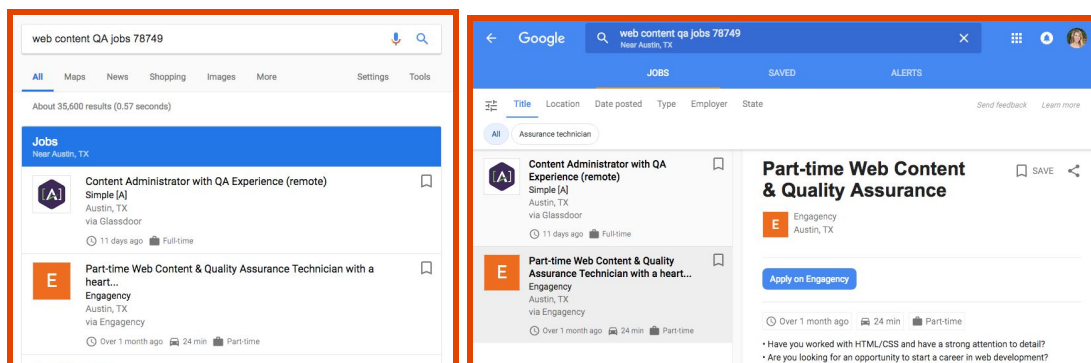
Google is able to pull the job title, location, description, and other details for the role because we included all of those fields in our schema markup for the page.

Google has a special section of the search results dedicated to job openings, and job candidates are likely to go right to Google to find their next job. Thanks to schema markup, we're able to reach more candidates.

Why care about schema?

SEO is highly competitive. Your company knows that. Anything you can do to increase your visibility in the search results is a worthwhile endeavor. Schema fits the bill.

By using schema, you make it much **easier for search engines to understand** the content on your website. This alone makes them more likely to display your website in relevant search results.

But, as we saw with our jobs example above, many types of schema also get transformed into "rich results" in the search results. These are those special search results that look different than a plain blue link.
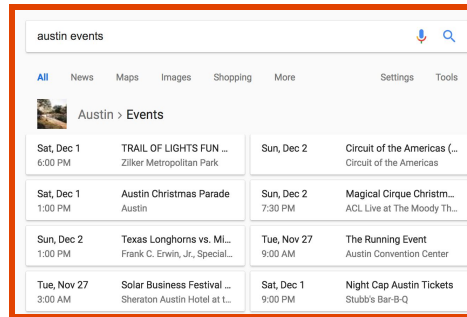
They may be product ratings and reviews:
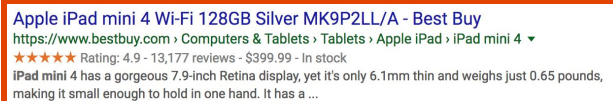
They might be a jobs carousel:
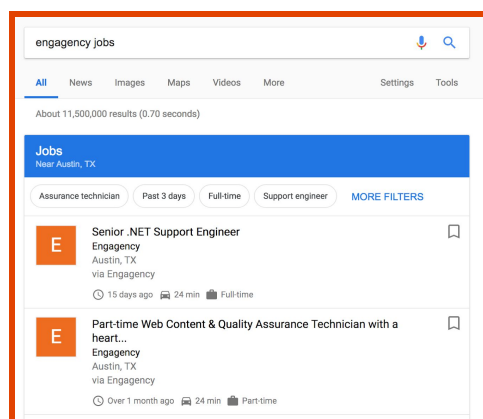
They could be event listings:

And that's just getting started. There are a lot of schema your business can use to gain visibility in the search results, many of which we'll review in a later section.

Prime visibility

As you can see, all of these search results are **highly visible and noticeable**. And many of them grant your business visibility that you wouldn't enjoy otherwise. For example, your business is unlikely to rank for broad, high-volume keywords like "events near me this weekend." Event aggregator sites are likelier to rank. If you use schema, however, Google will be more likely to display your company's event in the featured listings.

Best of all, these rich results are pulled from any of the websites who show up on page one. That means you can be ranking in spot 10, at the very bottom of the search results, and score an additional highlight at the **very top of the search results**. You get two rankings for the price of one!

Considering that the top spot alone gets over 35% of clicks, that's nothing to shrug off.

Higher-quality traffic

While expanded search real estate is a huge benefit all on its own, it doesn't matter if it doesn't translate to conversions.

Here's the great news: these rich results—enabled by schema—attract more-qualified traffic. According to Google's research, web pages that use schema markup enjoy click-through rates that are 25% to 82% higher!

Voice search optimization

Schema provides one more benefit that becomes more important as we enter the age of voice search. One in six Americans already own a voice-activated smart speaker. By 2020, analysts predict over half of all searches will be performed via voice.

When these speakers read out answers to their owners, where do you think they get that information from? From rich results, of course!

Using schema markup on your website is a SEO best practice, for now and into the future. It helps you stay competitive as search behavior changes from text to voice.

Benefits of schema

To summarize, using schema on your Sitecore website can offer you these benefits:

- Increased visibility in the search results

- Increased click-through rates and higher-quality organic search traffic

- Competitive edge for all organic search, traditional or voice

- Google's goodwill for making your content easy to understand

To clarify a common misconception, schema is not a ranking factor. However, it does give Google more context about your site, and the more information Google has (and the easier you make it for them to find said information), the better job they tend to do at ranking your website for the things you should be ranking for.

10 Key Schema for Your Sitecore Implementation
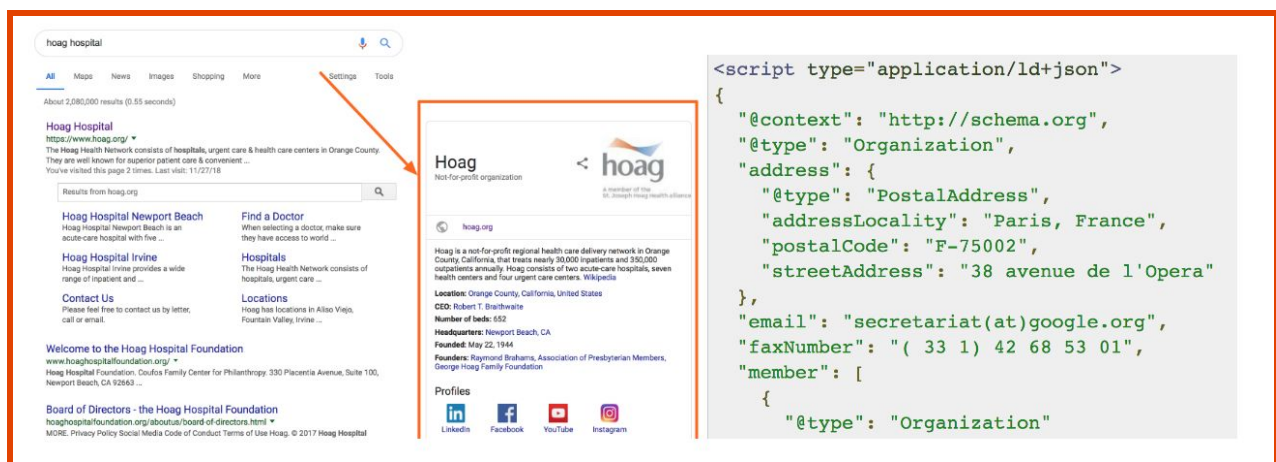
There are countless schema options for your business to use, all of which you can find on the Schema.org website.

Google hasn't yet translated all of these into rich results, though, so below we focus on the ones most likely to increase your SERP visibility today and well into tomorrow.

Here are the top ten schema we recommend implementing on your Sitecore website.

1. Organization Schema

At a minimum, every business should have Organization schema. This schema informs what Google displays for your Knowledge Graph result on the right rail of the search results. This Knowledge Graph may appear for any branded search terms that include your business name.
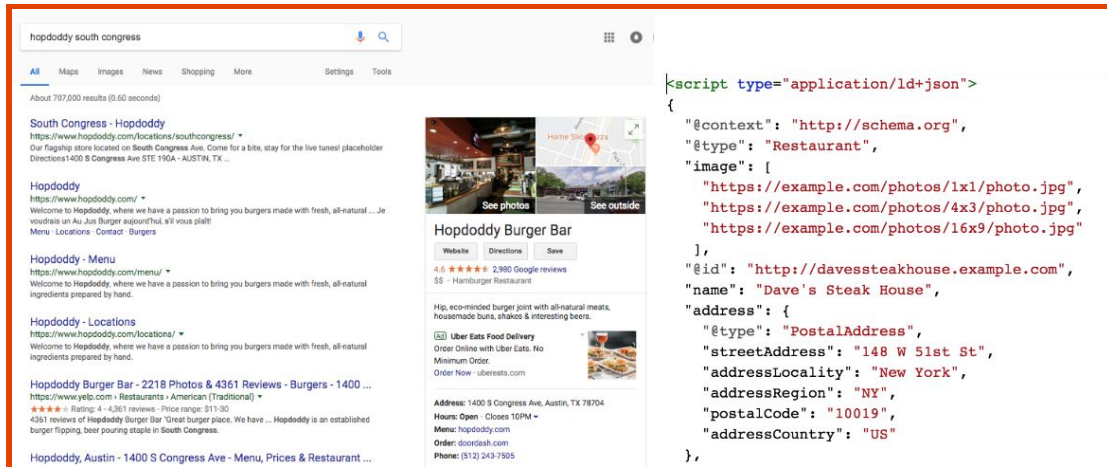

Required schema properties to include: A link to your logo, website, social media profiles, physical address, and contact information. To include additional information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org.

2. Local Business Schema

Local Business schema powers the Knowledge Graph for any physical locations your business operates. Identifying each of your offices or physical locations as a Local Business through schema may also influence Google's decision to show you in the local map 3-pack.

Required schema properties to include: Your business name, physical address, email address or telephone number, opening hours, an image URL, and the webpage URL for that location. If you have social media profiles for individual locations, make sure to add those, too.

In addition to the standard Local Business schema, there are additional schema properties you can add for specific local business types, such as a Physician's Office or a Restaurant. Review the schema.org website to see if there is a schema available for your specific type of business.

To include additional information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org or the Google Developers website.

3. Website Schema

When people search for your website, Google displays additional links below the main one for your website. These are known as "sitelinks." You cannot tell Google which sitelinks to display, but you can heavily encourage them by using the WebSite schema markup.
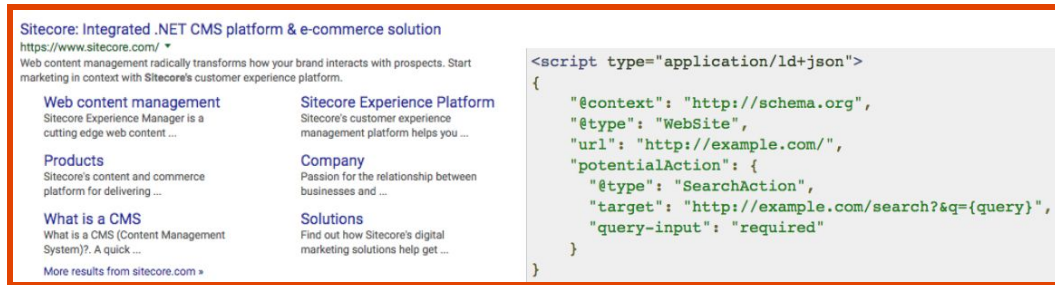
Required schema properties to include: The name of your website and the URL. If you've implemented search on your Sitecore website, you can also enable a search box in the SERPs with WebSite schema. To include additional information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org.

4. Video Schema

Google has a strong preference for YouTube videos in their video search results, so we recommend posting your videos to YouTube and embedding them on your site.

However, if you have some video files hosted on your website, you can increase their search presence by tagging them with Video Object Schema.
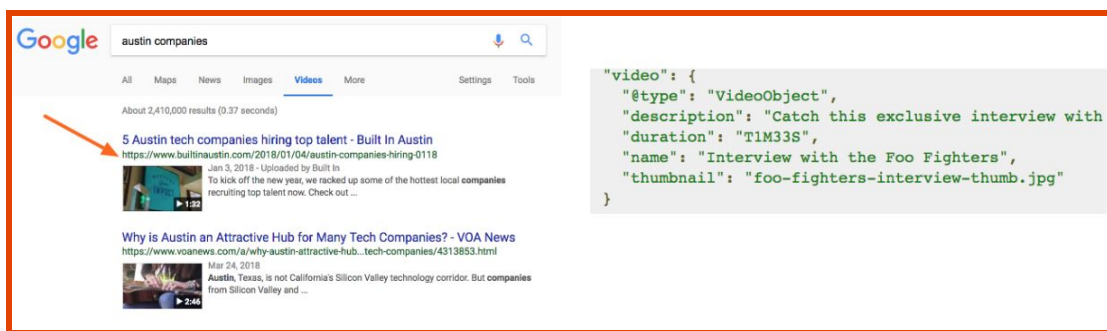
Required schema properties to include: The name of the video, a description, upload date, the video duration, a thumbnail image URL, video file URL, and embed URL for the video. To include additional information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org or the Google Developers website.

5. Product Schema

It's hard to stand out when you're in a sea of blue links. That's what makes the Product schema so attractive. When you enable Product schema, you get a whole extra line added to your SERP result.
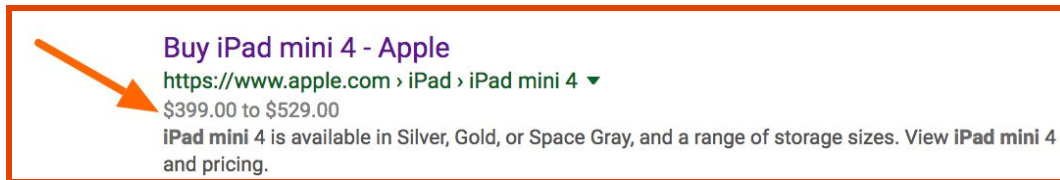
Combine it with Rating schema, and you unlock those bright orange stars that really make a search result pop.
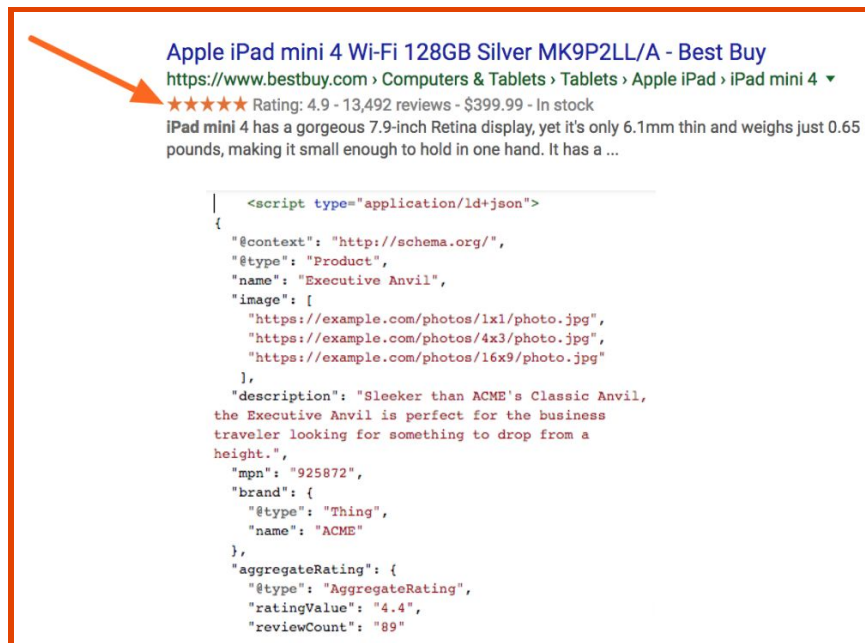
The Product schema is essential for all e-commerce websites powered by Sitecore. You can add it to all of your product pages.

Required schema properties to include: The product name and an image URL. You can also include the rating (if you collect reviews on your website), the brand, and a product description.

If you want the price to display in the search results, use the Offer schema. You can show a price range, the exact price, or a starting price. You'll need to define the currency, too.

To include additional information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org or the Google Developers website.

6. Review Schema

Now, to unlock those juicy gold stars, you need to use the Review schema. The Rating schema should only be used on websites that collect reviews on their website, whether it's for a local business, product or service.
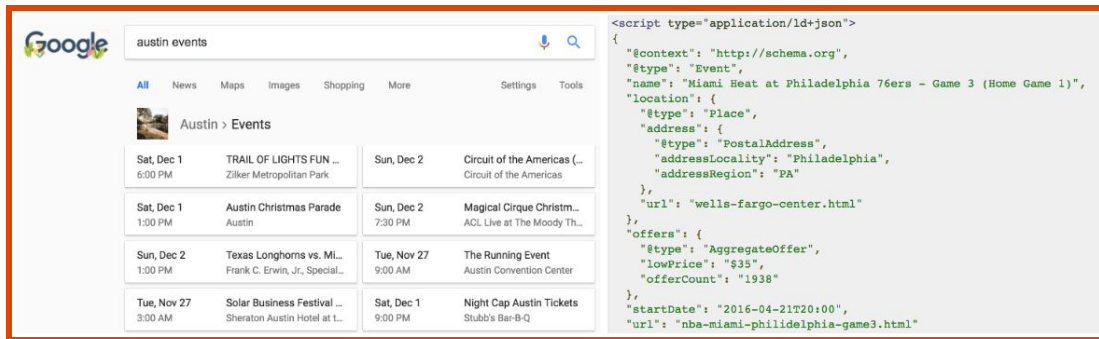
Do NOT use the Review schema for reviews you've copied and pasted from Google, Yelp, or another website. That violates Google's terms.
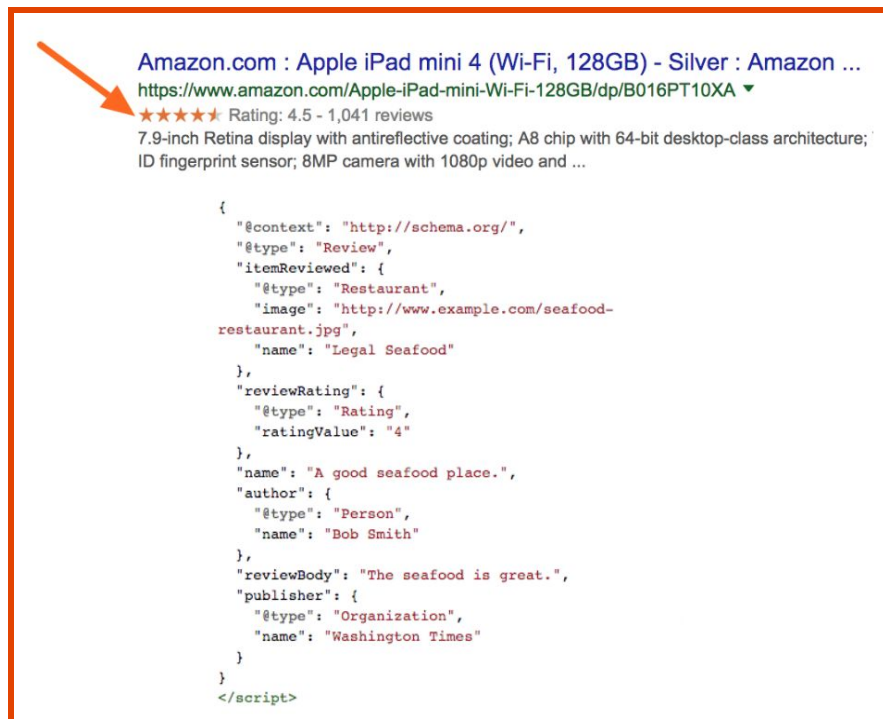
Required schema properties to include: The item being reviewed, the rating of the review, your rating scale, and the name of the reviewer. To include additional information, such as the body of the review, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org or the Google Developers website.

7. Event Schema

Event schema enables your company's events to display in the Google Search results as well as Google Maps. Like with local business schema, each event must have a unique URL on your website.
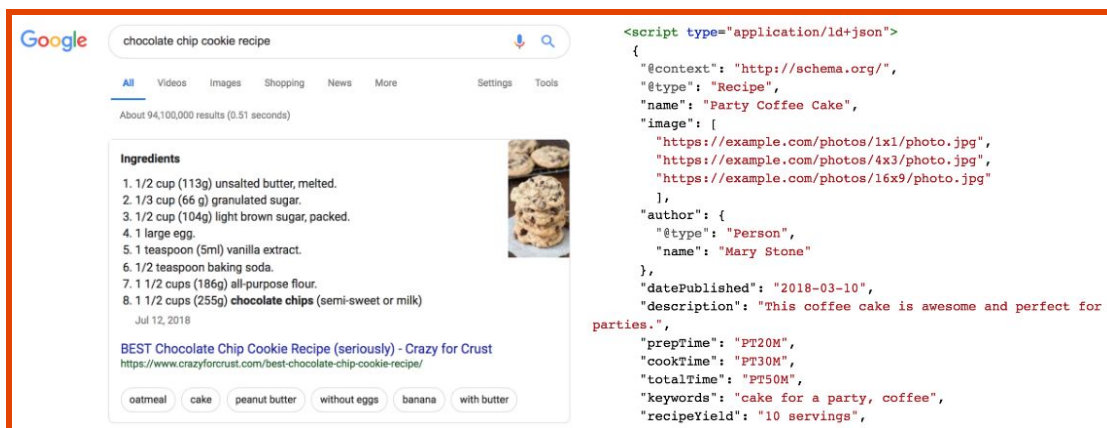
Required schema properties to include: The name of your event, the start and end date and time, the location, a short description, the ticket price, an image file URL, and the URL to the event page. To include additional information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org or the Google Developers website.

8. Recipe Schema

Recipe schema encourages Google to display recipes you've published on your site in the search results with additional fields like star ratings or calories. Earn a featured snippet, and smart speaker owners can follow along using voice search.
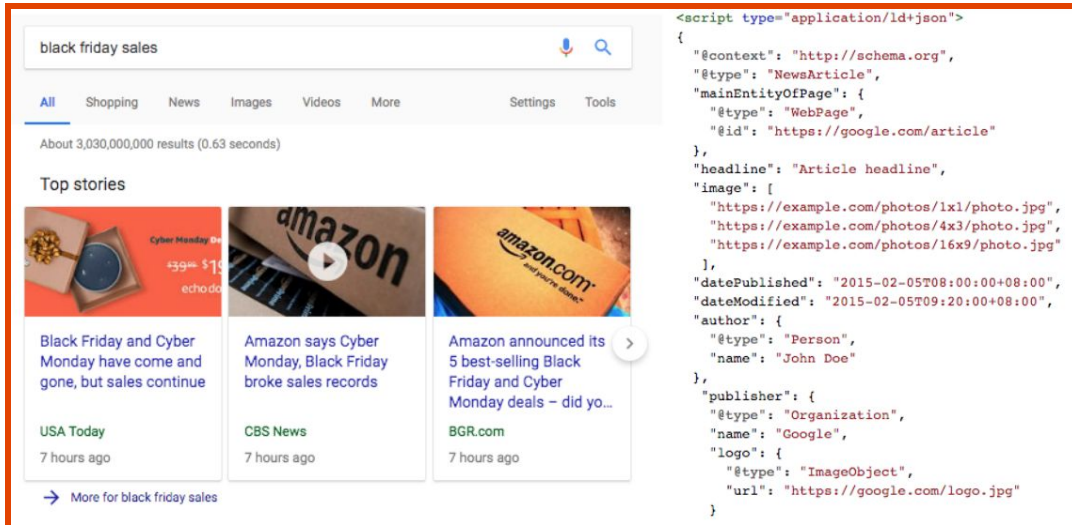
Required schema properties to include: The name of your recipe and URLs for any image files. You'll also want to include the date the recipe was published, a short description, the prep/cook/total time, SEO keywords for your recipe, servings, ingredients, and instructions.

To include additional information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org or the Google Developers website.

9. Article Schema

Does your Sitecore implementation include a blog? Mark up your blog posts with the Article Blog Posting schema and Google may display you in a special "News" carousel.

Required schema properties to include: The article headline, author, an image URL, the date and time your article was published, and the date and time it was modified (if relevant). To include additional information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org or the Google Developers website.

10. Job Posting Schema

Your company wants to source the best candidates. For that to happen, they need to be able to find your latest job openings. The Job Posting schema can help with that.

Required schema properties to include: The job title, the date the job was posted, a description of the job, the hiring organization (this should link to your Organization schema), and the location of the schema (this may be the same Place schema you used for your local business). To include additional information, such as salary information, check out the optional properties listed on Schema.org or the Google Developers website.

5 Schema Best Practices for Sitecore Implementations

As you incorporate schema into your Sitecore implementation, keep the following best practices in mind.

1. Use the JSON-LD format.

While Google supports structured data in all three schema formats—JSON-LD, Microdata, and RDFa—they recommend using JSON-LD.

★ Google recommends using JSON-LD for structured data whenever possible.

When it comes to SEO, it's in your best interests to follow Google's recommendations. Make it easier for them to identify your schema by using JSON-LD, and they may be more likely to display you for rich results.

2. Your schema should be unique to a specific URL.

Each schema you implement should be tied back to a specific page on your website. Do not create schema if you cannot pull content from the page to support the properties.

Google itself advises against copying and pasting the same schema across multiple pages. Don't make Google angry.

## 3. Use the same NAP across all your schema and web properties.

When you are adding a place to your schema, such as you would with the Organization, Local Business, or Job Posting schema, make sure the Name, Address, and Place (NAP) match the information you use across your web profiles. These include social media profiles like Facebook and Twitter as well as directory websites like Yelp or The Yellow Pages.

In the SEO world, these are referred to as citations, and having a consistent NAP across them makes it easy for Google to interconnect your various web properties.

4. Check your schema with Google's free tools.

Google has free tools you can use to make sure you're implementing schema correctly. This not only confirms you've made it as easy as pie for Google to display rich results for your schema, but it also makes sure you don't get a nasty message from Google telling you you've violated schema guidelines.

Before you go live, use their Structured Data Markup Helper to test your schema. Once you're live, you can test your live URL with their Structured Data Testing Tool to verify everything displays properly.
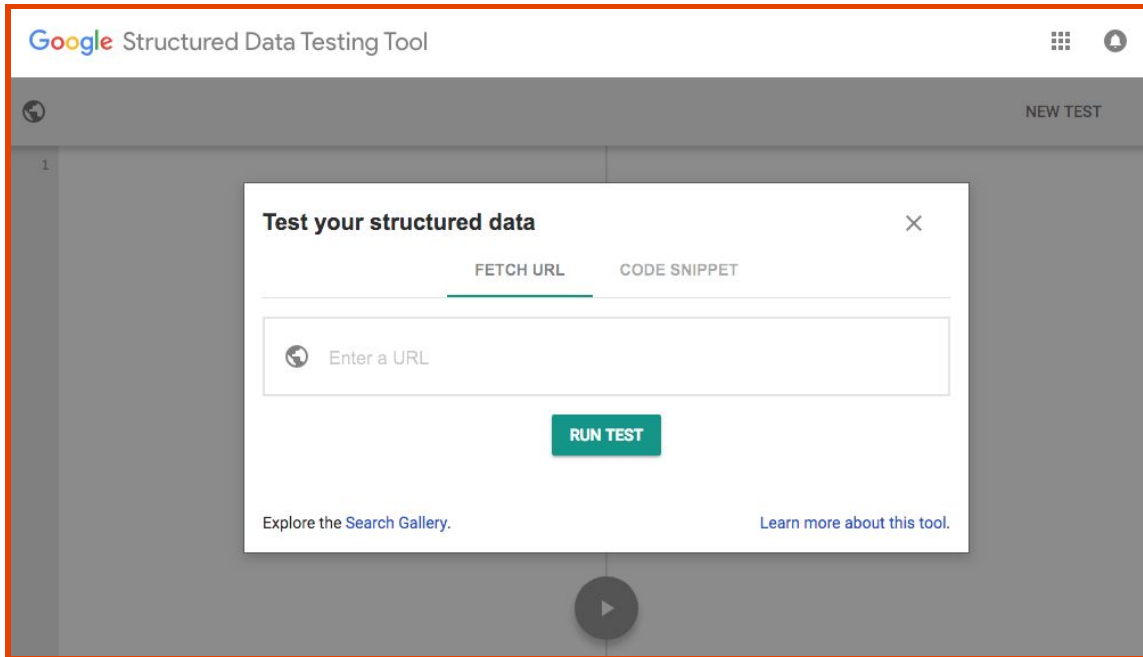
5. Don't scam the schema.

Some people try to scam their way to better SEO by deliberately violating their guidelines. Common examples of this include creating schema on a page that doesn't have content, such as 5-star customer ratings when there's not a review in sight.

Do not do this, as Google will issue a Manual Action for your website—and that can seriously negatively affect how your website appears (or doesn't) in the search results. Always test your schema to make sure it meets Google's guidelines.

Schema for your Sitecore website

As you can see, there is a lot to schema! The possibilities with schema are growing every day, and each schema you use just makes your site that much easier for Google to find. The easier you make Google's job for them, the better they'll be able to do it. Hopefully, that means displaying your website for more relevant search terms.

For help implementing schema on your Sitecore website, **call Engagency**. We'll work with you to identify all of the schemas available to you. Then we'll map your site content and pages to the appropriate schema and add it to your existing site. We'll

even modify your existing Sitecore Content Editor so you can easily add schema to new pages moving forward—without having to dig into the code.

Learn more about our Schema Implementation and other SEO services by contacting us today. Let's create a scheme for your schema.