Understanding Rich Snippets

What are Rich Snippets

First off let's be clear about one thing Rich Snippets are not new they were introduced by Google to their search results way back in 2009 as a method of helping users to find more information on an array of subjects including people, events, food recipes and reviews to name but a few.

Their ultimate goal is of course to help webmasters advertise their content in a much better way in order to provide the user with as much information as they could possibly need in order to make that decision and ultimately click a link through to their website or product pages.

But let's show you an example and it may be clearer on what the benefits of Rich Snippets really are.

In the above image you can see an example of how rich snippet will appear in the Google SERPS for a food recipe, so you can see that extra information to a standard listing such as the rating, time to prepare and calories in the dish are displayed with the listing.

More recent additions to the types of rich snippets that have been made available include such things as products, video, music info, restaurants, business organisations, people and authors and we have included another example of one of these below (Music Info).

Schema.org and Microdata

In 2011 the major search engines agreed to work together to support a set of schemas that could be utilised to improve search results and of more interest to us as businesses offered us the chance of better visibility if we were savvy enough with the technology. More recently Yandex joined in with the alliance and it is clear that they are open to other search engines joining the project as well.

SCHEMA

Schema – a type of microdata that makes it easier for search engines to pull out and interpret the information on your web pages. Ideal as it means they can deliver more relevant results to users based on search queries.

Schema.org is the centralised home on the web for the Schema project. This is a collaboration between Google, Bing, Yahoo and Russian search engine Yandex, to standardise structured markup (the coding used in schema).

Schema microdata is applied to the content of a page to define exactly what it is and how it should be viewed by google. It is in many ways like a contents page for the product, service, video, review, recipe, or event in question. The schema elements are added directly to the HTML code of a web page and offer search engines' crawlers additional information.

So schema for a Nike product I have entirely fabricated for the purposes of this document, would look like this:

```
<div itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/Product">

<a itemprop="url" href="www.nike.com"><div itemprop="name"><strong>Nike Cross-Extreme </strong></div>

</a>

<div itemprop="description">Cross Training multi-directional fitness trainers in black, red and gold. New range just arrived. </div>

<div itemprop="brand" itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/Organization">

<span itemprop="name">Nike </span></div>

<div>Product ID: <span itemprop="productID">234-679-01</span></div>

<div itemprop="aggregateRating" itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/AggregateRating">

<span itemprop="ratingValue">5</span> based on <span itemprop="reviewCount">42</span> reviews</div>

<div itemprop="offers" itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/Offer"><span itemprop="price">£45</span><link itemprop="itemCondition" href="http://schema.org/NewCondition" /> New</div></div>
```

There are schema creators available on the web but you will need some html experience to be able to place the code. There are some plugins that are currently being trialled but none that are widely used as of yet.

Our favourite tool of choice for doing this is Schema Creator courtesy of Raven Internet Marketing Tools as it is straight forward to use and covers all of the major schema that are available:

- Person
- Product
- Event
- Organisation
- Movie
- Book
- Review

They even have a schema creator for Wordpress plugin and both are free to use.

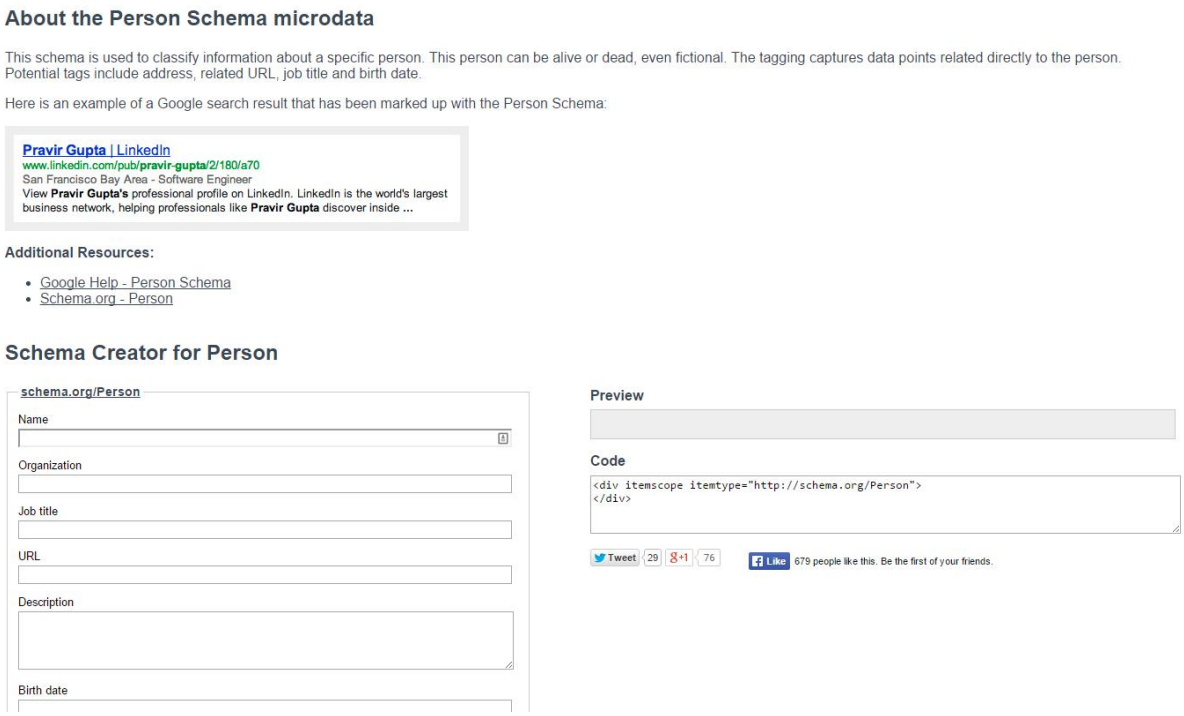


Figure 1Schema Creator in action creating Person schema

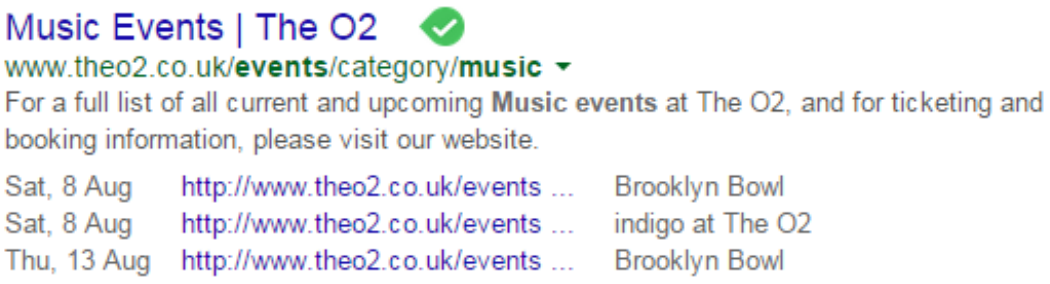
To check the standardised structured markup and naming conventions go to schema.org and to test your schema when it is in all in place use Google's structured data testing tool.

The type of schema you choose to employ will likely marry up to what you want to showcase to Google for use in creating rich snippets in the SERPs.

RICH SNIPPETS

Some of the data provided via structured data markup can be used to create and display rich snippets within search results.

Here is an example of event rich snippet data:



As you can see Google has pulled out the title, link and date of upcoming events at The O2 which is likely to increase click through rates because searchers can quickly scan the relevancy of the site to their search query. Google supports rich snippets for these data types:

- Product -- Information about a product, including price, availability, and review ratings.

- Recipe -- Recipes that can be displayed in web searches and Recipe View.
- Review -- A review of an item such as a restaurant, movie, or store.
- Event -- An organized event, such as musical concerts or art festivals, that people may attend at a particular time and place.
- SoftwareApplication -- Information about a software app, including its URL, review ratings, and price.

The information above was taken directly from Google's structured data Google Developers site. You will find further information on rich snippets and schema on this comprehensive resource.

So what are the Benefits of Adding Microdata to a Website

Should you be looking at adding microdata to your website? What exactly are the benefits?

As with anything to do with marketing there are pros and cons but Rich Snippets do offer some real benefits especially when it comes to outshining the competition, they provide eye catching results that draw a search user to these types of listings over others that are not using them.

They can potentially increase CTR (click through rates) and lower the chances of the user bouncing as you are providing more information at the source and before the user has clicked and they offer results that are closer to what the user specified in the first place.

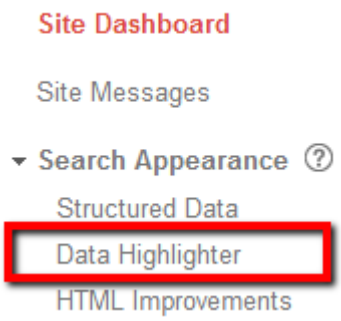
With all the major search players being involved rich snippets are certainly here to stay and the schema alliance have in their sights a more semantic web which can only bring improved search engine usability, better search results and ultimately happier users.

An Easier Way with Data Highlighter

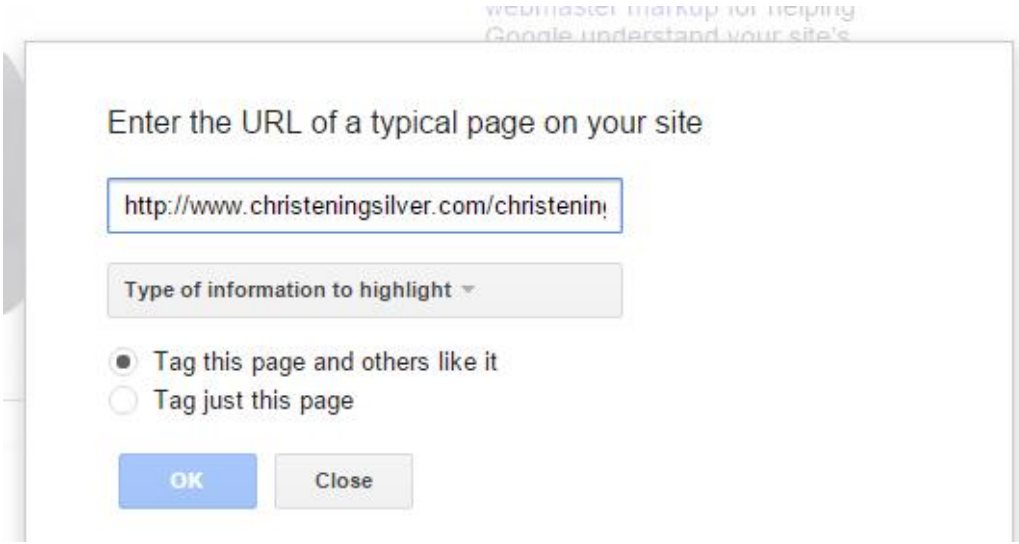
Of course to implement structured data you either need to be a developer or have a developer on call in which case it will probably have a cost involved (especially if you need to implement lots of it).

However for more simple semantic tagging there is now a tool developed by Google and offered as part of Google Search Console (Webmaster Tools) and this tool is called Data Highlighter. Data Highlighter is as simple as highlighting aspects of your websites pages and allow Google to do a spot of machine learning in order to implement the structured data across your site.

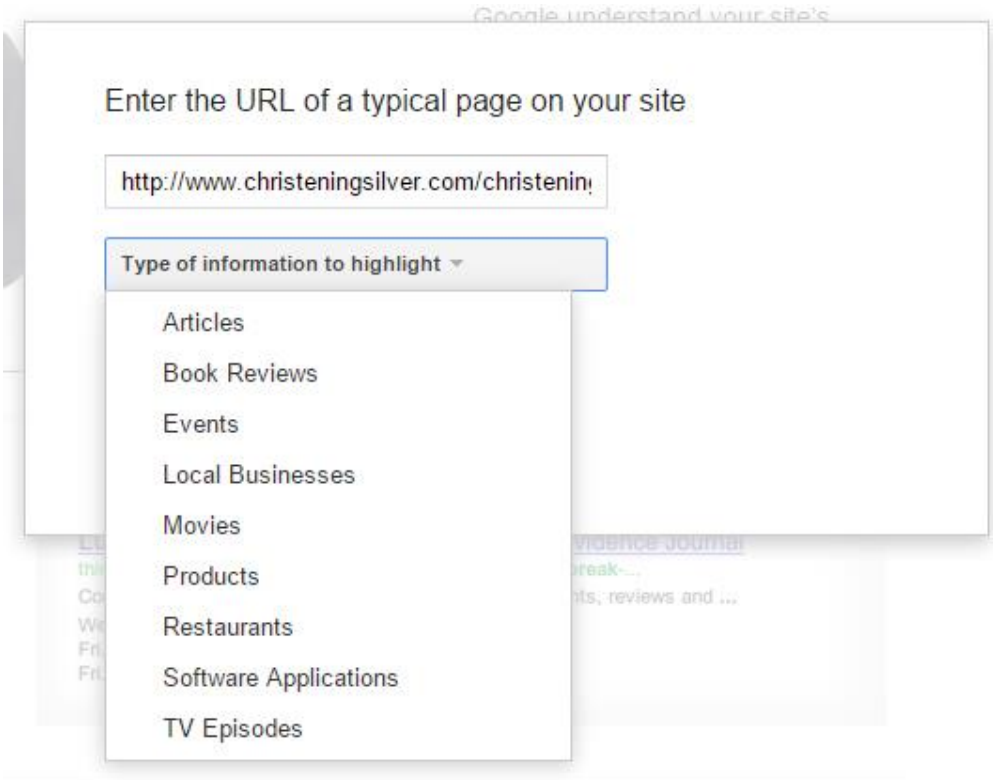
1. First you need to have a Google Search Console account so if you haven't already go and create one now. Once done login to the account and then under Search Appearance find and select Data Highlighter



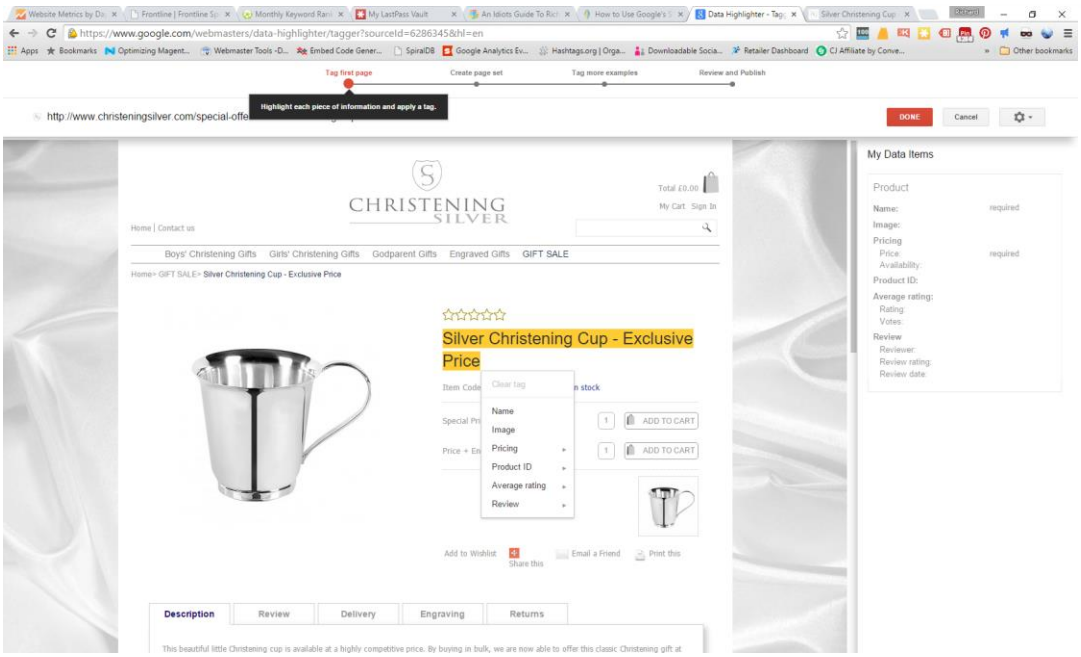
2. Watch the video if you would like to learn a little more and then get stuck in by clicking the 'Start Highlighting' button. A screen will pop-up and will prompt you to enter a URL of a page typically found on your site and here you want to choose a url from your site that is a group of pages with similar layouts such as a product page.



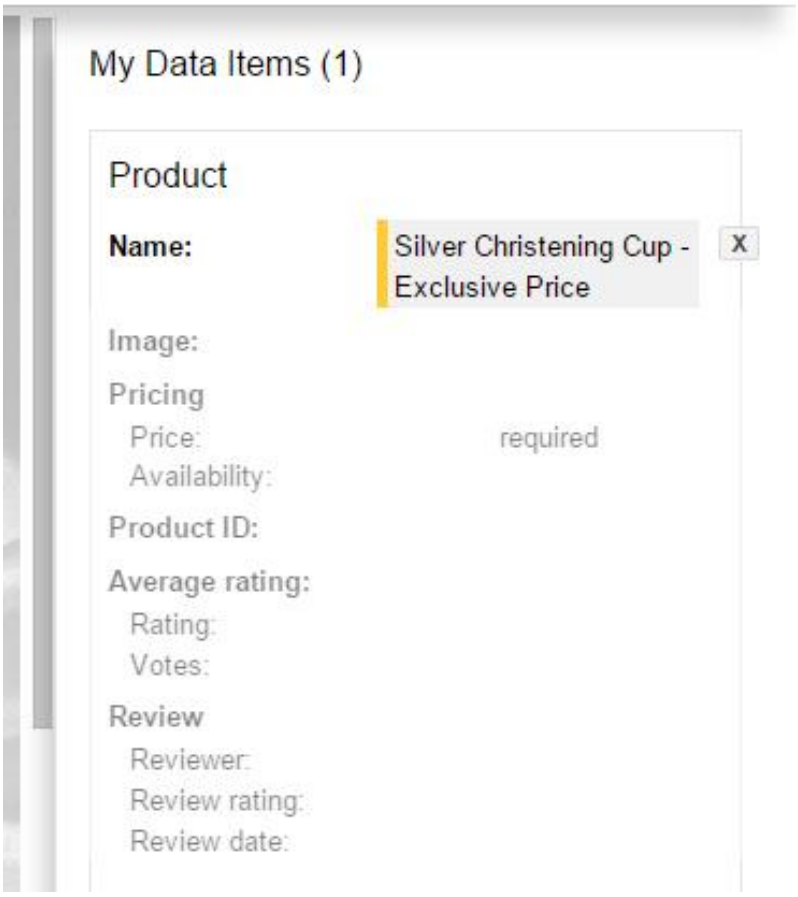
3. Then select the type of information you are going to be highlighting, so in our example we are going to highlight products. Leave the 'Tag this page and others like it' and click the OK button.



4. Now it's time to start tagging, you will see on the next screen a representation of your websites pages within the data highlighter environment, on the right of the screen is a list of the elements that you can actually tag on the page. If you take the first of these and highlight the product name on your page you will see a drop down option appear as shown below.

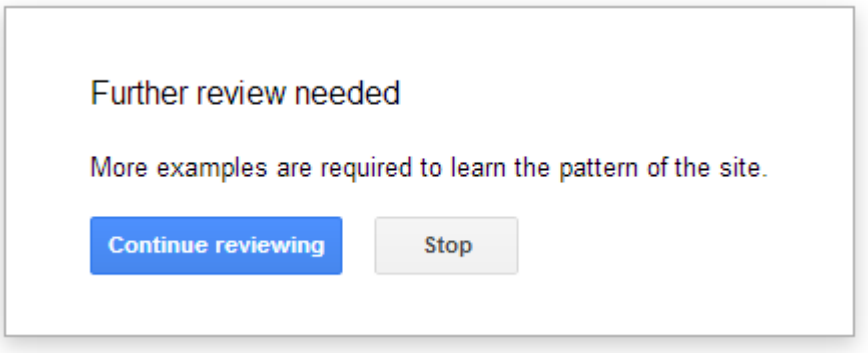


Select the relevant tag that corresponds with the selection of data you are highlighting, in this instance 'Name' and you will see the tagged piece of data appear in the list to the right.



5. Continue working through the items in this list until you have highlighted all the tags that you can for your current page (you may not have all of them). Once you have done this hit the red 'Done' button.

6. At this point you will be prompted to create a page set, this screen will show you a list of the pages that the tool has extracted from the site that it feels are similar pages. Give the page set a meaningful name and click the 'Create page set' button
7. Once you've created the page set, the Data Highlighter will ask you to review the suggested tags and fix any mistakes. Go through your pages, and if anything is incorrect, remove the tag on the right side, and re-tag appropriately. Continue working through the pages that are presented until you reach the end.
8. In some instances you may have to review several pages in order to help Google machine learn the pattern presented by the page layout.



9. Once you've finished tagging sample pages, you're ready for the final review of the data.
10. Data Highlighter will present you with a random sample of pages for you to look over and make sure the tags correspond to the correct data fields.
11. Once you've done that, hit "Publish!"
12. The published data set now appears on the dashboard.

Obviously if you have the technical ability at your disposal then the true coded schema is the better option so you will have to choose the best option suited to your organisations abilities.