



HOW TO AUDIT YOUR ORGANIC PERFORMANCE

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO BEGINNING YOUR RECOVERY, OR
IMPROVING PERFORMANCE, AFTER AN UPDATE



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INTRODUCTION

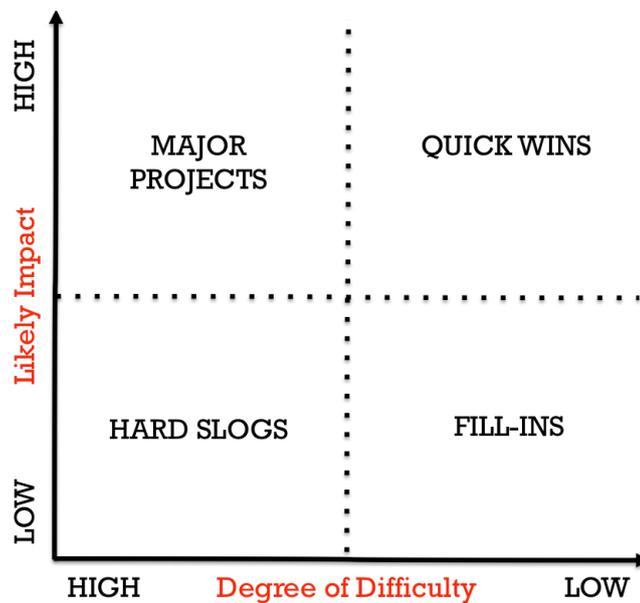
The updates come thick and fast these days and Google seems reluctant to tell us what exactly these updates do. Therefore, whether you're seeing upticks or drops in your organic performance following a rollout, it's important that you audit your site to see what contributed to it.

It's virtually impossible to state for certain what any one update targets, but there are certain elements of a site's performance which contribute consistently to performance. and which, therefore, can be examined to give you the best chance of understanding what has contributed to either a loss or gain.

WHERE TO START

It can be daunting to know where to start when it comes to any large audit process, but there's no real definitive answer but that it isn't important where to start, just that you do. For the most part, however, it's as good a plan as any to begin with whichever tool you're most familiar with and move through the tools from there, making notes of possible issues and of anything which is achieving results.

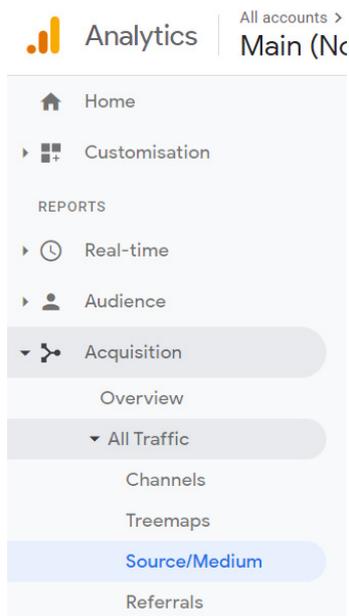
The best thing to do, therefore, is to set up a sheet or series of sheets where you can record the tool, the issue and the possible resolution as you proceed through the tools. From there you can then look to use a prioritisation framework to help decide the order in which any discovered issues or potential wins should be tackled. The below, for example, is a simple matrix for prioritisation.



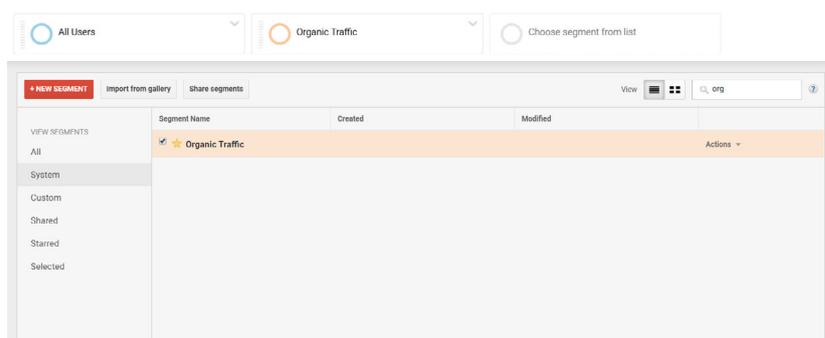
GOOGLE ANALYTICS

There's a lot of data available for those who want to look for it, but we're going to cover a fairly quick analytics audit and anyone that wants to dive a little deeper can keep up to date on our [blog](#).

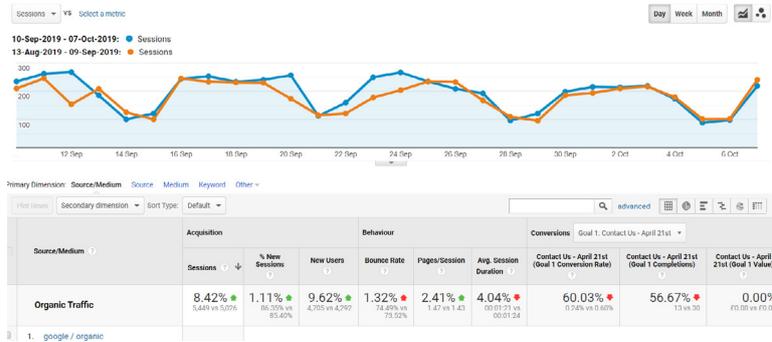
While there are plenty of audits you can carry out in Analytics, for the purposes of an organic performance audit, one of the most important is to monitor your organic traffic. Again, there are a few ways you can monitor this, but amongst them is the 'Source/Medium' report, located under 'All Traffic' report in the 'Acquisitions' sub-menu.



You can then limit this from all users to specifically organic traffic.



This, by adding in a comparison date range, allows you to observe your site's organic traffic performance across a series of date (whether that's week on week, month on month or year on year), and therefore to judge whether there has been a significant change up or down as a result of activity or update.



In addition, you'll also be able to observe the relative importance of various search engines to your traffic in the table below - whether Google, Bing, Baidu or any other.

Organic Traffic	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	Contact Us - April 21st (Goal 1 Conversion Rate)	Contact Us - April 21st (Goal 1 Completions)	Contact Us - April 21st (Goal 1 Value)
1. google / organic	661 (12.13%)	95.46%	631 (13.41%)	76.85%	1.14	00:01:13			
10-Sep-2019 - 07-Oct-2019	661 (12.13%)	95.46%	631 (13.41%)	76.85%	1.14	00:01:13			
13-Aug-2019 - 09-Sep-2019	340 (6.76%)	95.59%	325 (7.57%)	63.24%	1.23	00:01:26			
% Change	94.41%	-0.13%	94.15%	21.54%	-7.44%	-14.67%			
2. bing / organic	608 (11.16%)	73.19%	445 (9.46%)	45.39%	2.40	00:02:23			
10-Sep-2019 - 07-Oct-2019	608 (11.16%)	73.19%	445 (9.46%)	45.39%	2.40	00:02:23			
13-Aug-2019 - 09-Sep-2019	542 (10.78%)	75.09%	407 (9.48%)	47.79%	2.21	00:02:48			
% Change	12.18%	-2.53%	9.34%	-5.00%	8.33%	-15.66%			
3. baidu / organic	576 (10.57%)	87.15%	502 (10.67%)	91.32%	1.09	00:01:01			
10-Sep-2019 - 07-Oct-2019	576 (10.57%)	87.15%	502 (10.67%)	91.32%	1.09	00:01:01			
13-Aug-2019 - 09-Sep-2019	766 (15.24%)	86.68%	664 (15.47%)	90.08%	1.11	00:00:48			
% Change	-24.80%	0.54%	-24.40%	1.38%	-1.78%	27.64%			
4. yahoo / organic	328 (6.02%)	96.34%	316 (6.72%)	83.54%	1.09	00:00:30			
10-Sep-2019 - 07-Oct-2019	328 (6.02%)	96.34%	316 (6.72%)	83.54%	1.09	00:00:30			
13-Aug-2019 - 09-Sep-2019	134 (2.67%)	93.28%	125 (2.91%)	87.31%	1.07	00:00:35			
% Change	144.78%	3.28%	152.80%	-4.33%	1.00%	-14.40%			

Secondly, you can also check the performance of various landing pages in the same manner. This time using the 'Landing Page Report' in the 'Site Content' sub-menu of 'Behaviour'. Again, by filtering this to organic traffic, you can then see the organic performance of specific pages. Whether you have specific cornerstone content that brings users to the site and are monitoring their performance, or are looking for trends over time, this will allow you to audit the organic performance of specific pages.



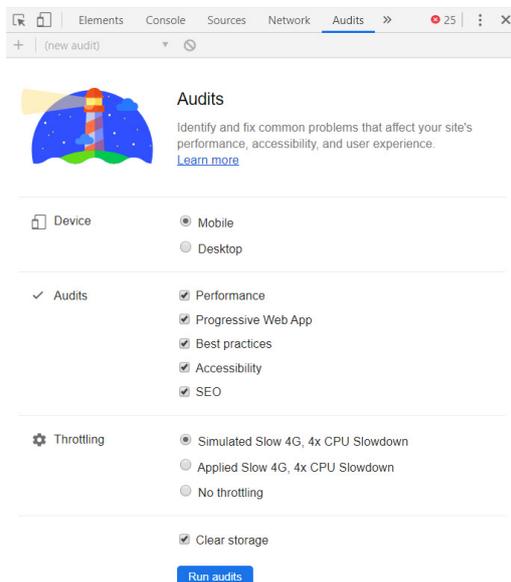
Finally for a quick audit, the same is possible using the 'Acquisition' overview report and again filtering for organic traffic only. This will then allow you to observe changes in organic conversions over the selected period.

LIGHTHOUSE REPORT

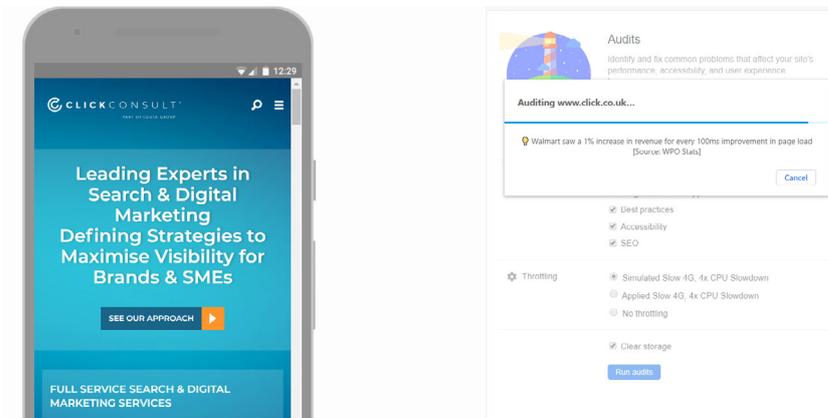
Lighthouse Report is a built in tool within the Chrome web browser. To access the tool, simply select 'More tools' and then 'Developer tools' from the hamburger menu (three dots) at the top right corner of the browser window.



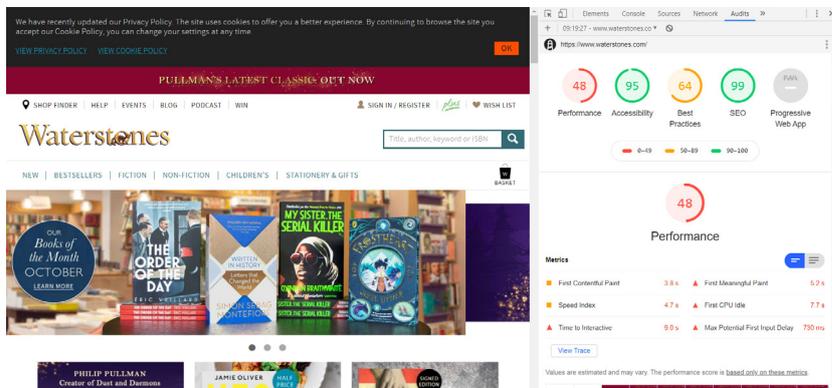
This will open up a panel at the right hand of the screen. If you can't see the audit tab straight away, you can access a number of other tabs by clicking the ">>". The audit options look like the below.



With the introduction of mobile first ranking, it makes sense to run the audits from a simulated mobile browser - giving you the best view of how your site is performing on mobile devices. You'll then see the brief execution of the audits as it checks your site.

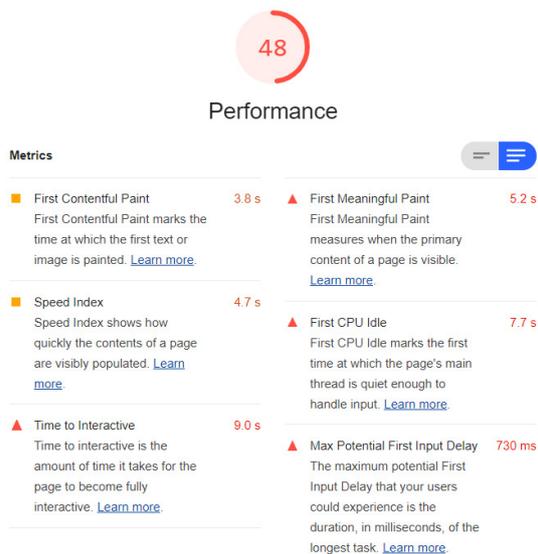


Once the audits are run, you'll see a summary of the audits which you can scroll down to study further - all of which use a standard traffic light system to indicate the good/fair/bad scores of each area. Again, we'll cover the most applicable report - but there's much more you can get from your Lighthouse Report audits.



PERFORMANCE

First on the list of reports is the performance report which provides a lot of useful information on your performance - good or bad - and even some hints as to how the performance can be improved.



Following these 6 metrics come a list of possible opportunities and a diagnostic list. For the Waterstones site, for example, the opportunities include the advice to properly size images (sizing the image for its container prior to uploading) and removing unnecessary CSS (code which isn't executed and therefore isn't necessary). These opportunities even come with a potential time saving.

The diagnostic list, on the other hand, includes such things as: "reduce JavaScript execution time" - which is a common problem with sites that have either become too reliant on JavaScript for various animations or similar, or have failed to implement asynchronous loading.

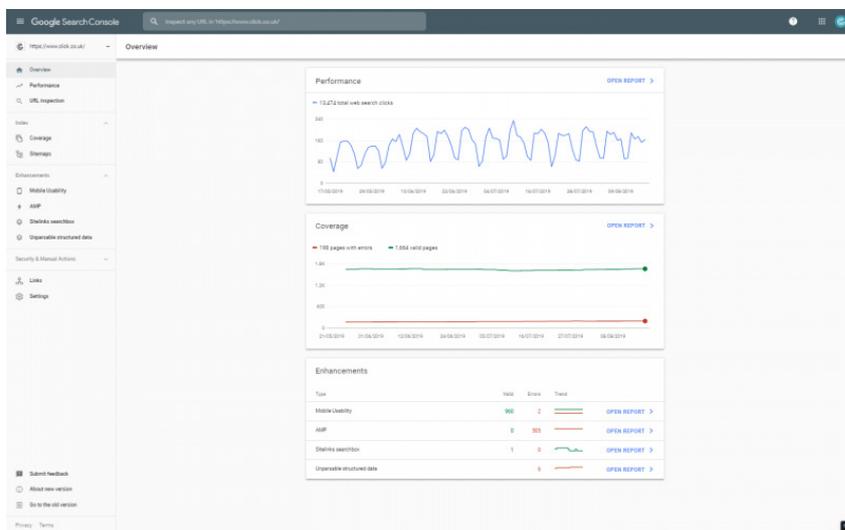
However, what all of these performance issues relate to, is the load speed of the website - something which has grown in importance as far as rankings are concerned - and has also become more valuable to demanding consumers whose patience with load times seems to shrink all the time.

GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

Google Search Console has plenty of scope for investigation whether you've noticed a drop or a gain in the wake of an update. Either way, GSC is an often overlooked free tool that should be given a regular review by any brand - a full breakdown of the tool is available here, but the following is a good place to start for the purposes of auditing performance.

GSC OVERVIEW

The first dashboard as you log in to GSC is the overview and, as you would expect from an 'overview', it offers a big picture view of your site's recent performance, coverage and enhancement with full reports available at a click.



Source: Google Search Console

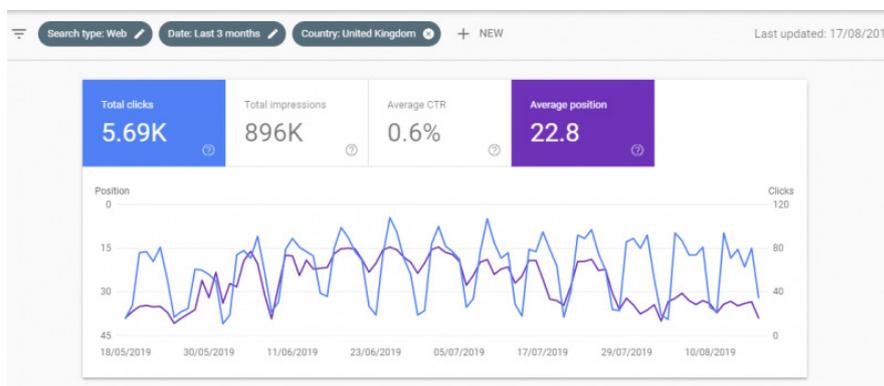
PERFORMANCE

An expanded version of the top level performance report from the overview, this is made up of two sections – your site's performance in SERPs, and your site's performance broken down into categories.

TOP LEVEL

The top level report offers insights into the performance of your site overall – with four metrics displayed in a line graph:

- Total clicks: – The total number of clicks through to your site resulting from searches.
- Total impressions: – How often your site has appeared for a consumer’s search term.
- Average CTR: – The percentage of impressions that resulted in a click.
- Average position: – The average position of your top ranking page whenever your site appears in a search result.



Source: Google Search Console

These can be filtered by:

- Search type : – this can be filtered to include only web searches, image searches or video searches – it’s worth pointing out here, that the ‘google images – organic’ source seems to have disappeared from Google Analytics, so this will be where you’ll need to look for performance in this area.
- Date: – this is simply the start and end dates for the report, allowing you to specify a duration that runs through the most recent update and observe its impact.
- Country: – restricts the report to only include searches made in a specific country.
- Query: – narrows the report to searches that contain a specified keyword or phrase.
- Page: – filters the report to searches for which a specific URL appeared.
- Device: – allows you to see searches only from desktops, mobile phones or tablets.
- Search appearance: – shows searches where your site appears in either ‘Web Light’, ‘AMP’ or ‘AMP article’ results.

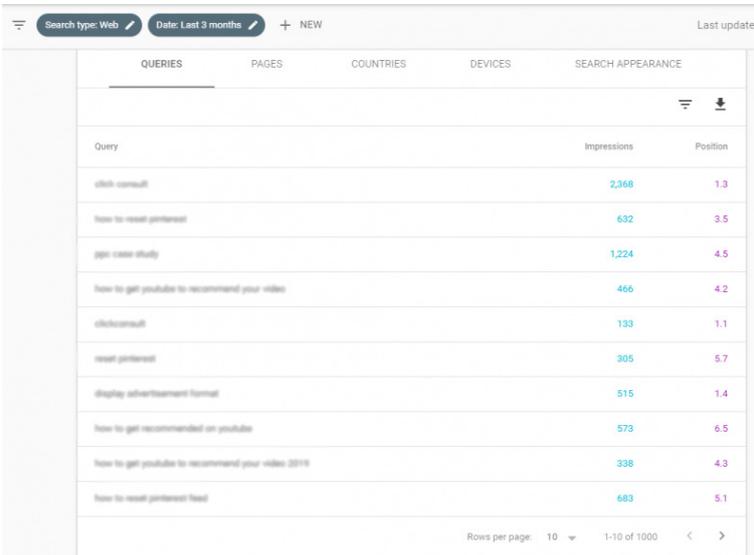
While the uses of this are probably obvious, this group of potential filter combinations allow you to compare your performance on different devices, track your site’s performance over time and the frequency your site’s AMP pages appear in SERPs, meaning that you can use it to examine the possible effects of an update across a range of metrics.

BREAK DOWN

The break down table organises your site data more specifically – giving you greater insight into performance. While the metrics remain the same for each of the five options, they are still subject to the main page filters – so that comparison between devices, queries etc. can still be made. The metrics for the table are:

- Impressions: how many times the specific page, query etc. has generated an impression.
- Position: the average position of the specific page, device, country etc.

There are other metrics there – but to access them, you will have to either export the data, or connect your GSC to Data Studio (there's a guide to creating a GSC report [here](#)).



The screenshot shows the Google Search Console interface with the 'Breakdown' table. The table has columns for 'QUERIES', 'PAGES', 'COUNTRIES', 'DEVICES', and 'SEARCH APPEARANCE'. The 'SEARCH APPEARANCE' column is expanded to show 'Impressions' and 'Position'. The data is as follows:

Query	Impressions	Position
click consult	2,368	1.3
how to reset password	632	3.5
ppc case study	1,224	4.5
how to get youtube to recommend your video	466	4.2
clickconsult	133	1.1
reset password	305	5.7
display advertisement format	515	1.4
how to get recommended on youtube	573	6.5
how to get youtube to recommend your video 2019	338	4.3
how to reset password feed	683	5.1

Source: Google Search Console

The dimensions available here (again, all filtered by the main page level filter) are:

- Queries: gives you the search terms for which your site has appeared.
- Pages: which of your pages has appeared in search.
- Countries: which countries your site has appeared in results for.
- Devices: how your site has performed on mobile, tablet and desktop.
- Search appearance: how your site has fared across 'Web Light', 'AMP' and 'AMP article' results

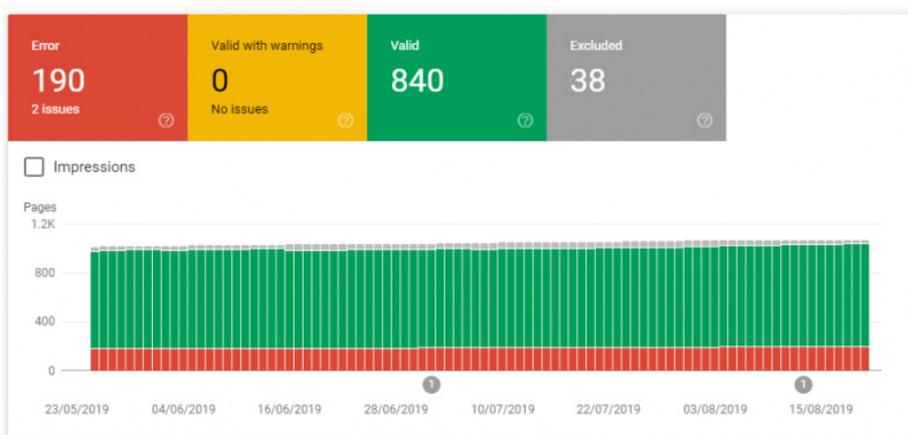
This table gives you the ability to determine your best performing content, topics, queries you are answering well and those you could answer better, which countries are seeing your work and which could do with a little extra help – whether in the form of translation or paid promotion – and more besides.

COVERAGE

Your 'Coverage' report gives you the headline numbers on your indexing performance and any errors present with your site's coverage by search. This allows you to ensure you have not 'noindex'ed any important pages, and whether or not there are any other errors that are halting your progress in search. In addition, by overlaying the 'impressions' line, you can also see immediately whether your errors are causing any real problems with your visibility.

The report is broken up into a stackable bar chart with four options and a 'Details' table below. The four metrics in the top chart are:

- Error: – gives you the search terms for which your site has appeared.
- Valid with warnings: – which of your pages has appeared in search.
- Valid: – which countries your site has appeared in results for.
- Excluded: – how your site has performed on mobile, tablet and desktop.



Source: Google Search Console (they don't like you no-indexing pages)

This can also be filtered to 'All submitted pages' and to your submitted sitemap (with the default 'All known pages').

DETAILS

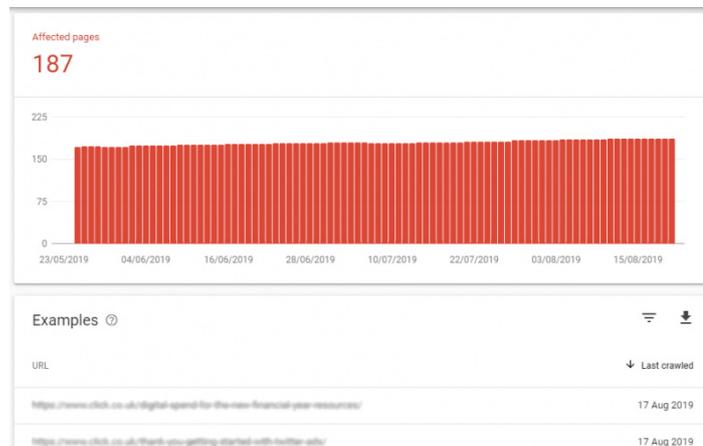
The details box allows you to dig a little deeper into the highlighted issues in the main chart – however, any pages you have specifically noindexed will show as errors, so don't panic but do make sure you keep an eye on the total so that it matches your own number (to save you having to go through the URLs every time).

Status	Type	Validation ↑	Trend	Pages
Error	Submitted URL marked 'noindex'	! Not Started		187
Error	Redirect error	🕒 Started		12
Error	Submitted URL has crawl issue	N/A		0

Rows per page: 10 1-3 of 3 < >

Source: Google Search Console

By clicking on any of the errors or warnings, you are directed to a more in-depth report on the issue – with effected URLs listed and exportable to a Google Sheet or CSV.



Source: Google Search Console

In addition, once you have tackled any issues present – you can then click a button to have Google validate the fix for you.

Submitted URL marked 'noindex'
First detected: 20/12/2017 Status: Error

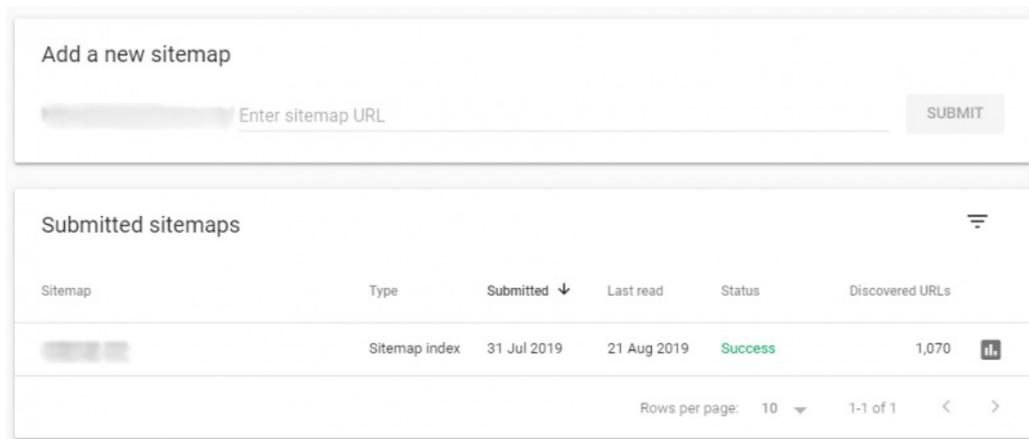
[LEARN MORE](#)

Finished fixing?

Source: Google Search Console

SITEMAP

Sitemap is where you enter the location of your XML sitemap for validation – this allows you to communicate to GSC what you expect to see indexed and, therefore, is an important part of setting up your GSC profile. There's some more information on the importance and creation of XML sitemaps [here](#).



The screenshot shows the 'Add a new sitemap' section with a text input field labeled 'Enter sitemap URL' and a 'SUBMIT' button. Below it is the 'Submitted sitemaps' table.

Sitemap	Type	Submitted ↓	Last read	Status	Discovered URLs
[Redacted]	Sitemap index	31 Jul 2019	21 Aug 2019	Success	1,070

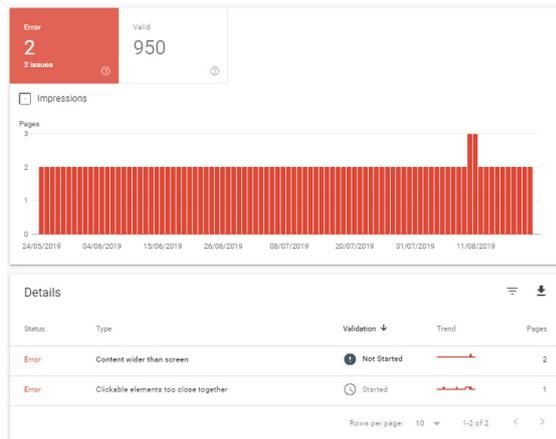
Rows per page: 10 1-1 of 1

Source: Google Search Console

MOBILE USABILITY

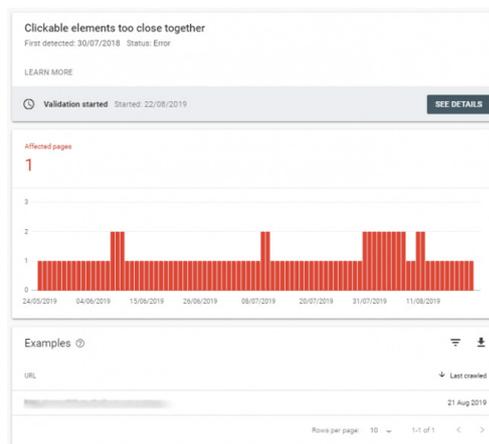
The Mobile Usability report, like many of the other GSC report types, is split in to the top table and 'details' box below. Errors detected by this report include:

- Clickable elements too close together: – as you might imagine, this refers to icons, menus and the like which are positioned in such proximity that it makes clicking on the right option difficult or impossible.
- Viewport not set: – while I'd hope you won't see this error, this refers to the <meta name="viewport"> element which should be set generally as <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0">.
- Content wider than screen: – generally experienced when you have failed to define a width or break points for your site or images, this is where you'll see pages on your site which require sideways scrolling to see the whole page.
- Text too small to read: – again, this is fairly self-evident but refers to the size of your text when viewed on smaller screens – again, you can resolve this by selecting specific increases in font sizes along with your break points, attributing font sizes relatively (using em or rem), or by specifying font sizes along with your @media queries.



Source: Google Search Console

Again, these errors are clickable – taking you to a page with a drill down of the errors, and the option to submit your fixes for validation.



Source: Google Search Console

MANUAL ACTIONS

Manual actions is within the 'Security & Manual Actions' section of the reports and is an entirely binary report – you will either have a manual action penalty and it will tell you where and why, or you won't, in which case you'll see the below message:



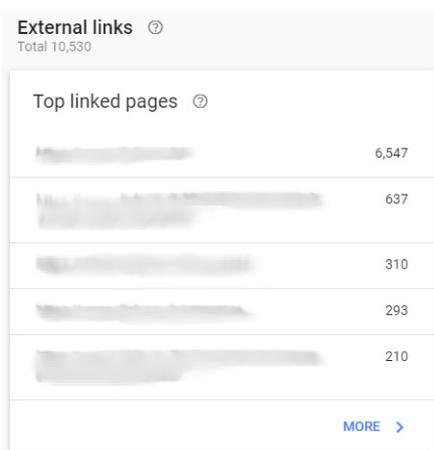
Source: Google Search Console

LINKS

Honestly, there is no one tool that will give you a full reflection of your external inbound links – but in case you haven't the budget for the two or three it would take to give you a good idea, GSC's link report is a pretty good place to start. There are 4 reports – each of which will give you a little more information about how your links (internal and external) are representing your brand and the information they communicate about you - though we'll only cover the external reports here.

TOP LINKED PAGES (EXTERNAL LINKS)

This report gives you the pages on your site that have presently earned links to your site, and the report shows as a table on the links report with the target URL and the number of links, but once clicked through, you can also see the number of linking sites.



The screenshot shows the 'External links' report in Google Search Console. It displays a table titled 'Top linked pages' with five rows of data. The first row has a link count of 6,547, the second 637, the third 310, the fourth 293, and the fifth 210. A 'MORE >' link is visible at the bottom of the table.

Top linked pages	Count
[Redacted URL]	6,547
[Redacted URL]	637
[Redacted URL]	310
[Redacted URL]	293
[Redacted URL]	210

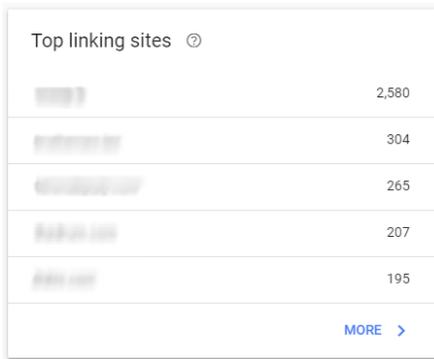
Source: Google Search Console

While, obviously, we think everything we write is worthy of linking to – we write what we do because we think our audiences need to read it – but it's seldom the case that everything will earn a click let alone a link. This report allows you to see what parts of your site, what content you've produced, is earning your site links.

While most of your links, generally speaking, will probably be to your home page – you'll be able to scope out content that you could be promoting more, or that could use updating in order to keep it relevant etc.

TOP LINKING SITES

Top linking sites is not just a way to check for your biggest fans – it can also represent an opportunity for prospecting. By downloading the full list, you can run it through whatever tool you're using to audit links, but you can also check out any sites that have linked to you once or twice and, using tools like SEMrush, Ahrefs or others, you can look for similar sites that might also want to link to your content.

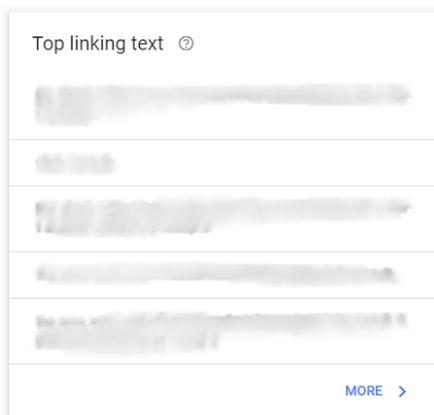


Top linking sites	Count
[blurred]	2,580
[blurred]	304
[blurred]	265
[blurred]	207
[blurred]	195
MORE >	

Source: Google Search Console

TOP LINKING TEXT

Set up like the rest of the reports in this area, the top linking text report provides you with a list of the anchor text that is being used to point to your site – while you can tell from a glance whether your top text is what you want it to be, if you have hundreds of results here, you can export the list, possibly using delimiting in a spreadsheet and run it through a word cloud generator to discover trends in the anchor text and expose areas you may need to work on.



Top linking text	
[blurred]	
MORE >	

Source: Google Search Console

CONCLUSION

While we've framed this from the perspective of a post update audit, in truth regular audits of this nature are a fantastic way to ensure you're making the most of your website and maximising your performance - as well as making sure that your site is less likely to suffer from losses of traffic as a result of any future update.

One of the most common problems with SEO communicators is that it can appear as though SEO is a project - something that can be completed. However, as websites develop, there are elements that will require ongoing maintenance and other issues that will require their own endeavours from time to time. SEO is less a project than a process - and regular audits are how we keep the process on track.



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ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning digital and search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC). Part of global consumer brand business Ceuta Group, we have a team of 70-plus specialists and a portfolio of more than 60 clients worldwide.

Our complementary services include content marketing, outreach, social media, conversion rate optimisation (CRO) and international/multilingual search marketing. We can also offer training and consultation to support your teams or existing strategy.

Click was named SEO Agency of the Year 2019, adding to our long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'. We're also a Google Premier Partner, a Bing Select Partner and feature in The Drum Recommends.

YOUR BESPOKE ORGANIC SEARCH (SEO) ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

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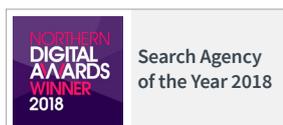
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OUR ACCREDITATIONS



OUR AWARDS



OUR TECHNOLOGIES

monitor **TRAX** rank **TRAX** feed **TRAX** link **TRAX** pro **TRAX** page **TRAX**