SEO UNCOVERED
[REMASTERED]

An Advanced Guide To Organic Search

CHAPTER 5

Analytics and Measurability

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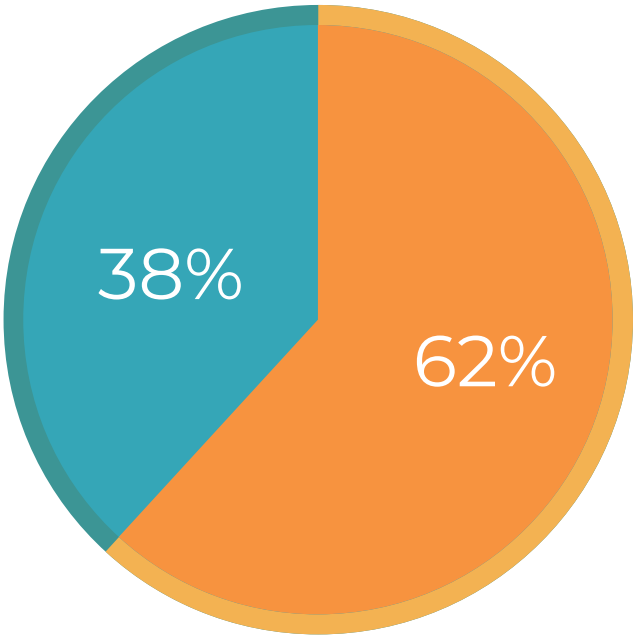
INTRODUCTION

Measurability is something on which we place a lot of importance. Its role, not only in the learning curve, but also in the implementation of a mid to long term campaign cannot be overstated. This is why we consistently offer advice on the hows and whys of a successful, measurable search marketing strategy. For this reason, it was vital for us to include this section – especially with almost 40% of respondents to a recent Click Consult survey professing little or no knowledge of data analysis and analytics.

Knowledge of Data Analysis and Analytics

- **Some to Expert**
- **Little or None**



MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONCE

For SEO to fulfil its potential and become the vital marketing tool it should be, the screens have to be pulled back and it must be not only acknowledged by the industry, but actively demonstrated that SEO is not magic, or some other dark art practiced behind closed doors to combat the Google algorithm, it is a science developed and performed by highly skilled individuals in accordance with best practice derived from data-collected historically.

Since the rise of SEO in the 1990s, the process has been one of give and take with Google, whereby black-hat techniques have been recognised and punished and where those committed to ethical, principled search marketing have found their efforts rewarded by an algorithm that seeks to reward strategies that place user experience at their heart. This has led to a proliferation of tools to weigh and measure all aspects of performance, yet though there are a few notable exceptions, the SEO industry has remained remarkably opaque for clients and initiates alike. This is demonstrative of a lack of confidence in the methodology being used across some parts of the industry.

What search marketing entails is not a mystery, it is not something practicable by a chosen few; it is a science which is driven by data and with results that are replicable across industries, dependent on thorough research and studious, rigorous implementation of best practice. The SEM industry needs to embrace this, to compete for clients transparently, on a platform backed by data and results.

Clients will often come to agencies with minimal information regarding the practice and implementation of search marketing, it is that agency's job to clearly and concisely communicate the practice, to reassure clients of the efficacy of ethical techniques, and to counsel them against the urge to attempt to make quick gains at the expense of a long term strategy. The industry is full of talent and experience and that should be the sales platform – not the supposed incomprehensibility of the practice, but the wealth of experience both technically and creatively that the industry can place at the disposal of clients.

It is time for search marketing to be brought into the light, and treated – by brands and agencies alike – as the integral part of modern marketing that it is, as one of the leading factors in the increase in UX across the internet and in doing so to further distance the industry from individuals and agencies that cling to unethical practices until the last possible moment.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF GOOGLE ANALYTICS

WHAT IS GOOGLE ANALYTICS?

As with most of the premier analytical tools available to SEO practitioners, Google Analytics is a freemium service featuring a free basic program with 'premium' or paid additional functionality (in this case things such as Google Analytics 360 and Google Analytics for Mobile Apps).

Google Analytics allows you to track site performance data at numerous levels (overall site down to individual CTAs on specific pages) as well as set up custom dashboards to surface data important to your brand, custom goals and events which allow you to track specific user interactions with your site and more besides.

While there have been numerous other platform specific analytics platforms released, Google Analytics has been the go to package for brands looking to succeed in search since Google purchased digital tracking company Urchin Software Corp in April 2005.

THE GOOGLE ANALYTICS TRACKING SCRIPT

The Google Analytics tracking script (analytics.js) is a JavaScript library which enables measurement of user interaction with your site. In order to track interactions, the script should be added to the site template before the </head> tag. In order to implement it properly on your site, it is necessary to know your site's property ID (tracking ID) – it is this that is substituted for the 'UA-XXXXX-Y' string in the example below and can be found in Account Explorer if you do not know it.

```
<!-- Google Analytics -->
<script>
(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){
(i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o),
m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m)
})(window,document,'script','//www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga');

ga('create', 'UA-XXXXX-Y', 'auto');
ga('send', 'pageview');
</script>
<!-- End Google Analytics -->
```

A guide to implementing this script can be found on the Click Consult website.

KEY ANALYTICS METRICS

Sessions

Sessions is a fairly basic data point, giving you the total number of visits to a specified page or area of the site. Though obviously the higher the number is, more often than not, the better your site will be performing, it is important to place this data in context alongside the other data-points listed here. A high number of sessions, for example, is only a good thing if they are relevant sessions, and whether they are relevant can only really be ascertained by comparison.

Source/Medium

These dimensions can provide invaluable insight into the performance of a wide range of digital marketing activities. Showing first from where the traffic has come (source) and secondarily whether the traffic came directly, organically or by any other means, you can see which areas of your site are benefiting most from specific digital marketing activities.

Traffic type

Traffic type gives a more top level overview of the data shown by segmenting by the source/medium dimension. In conjunction with the sessions dimension, however, you can gain a fantastic insight into what variety of marketing is working best which can feed into future efforts on various campaigns – are you solely performing well on pages serving as landing pages for PPC ads? Then you need to up your efforts in organic and inbound marketing. By keeping an eye on this dimension, not only can you see what you are doing well but also where you can improve.

Avg. session duration

Average session duration denotes (as you would expect) the average length of time a visitor to the site spends there. The more visits the site receives, the more accurate a representation this will be (small data-pools are too easily warped by anomalous results), but generally speaking the longer the session length, the better your pages are holding a visitor's attention. This will obviously vary depending upon the content on-site – if, for example, you are distributing short video clips, short form blog posts, or have little content at present, then your expectations of session length should be lower than, for example, an academic journal producing comprehensive reporting. The key to understanding this data-point is really in understanding what your own site is offering to its visitors.

Bounce rate

Your bounce rate is indicative, in many ways, of how well your site is catering to the needs of your consumers. Therefore, you are looking for the lowest figure possible. Bounce rates across the digital landscape often appear high. However, bounce rate typically refers to the percentage of people leaving the site after visiting only one page, so if your site has a lot of purely informational pages, it is not uncommon for a visitor to find the answer they were looking for and navigate away.

Probably the best way to reduce bounce rate (provided your pages are SEO optimised and answer the key search terms they are optimised for) is to offer links to similar topics/products/services which will prolong the visitor's time on-site by drawing them on to other assets on your site.

Conversion rate

Conversion rate is the number of visitors to a page that complete a desired action divided by those that visit a page. Though, obviously, the higher this figure is, the better it is for your business, do not be too disheartened by single digit percentage and ensure you are tracking return visits (the time from initial visit for it to count as a conversion on their return is typically set at thirty days, but can be altered if your brand is one for which consideration time is longer than average).

Exit pages

Exit pages are important for a number of reasons and can feed back into the development of a strategic customer journey. Look for commonly recurring pages and use the previous chapters of this text as a guide to assess their performance. Some pages can literally be dead-ends – offering no way to continue the customer journey due to insufficient or confusing internal linking, some may prove to be typical exit pages as they fail to deliver on what the anchor text or image seem to offer. Again, some pages can show up as exit pages for the same reason that some will have a high bounce rate, but it is especially important that this is proven. If you are unsure, it may be worthwhile looking toward an A/B test with an alternative page to make sure you are not losing consumers unnecessarily.

Internal site search

An often overlooked resource (which can be switched on for any view in the 'site search settings'), internal site search data can reveal whether you are adequately catering for user queries with the assets you are presently providing, and therefore provide ideas for expanding your offering. In addition to this, site search data can also be a boon when developing your keyword strategy – giving you, as it does, exactly what your consumers most often look to you for.

Organic landing pages

Organic landing pages are those pages at which consumers arrive through search and will offer insight into the areas of your site which are performing well for their given purpose. Provided the bounce rate is within expected limits, top performing landing pages can provide the template for the optimisation of your other pages, it also gives you a chance to experiment with CTAs and internal links to see whether your customer journey can be better managed to improve UX and overall site performance.

Page specific monitoring

Not so much a specific dimension as it is a recommendation – page specific monitoring gives you another layer of analysis when reviewing and seeking to optimise your performance. By ensuring that you are reviewing data at such a focused level, by adding various applicable metrics and goal completion monitors to each page specific drill down you can see how various specific types of content/asset or service are performing. It is here you can spot potential differences (positive or negative) between site-level performance and individual asset performance and look to improve on poor performances and capitalise on the positives.

Pages/session

A pretty self-explanatory measurement, pages/session is an average of pages viewed over all sessions. As with many of the other data-points in this list, it may not seem to offer much in the way of information at first glance, but the number of pages an consumer views per visit can tell you a lot about how well they are being served by your content. With the exceptions mentioned previously (information pages etc), the more time consumers spend on site, the more pages they view, the more your brand connects with them and the more likely they are to eventually convert. Again, this can be an important data-point when planning the customer journey through your site.

Referral path

The referral path is a useful dimension for monitoring the performance of social media and other activities external to the site – by selecting 'Referrals' under the 'Traffic Sources' option, you can gain visibility on the main domains from which your traffic is originating. Though you will not get as much information as you would were you to use UTM parameters, referral path will give you root domains for traffic that will provide a fairly solid indication as to whether your activities on various platforms are paying off.

Session by device

Sessions by device can indicate the performance of your site on various devices (mobile, tablet, desktop), thereby allowing you to compare results. Depending on whether your site is reactive or responsive (it should be somehow optimised for mobile traffic one way or another), you can see whether there are trends in consumer activity depending on the device used to access your site. In the same way, it is possible to determine – if your traffic is more heavily weighted to one device or another – whether your content could be better fitted or prepared for other device types or whether you should focus more on varieties of asset which are better suited to the best performing device.

USING ANALYTICS TO DISCOVER NECESSARY OPTIMISATION TASKS

One of the most useful things, beyond reporting and influencing future planning for content and strategy development, is that analytics can offer a brand is the ability to use certain metrics to improve user experience (UX) and site performance by optimising current content and pages to be the best they can be.

Bounce rate

As mentioned previously, this metric is available across a most of Google Analytics' reports and gives an excellent indication as to how well your site's content is doing its job. While high bounce rates are acceptable for strictly information pages, a page designed to lead a consumer through the site or to another page can be quickly determined a failure if the bounce rate is high. This can give you a strong indication of which areas of the site need to be optimised to better fulfil their role and which pages can be learned from.

Exit pages

Accessible by expanding the 'Behaviour' and 'Site Content' menus, 'Exit Pages' shows how many site visitors leave your site at a specific point. The same thing can be said of information pages as with bounce rate – a high percentage of exits versus views for your unsubscribe page or your contact page is reasonable, but equally landing pages (especially thank you pages) with low exit level percentages should be looked at closely to see if there is anything you are doing right on those pages that could be replicated site wide.

Site speed

Site speed is increasingly important – especially with Mobile First ranking approaching, at which point speed will become a ranking factor. The 'Site Speed' reports are again accessible by expanding the 'Behaviour' menu. The reports will not only define the average loading time for any given period, but also their performance against average, across various browsers etc. they also offer (through PageSpeed Tools) recommendations for improving performance.

Location

Location data can be found by expanding the 'Audience' then 'Geo' menus and can give you a good indication of whether you're appealing to the right place. A global audience for a local retailer's blog may be wonderful, but unless most of the audience is within the catchment area of their location or within their ability to deliver to, it is largely wasted – and similarly, a global brand should see demographic locations across their areas of operations.

Source/Medium

Additional 'dimensions' to many reports, source and medium detail the place from which the traffic has come (Google, Facebook etc) in the case of source and the manner through which they arrived (organic, referral, email etc) in the case of source. Along with your UTM tracking (detailed in the Relationship eBook of this series), your source/medium dimensions can offer insight into the platforms your content is performing best and whether any publisher relationships you have built are paying dividends.

Attribution

Attribution – accessible from the 'Conversion' sub-menu – allows you to compare various forms of channel against a variety of metrics and in a number of ways. This means that you can monitor your email campaigns, your best performing social channels and referrers to see their impact on your conversion numbers and values. This can be done several ways:

- **Last interaction:** The last interaction receives 100% of the credit for the sale/conversion.
- Last non-direct click: Direct traffic is ignored here, in favour of the last channel the consumer clicked through prior to converting.
- **First interaction:** The customer's first interaction with one of your brand's channels receives 100% of the credit.
- **Linear:** Each channel with which the consumer interacts is given equal credit for the conversion.
- Time decay: The channel closest to the conversion receives the most credit which then diminishes the further back in conversion path the interaction lies.
- **Position based:** 40% of the credit for the conversion goes to both the first and last interaction and the remaining 20% is distributed to the intermediate stages.
- **Data-driven attribution:** This gives credit based on how people search for your brand and decide to become your customers using data from your account to determine which ads, keywords and campaigns have the most impact on your business goals.

The attribution section can, therefore, provide a readymade to-do list for optimising channels which are not pulling their weight.

Event tracking

A set of reports accessible from the sidebar by expanding the 'Behaviour', then 'Events' menus, event tracking allows your brand to keep tabs on the number of user interactions tracked independently from a page or screen load. This includes things such as:

- Ad clicks
- AJAX embedded elements
- Downloads
- Shares
- Video plays

These are tracked by implementing small snippets of Javascript which you can find here. These will then report to the four subcategories below the 'Events' menu.

Top Events
Event Category
Event Action
Event Label

	Event Action	Total Events	% Total Events
1.	outbound link click	853	63.75%
2.	submitted form	482	36.02%
3.	linkedin	3	0.22%

CLEANING UP YOUR DATA

There are a number of spam problems plaguing analytics at the moment – here we're going to deal with referrer spam, but there are step by step guides to other varieties on the Click Consult site.

Removing referrer spam in Google Analytics

The issue of referrer spam is one of the latest in a long line of black-hat promotional techniques, this time utilising bots (crawler programs developed for web indexing, or to quickly and accurately replicate repetitive actions) in order to artificially inflate site traffic by sending thousands of HTTP requests with a false point of origin (referrer), so in order to ensure your monitoring and reporting is accurate, this section will deal with combatting the negative effect referrer spam can have.

The idea behind referrer spam is, or at least seems to be, that by embedding a website URL they wish to promote in this faked referrer header, it can (provided the sites server log is public) be indexed by Google as a backlink and influence the SERPs position of the embedded URL.

As these 'spam-bots' are able to avoid the bot-filtering methods used by Google Analytics, they will appear in referral reports, skewing data and the ability to draw inference from Analytics reports.

However, not all of these bots operate on this model, and some of these may be seeking to scrape your web property ID, in order to sell or share the data among other bot-nets which will then result in referrer spam. Detailed guides to cleaning up your data can be found here.

WHY YOU NEED CLEAN DATA

To explain a little firstly, clean data is a short hand term for data which is free of avoidable manipulation and anomalies either as a result of an error by the webmaster or as a result of third party efforts to corrupt the core reporting data (this includes failure by the webmaster to exclude traffic from company IP addresses all the way through to bot traffic).

The reason that 'clean data' is important should, therefore, be immediately obvious – data without appropriate filtering and control can lead to errors in resultant reporting and a snowball effect that can lead to decisions which are bad for brands – for example, strong seeming performance in organic traffic during a month where there were no blog posts by a site could potentially lead a brand to think that their blog was unimportant to their traffic. However, if the organic traffic that led to this decision was artificially inflated by 'bot' traffic, the brand could lose vital traffic to the site as a result leading to lower revenue or conversions etc.

ANALYTICS AND CONTENT MARKETING

It's sometimes difficult to know what content is working when a brand first embarks on a content marketing campaign, but there are a few places that will give you insights into your current content that can drive future campaigns.

To those outside of the search marketing industry, or those that are new to it, content marketing can appear a little woolly – a practice big on ideas, but short of facts – but proof of concept is there for those who look for it, and there should be an immediate distrust of anyone who simply answers 'it's hard to measure' when asked for results.

Though there are certainly more metrics and methods of monitoring your content marketing progress and its effect on your organic visibility than will be shown here, but the following should provide the basics to track the success of your brand's content, allowing you to build on the data gathered for future campaigns.

Here we're going to take a look at sessions that take place on-site, though we've dealt with UTM tracking elsewhere, and look at what analytics can tell us about content performance at a glance.

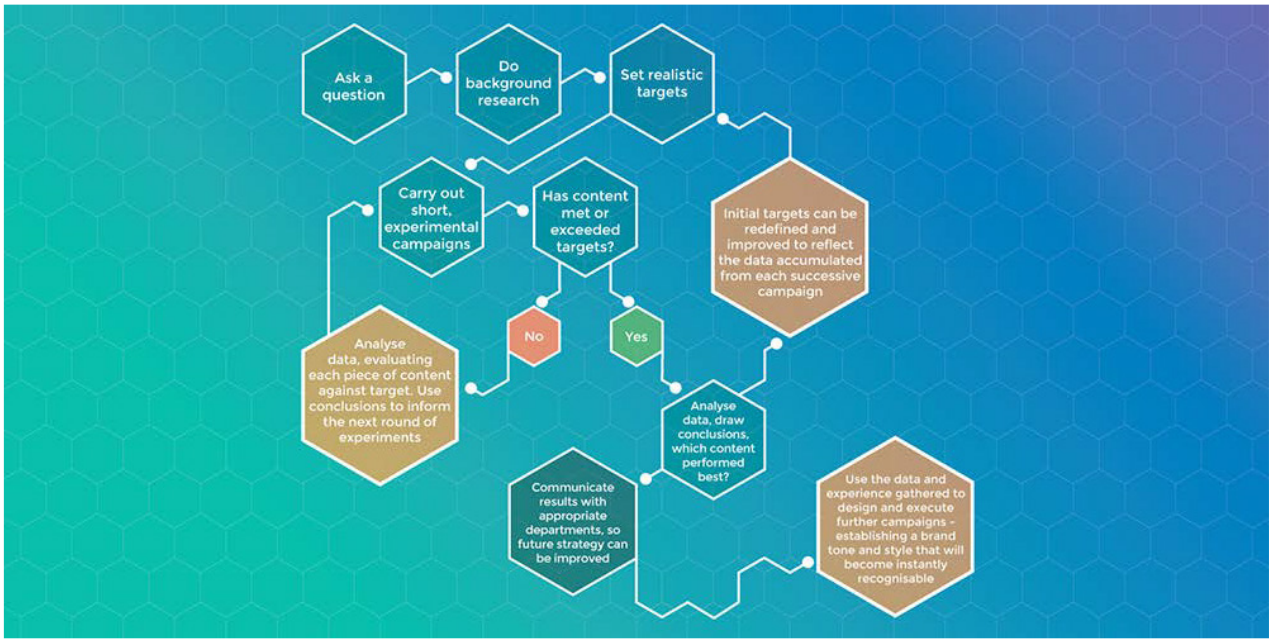
Landing page analytics

Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	Goal Conversion Rate	Goal Completions
16,000 % of Total: 17.28% (92,612)	84.06% Avg for View: 79.81% (5.33%)	13,449 % of Total: 18.20% (73,910)	65.52% Avg for View: 61.50% (6.55%)	1.57 Avg for View: 1.90 (-17.11%)	00:00:53 Avg for View: 00:01:07 (-21.22%)	0.15% Avg for View: 0.47% (-67.84%)	24 % of Total: 5.56% (432)

The above, for example, shows some of the best metrics for measuring the success of your content (and included in the standard view if you follow Reporting>Behaviour>Landing Pages) and is an average of all pieces in the selected area of the site for the selected duration of time.

- **Sessions:** Sessions is total number of visits to the specified subsection of the site (here reached by searching '/blog' to give a view of blog traffic). It details the overall number of visits, including returning visitors. It has the obvious benefit of indicating your overall traffic – and if tracked in the graph commonly found above this table, it can show how much your traffic improves alongside a content strategy. In essence, an uptick in sessions is a correlative of improved visibility and better satisfying consumer queries.
- **% New Sessions:** As above, but this metric excludes returning visitors and so is able to give you an indication as to the new consumers your content is attracting. Clearly it is desirable to retain some repeat traffic as it indicates that your content is developing a following, but this metric can offer a fantastic insight into how your content is developing your traffic.

- **New Users:** This is the number of new visitors, rather than as a percentage. Easier to parse at a glance as a simple figure, this metric shows how attractive to new audiences your content is – perhaps revealing how well a piece of 'How to' or instructional content is answering the search query it is aimed at for example.
- **Bounce Rate:** This is a great metric for measuring how well your content feeds in to other pieces – showing the percentage of users that visit only one page of your site before exiting. It can also show you how well your 'similar content' lists or CTAs are working, as these are the main tools you will use to draw consumers on through the site as part of your path to conversion.
- **Pages Per Session (PPS):** This offers an insight into what consumers are doing on your site and potentially how well you're capturing their attention. PPS will generally be much higher for eCommerce sites, but equally a site looking to measure the success of a content strategy will want a high average as it indicates that they are continuing to read/watch/listen past the point of finishing what originally drew them to your site.
- **Avg Session Duration:** The ideal length of this will depend upon how long your individual pieces of content are and how many pages per visit your consumers are visiting, but again the best result is always longer. If a piece of long form content is only receiving a minute of attention, for example, it may be worth revisiting the page to see if you address any issues with the content or layout.
- **Goal Conversion Rate & Goal Conversions**: Again, these will depend on what goals you have in place, how you're using CTAs in your blog and other things, but essentially these metrics allow you to assess at a glance how well your content is performing against specific goals – which can, again, be tracked over time to measure progress and identify areas for improvement.



CUSTOM DASHBOARDS

Though all views in Google Analytics have a default 'My Dashboard', there is utility in the creation of a customised dashboard which reflects your brand's aims and intentions.

While the standard dashboard may be perfect for what your brand needs, the initial set up is audience focused – giving top level session information (total users, total sessions, page views etc), however, the chances are you will want augment this view or start from scratch in order to ensure the information you want to see is readily available at a single click.

WHY DASHBOARDS AND GOALS HELP

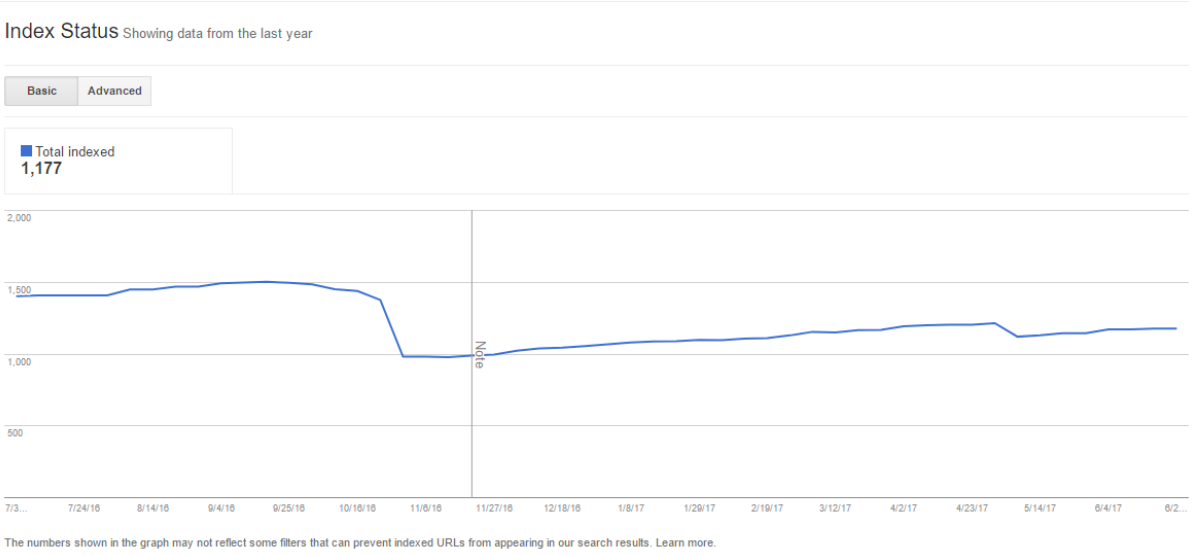
Dashboards and goals, though taking time to create initially, are helpful due to their usefulness in monitoring and reporting on important metrics. It is possible to report on most metrics from Google Analytics, but by creating a custom dashboard it is possible to ensure that important data is visible in a single place.

As far as goals are concerned, as an example, not all actions on a site carry a monetary value which is trackable through an eCommerce dashboard, for example, but can be attributed a value when measured as a goal completion. This covers things like account signups and forms of gated content, in this way – if through analysis we can determine that a specific action carries a measurable average worth – we can ensure that reporting is accurate by attributing an average value to each conversion.

SEARCH CONSOLE

What is search console?

Search Console is a free Google tool to assist brands in monitoring and maintaining their site and its presence in search engine results pages (SERPs). It offers an overview of how Google perceives your site as well as how consumers are finding your site as well as how many of your site's pages have been indexed, your total links and most linked content, mobile usability, crawl errors and much more.



It is within this tool that you will also upload and update your sitemap and disavow files and receive messages from Google.

SOME IMPORTANT REPORTS

While Search Console is a useful tool in many ways, allowing you to drill down into many issues surrounding coding, mark-up, usability etc. for the purposes of SEO there are a few reports which can be considered first among equals.

Crawl errors

Accessable by expanding the 'Crawl' menu in Search Console, the crawl errors can give you an understanding of your site's health – with the report offering information on both desktop and platform and listing server errors, access denied problems (pages blocking the Googlebot), not found (404s and other redirects and broken links) and 'other' – 400 error codes and the like.

By ensuring these never get out of hand, you can ensure that your consumer's journey through your site is as smooth as possible with no missing steps along the way.

Search Analytics / Search query report

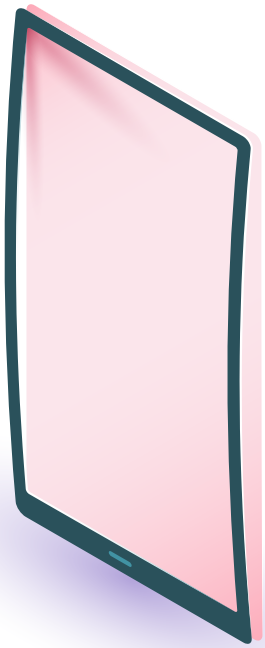
Located in the 'Search Traffic' dropdown menu and under 'Search Analytics' the search analytics reports are a fantastic resource for keyword research (showing you the search terms through which consumers arrived on your site) as well as showing your total clicks and impressions, average click through rate and average position in SERPs.

HTML improvements

By selecting 'Search Appearance', the drop down menu will provide a number of options – one of which is 'HTML Improvements' which will provide information on your site performance in a number of technical respects – including meta descriptions, title tags and whether there is any non-indexable content. The importance of these elements is discussed in the 'Technical' chapter of this series which can be found here – but needless to say, if Search Console is flagging problems with any part of your performance, it should be looked into.

Links to your site

Along with some of the third party tools listed below, 'Links to Your Site' (in the 'Search Traffic' drop down menu) is a good place to monitor your link profile as it develops – with the option to view links, linked content and anchor text. While it's not the most user friendly link tool, it does offer a good overview for monitoring inbound links; content which has been successful at generating links; and what anchor text is being used to link to you (to measure how appropriate the links are at a glance).



THIRD PARTY TOOLS

Ahrefs

With plans starting at around $1000 a year (though with a free trial if you are looking at a brief optimisation exercise before you are ready to buy at a later date), Ahrefs is a key platform for monitoring, managing and optimising your backlink profile as well as to improve your analysis ability of target keywords.

Searchmetrics

In much the same price range as Ahrefs, Searchmetrics is the perfect too to help you monitor your brand's visibility in SERPs as well as serving as a keyword research tool, a backlink monitor and a valuable tool for keeping track of your current organic keyword count, keyword position spread, performance vs. competitors and, importantly, offers a mobile performance metric.

Copyscape

Copyscape enables brands in identifying third party websites that have republished copy from their sites. Once duplicate content is discovered, action can then be taken to get the content removed and prevent it from cannibalising links or traffic.

DoubleClick

DoubleClick Search (DS) is a search management platform that helps agencies and marketers efficiently manage some of the largest search marketing campaigns in the world, across multiple engines and media channels.

Streamlined workflow and powerful reporting features enable buyers to efficiently run campaigns, while strategic bid optimization improves campaign performance. Native integration with the DoubleClick Digital Marketing platform (DDM) allows buyers to manage and track digital campaigns across a single platform, enabling rich, cross-channel buying, reporting and attribution.

VWO

Visual Website Optimizer is a market-leading testing and optimization tool that allows marketers, product managers and analysts to create A/B tests and geo-behavioural targeting campaigns without having any sort of technical or HTML knowledge.

Visual Website Optimizer is an easy to use A/B testing tool that allows marketing professionals to create different versions of their websites and landing pages using a point-and-click editor (no HTML knowledge needed!) and then see which version produces maximum conversion rate or sales. Integration with Google Analytics would allow you to create different versions of your webpage in VWO, and then do analysis of an A/B test in Google Analytics.

Visual Web Site Optimizer is also flexible multivariate testing software (full factorial methodology) and has a number of additional tools like behavioural targeting, heatmaps, usability testing, etc. With 100+ features in Visual Website Optimizer, you can be sure that all your conversion rate optimization activities are covered by our product. Thousands of enterprises and small businesses are using Visual Website Optimizer for landing page optimisation, increasing website sales and improving conversion rates.

ResponseTap

ResponseTap is advanced call tracking software. The software tracks phone calls from all sources at visitor level and can be configured to trigger a goal in Google Analytics when someone calls.

GroupHigh

GroupHigh provides world-class software for agencies and brands that conduct blogger outreach campaigns and maintain blogger networks. The software consists of several modules that streamline the entire blogger outreach process from identifying influential bloggers to reporting on the earned media value and mentions generated through blogger outreach.

HotJar

HotJar allows brands to discover how users are interacting with any website with tools such as heatmaps and session recording. This can help us determine what element is the most valuable on any given page or through the goal funnel and how to utilise this to maximise engagement.

Link Detox

Link Detox is software that automatically rates links based on automated rules we develop. In addition, the tool also calculates and estimates the probable risk for a domain receiving a Google penalty or Google filter.

Google Tag Manager

Google Tag Manager is a management system created by Google to manage JavaScript and HTML tags used for tracking and analytics on websites (variants of e-marketing tags, sometimes referred to as tracking pixels or web beacons). There is a beginner's guide to Tag Manager here.

Link Detective

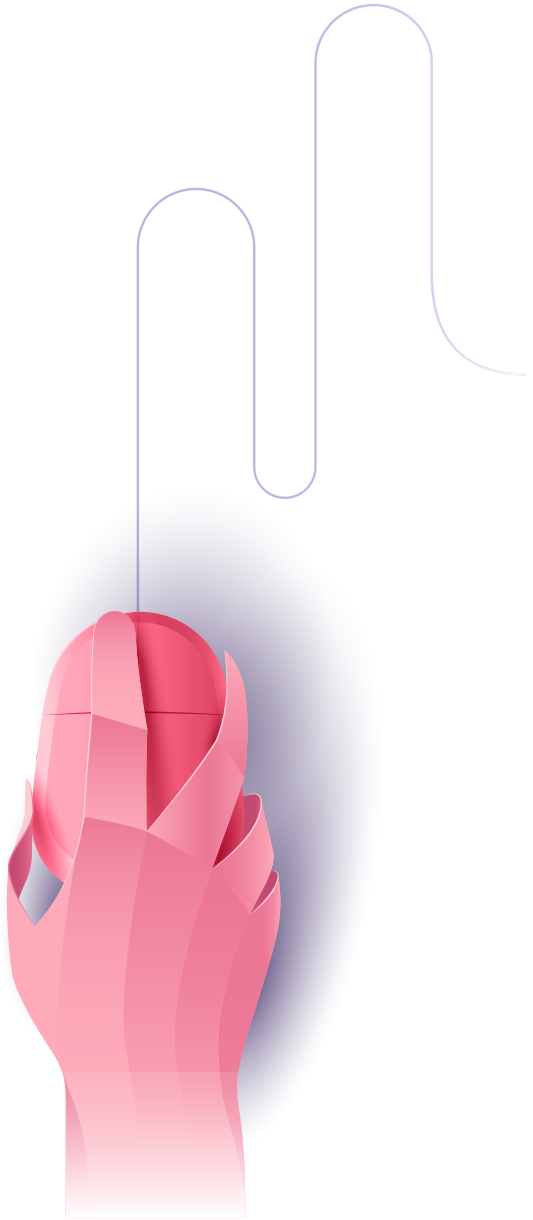
Link Detective is a competitive backlink research service. Using this tool, brands can delve into the backlink profiles of our competitors to better understand their link building strategies. Gathering such data helps to develop successful link building campaigns.

Moz

Moz is 'software as a service' – a SaaS company, that sells inbound marketing and marketing analytics software subscriptions. The company also hosts a website which includes an online community of more than one million globally based digital marketers and marketing related tools.

Semrush

SEMrush is your online marketing toolbox that contains indispensable data for developing SEO, advertising and link building strategies. SEMrush was designed to help speed up and facilitate your daily online marketing activities, and easily monitor a website's performance.



MEASUREMENT INTERVALS

Measurement is important, it's really important – but equally important is your frequency of measurement. It is not enough to measure whenever you remember, neither is it good to measure some metrics too often. You will need to take stock of your aims and your metrics and arrange a plan for measurement.

Daily

While it may be nice to watch the transactions as they happen, monitoring your revenue daily can lead to unnecessary anxiety. The same is true of a number of metrics. While it may be beneficial to check on new links, or sessions, there is a lot to be said for looking at a big picture with a lot of metrics – the more data points you have, the easier it is to make an informed decision.

Weekly

Searchmetrics is a good example of a tool to measure weekly – as it updates only once a week, but so too are things like sessions, bounce rate AWR (another tool updated on a weekly basis) and your Search Console in order to ensure there have been no spikes in crawl errors or messages from Google.

Month on month

Monthly comparison is the time to drill down into your data – with enough information available to you and (provided you've had the Analytics script in place for two months or more) a previous data set to compare to you can begin to judge the success of your social sharing, of recently added blogs and various other marketing endeavours.

Year on year

Year on year is really the main comparison to find out your progress. While daily, weekly and monthly reviews of data and tools will allow you to be agile with your content and your activity, year on year will allow you to see how all of your cumulative changes are improving the business.

DATA STUDIO

Whether you are working at an agency or on the client side, in all likelihood, you are spending at least one day a month poring over your Google Analytics (GA) account to pull together reports for various parts of your site. Even people who know there is a better way will often postpone report automation over and over again because of the initial investment of hours needed to set things up.

Most of the time we will excuse the work to ourselves and others by pointing out that the monthly report is pulled together much quicker these days as we have been doing it for so long and we are used to the process. Other times, we will point out that spending the time automating reporting will set us back in other tasks. For others, there is the issue of not knowing where to start or fearing possible costs (sometimes even the worry that it may not work).

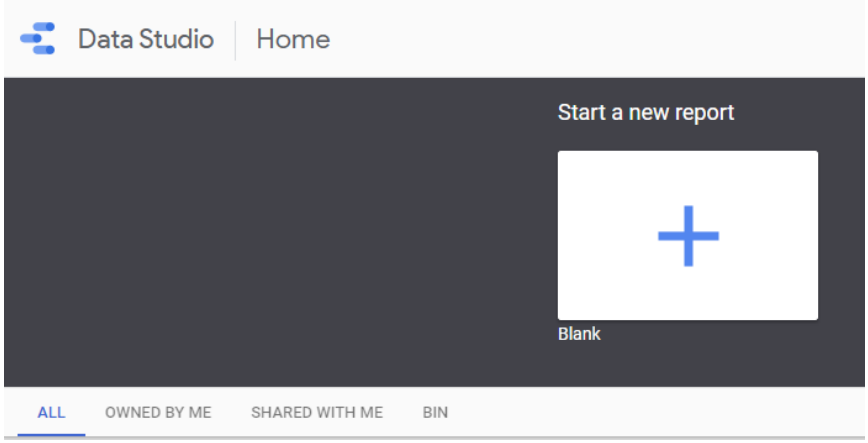
One of the best things about Data Studio is that, with effort and patience, anyone with a good knowledge of Google Analytics can (and arguably should) automate their monthly reporting – and Google are adding more functionality all the time.

WHAT IS DATA STUDIO?

Part of the "Google Analytics 360" package released in March of 2016, Data Studio is a data visualisation tool that allows you to create and maintain a host of report types in more easy to comprehend visual formats which can be shared via a link or downloaded as a PDF.

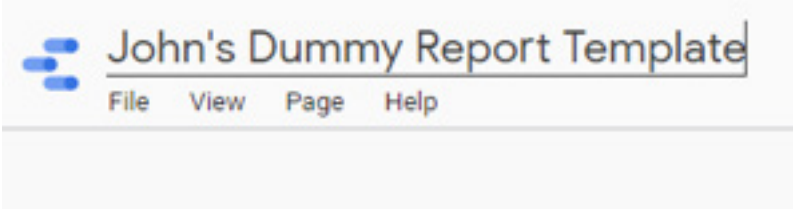
Setting up a basic Data Studio Report

First things first, you'll need to ensure you have your access to Google Ads and Google Analytics, but assuming you have these set up and linked to the account you will be using for Data Studio, the next step is to sign in to Data Studio. Once there, you'll have the option to create a new report – which you can select:



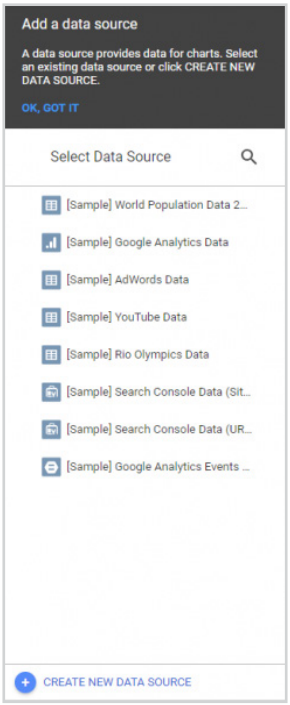
Titling your report

You'll then be taken to an ominously blank page – name it and make it your own. Bear in mind the audience for your report and what you intend it to contain. While you can rename your title, it's important to make sure it is clearly named – not only for ease of rediscovery, but for ease of comprehension.

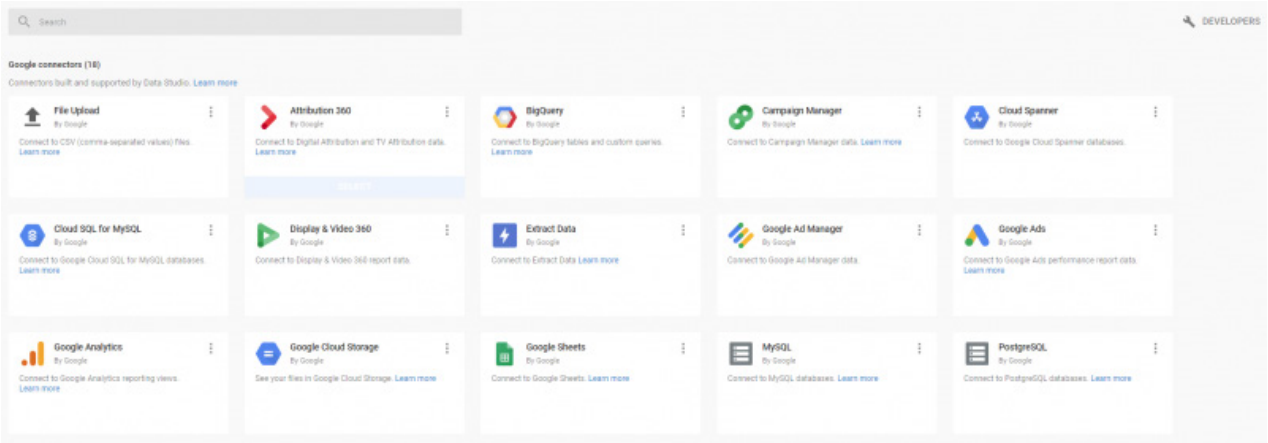


Connecting to Analytics

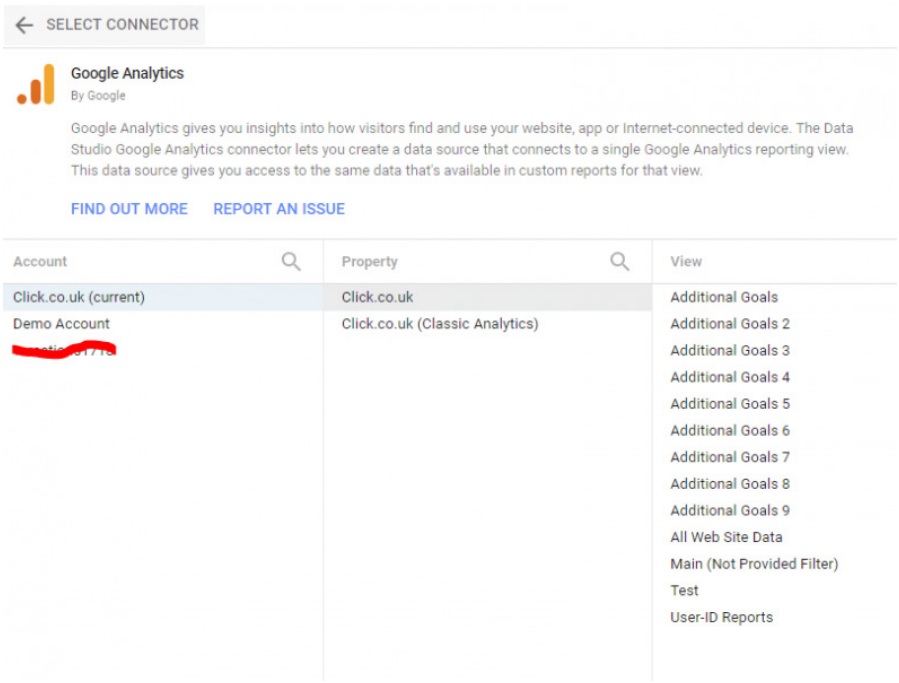
Once this is done, you can connect your Analytics and Google Ads accounts by creating a new data source using the menu bar that should be to the right of your blank page.



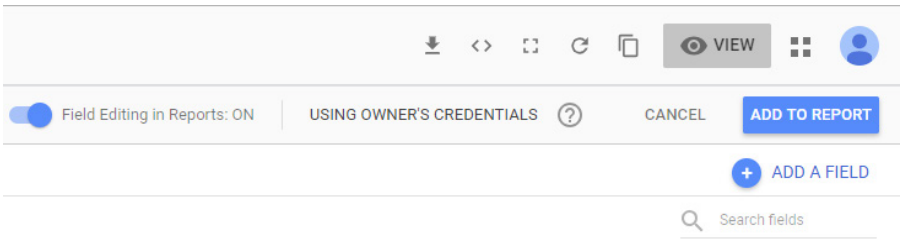
This will then bring a list of the currently available (built by Google) data sources – you can then select Ads or Analytics. These data sources can also be augmented by third party tools – like Supermetrics – if you want to add in things like social media followers without taking the long road.



You will then need to authorise the connection, then select the account, property and view.



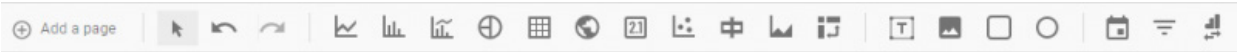
This will auto load the dimensions/metrics etc that are currently part of that view in analytics or Google Ads. Select 'Add to report' to make these available to you when setting up the report.



Once you have allowed Data Studio access, it will return you to your blank report – this will now at least have some gridlines to ease your mind, it will also have a new menu bar on the right with 'layout' and 'theme' as tabs.

Using these two tabs, you can choose the colour palettes and other various presentation attributes – useful if you're looking to use brand colours or, unlike me, have any kind of design aptitude.

Once you've set your theme and layout, you can then begin creating your report using the various chart types in the top toolbar.



You begin by selecting your chart of choice then drawing the area it will occupy – the chart types (from left to right) are:

Types of chart

- **Time series:** A line chart plotting a metric over time.
- **Bar chart:** Showing comparisons of a metric vs. a stated dimension.
- **Combo chart:** Literally a combination of the previous two types.
- **Pie chart:** Showing the share of a metric apportioned to a chosen dimension.
- **Table:** A versatile format allowing multiple metrics to be shown according to their relationship with a dimension.
- **Geo map:** Allowing you to display the spread of a metric across a map (you can refine the level from global down to various subcontinental areas).
- **Scorecard:** A simple return of a count or total for a metric.
- **Scatter chart:** Allows you to plot a source on a chart with an x and y axis that are both metrics.
- **Bullet chart:** Used for showing progress toward a target (goal completions for example).
- **Pivot table:** Allows you to show a metric distributed between two or more dimensions (with a minimum of one per column and row).

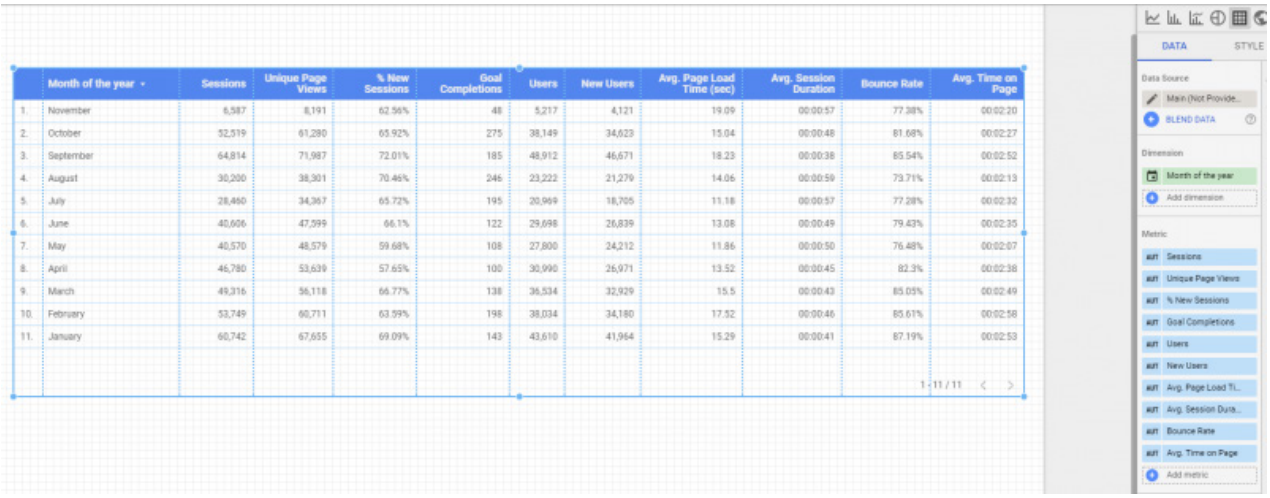
Populating your chart

To begin with, I'm going to set up a table – with a view to then refining this in the next two sections using either a segment or a filter.

Whenever I draw a table (this may not be standard, but always happens for me), it auto-populates with the Data Source I nominated initially (the view), the dimension 'Source' and the metric 'Sessions' and looks like this:

	Source	Sessions
1.	google	33,254
2.	(direct)	5,960
3.	Act-On Software	1,536
4.	digitalagencynetwork.com	168
5.	bing	102
6.	LinkedIn	96
7.	Facebook	48
8.	(not set)	42
9.	Twitter	34
10.	eBook	31
11.	m.facebook.com	22
		1 - 100 / 112

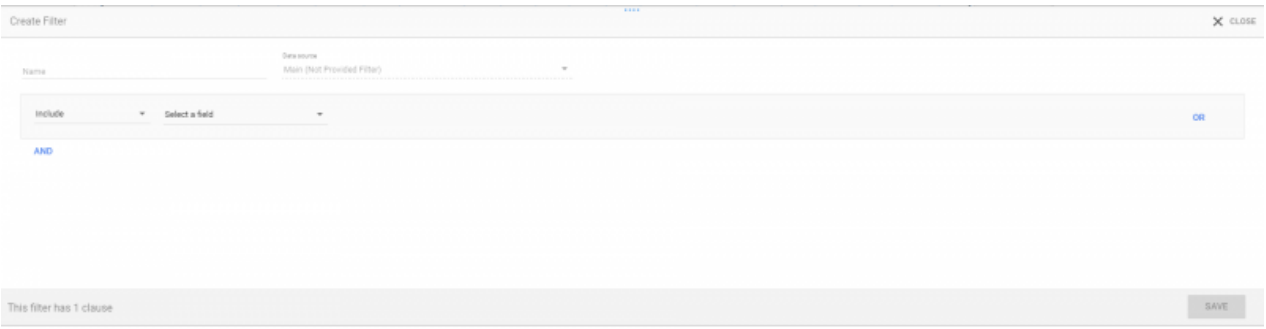
For a top level report table, however, using the menu on the left, I'm going to select some of the most important metrics and use the dimension 'month of the year' to create a month by month breakdown which will be sorted using the dimension in descending order to place the current month top of the list.



	Month of the year	Sessions	Unique Page Views	% New Sessions	Goal Completions	Users	New Users	Avg. Page Load Time (sec)	Avg. Session Duration	Bounce Rate	Avg. Time on Page
1.	November	6,587	8,191	62.56%	48	5,217	4,121	19.09	00:00:57	77.38%	00:02:20
2.	October	52,519	61,280	65.92%	275	38,149	34,623	15.04	00:00:48	81.68%	00:02:27
3.	September	64,814	71,987	72.01%	185	48,912	46,671	18.23	00:00:38	85.54%	00:02:52
4.	August	30,200	38,301	70.46%	246	23,222	21,279	14.06	00:00:59	73.71%	00:02:13
5.	July	28,460	34,367	65.72%	195	20,969	18,705	11.18	00:00:57	77.28%	00:02:32
6.	June	40,606	47,599	66.1%	122	29,698	26,839	13.08	00:00:49	79.43%	00:02:35
7.	May	40,570	48,579	59.68%	108	27,800	24,212	11.86	00:00:50	76.48%	00:02:07
8.	April	46,780	53,639	57.65%	100	30,990	26,971	13.52	00:00:45	82.3%	00:02:38
9.	March	49,316	56,118	66.77%	138	36,534	32,929	15.5	00:00:43	85.05%	00:02:49
10.	February	53,749	60,711	63.59%	198	38,034	34,180	17.52	00:00:46	85.61%	00:02:58
11.	January	60,742	67,655	69.09%	143	43,610	41,964	15.29	00:00:41	87.19%	00:02:53
											1 - 11 / 11

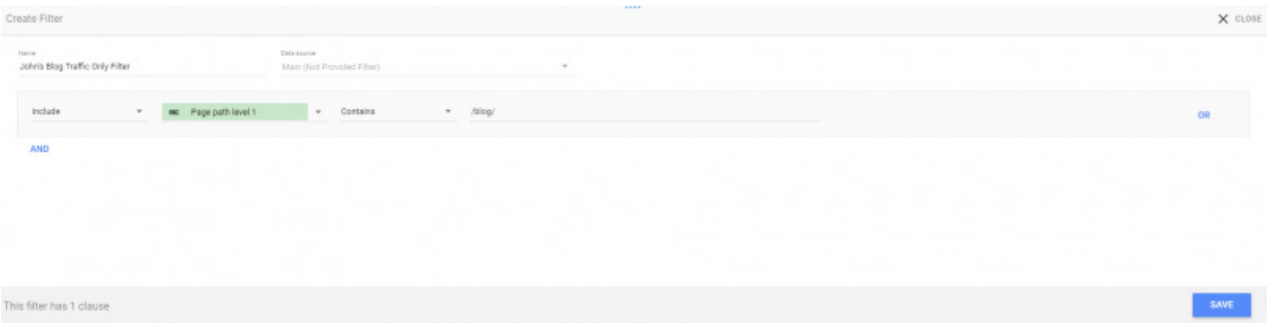
Using filters

With this table giving us a starting platform, we can then look to narrow our focus and initially we'll do this using a filter – which you can do by selecting 'add a filter' in the right hand menu (under the 'data' tab). So, having copied the table and pasted it in to a new report page, you can select the 'add a filter' option. This will bring up the filter creation menu:



You can use the basic include/exclude options with any metric or dimension, refining it with 'contains', 'equal to', 'starts with' and other options. The full row is referred to as a 'clause' – which can be augmented with additional clauses to refine the filter further.

If, for example, you wanted to look at a specific subfolder on your site, you would use the following options (where '/blog/' is equal to the specific name of the subfolder you want to look at):

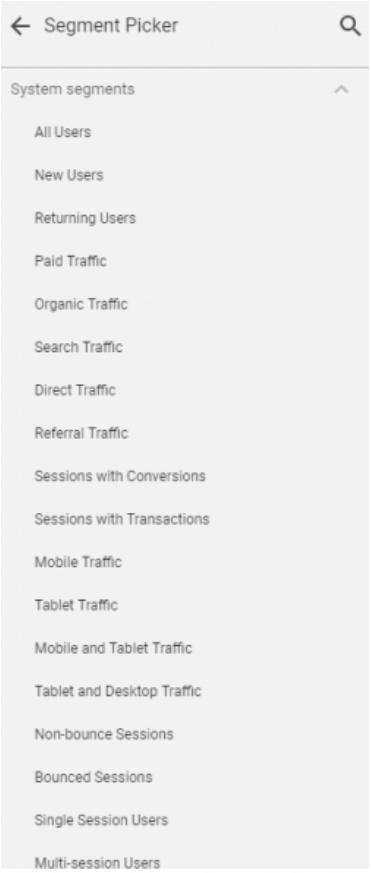


This gives us the same report as previous, only this time it will only include sessions that include a visit to that particular subfolder:

Month of the year	Sessions	% Δ	Unique Page Views	% Δ	% New Sessions	% Δ	Goal Completions	% Δ	Users	% Δ	New Users	% Δ	Avg. Page Load Time (sec)	% Δ	Avg. Session Duration	% Δ	Bounce Rate	% Δ	Avg. Time on Page	% Δ
November	640	-66.5%	762	-65.6%	83.28%	-0.4%	0	-	627	-66.9...	533	-66.7...	4.96	-69.3%	00:00:39	-27.7...	87.34%	-1.4%	00:02:34	-32....
October	2,712	33.8%	3,292	38.0%	85.77%	3.5%	0	-	2,768	41.4%	2,326	38.5%	29.63	27.7%	00:00:44	-17.1...	85.69%	-0.7%	00:02:54	-14....
September	1,925	21.4%	2,437	31.0%	83.64%	-1.7%	0	-	1,931	21.1%	1,610	19.3%	10.21	-18.2%	00:01:07	21.7%	83.43%	-4.2%	00:03:23	-11....
August	2,133	10.7%	2,589	14.2%	81.01%	-7.7%	0	-	2,023	4.3%	1,728	2.1%	8.31	-11.8%	00:01:08	44.7%	83.87%	-5.0%	00:03:50	14.9%
July	2,281	-1.9%	2,629	-1.3%	83.6%	-3.4%	0	-	2,191	-2.4%	1,907	-5.3%	13.68	10.4%	00:01:01	7.3%	84.22%	-2.0%	00:04:04	11.7%
June	2,162	30.1%	2,469	35.0%	84.51%	-1.5%	0	-	2,111	33.6%	1,827	28.1%	16.48	10.0%	00:00:53	-1.2%	86.08%	-1.1%	00:04:20	-7.4%
May	2,659	49.5%	2,985	49.4%	78.26%	-10.1%	0	-	2,468	42.3%	2,081	34.4%	13.16	44.8%	00:00:55	20.0%	79.58%	-10....	00:03:09	-13....
April	3,040	100.7%	3,494	102.3%	71.58%	-15.0%	0	-	2,678	87.9%	2,176	70.5%	13.17	-9.2%	00:00:50	-12.5...	87.63%	1.6%	00:03:26	-9.1%
March	27,244	1,479....	27,669	1,350...	59.98%	-30.0%	0	-	19,441	1,08...	16,340	1,00...	19.74	33.8%	00:00:32	-32.8...	93.28%	7.6%	00:05:28	36.8%
February	42,087	3,115....	42,509	2,749...	61.94%	-27.2%	0	-	29,120	2,18...	26,068	2,24...	20	75.9%	00:00:30	-39.7...	93.07%	8.6%	00:05:23	69.4%
January	2,245	12.0%	2,626	14.4%	78.84%	-4.3%	0	-	2,208	18.1%	1,770	7.2%	19.43	56.2%	00:00:48	-20.9...	85.7%	1.9%	00:02:59	-21....

Using Segments

We can then refine this report further using 'segments', so if we copy the table across to a third page, then select 'add segment', we'll be presented with two options in a 'segment picker': 'System segments' and 'Custom segments'. We'll be using the former here – the latter is defined in Analytics, so you will be aware already if you have any and what purpose they could be used for.



This list is fairly self-explanatory if you've spent any time in Google Analytics – allowing you to restrict the data in your table by one of a number of factors – ranging from user specific, like 'New User' and 'Multi-session User', to general source, like 'Organic Traffic' and 'Paid Traffic'.

By using the 'Organic Traffic' segment, we now have a table which shows the organic traffic, to the specific subfolder, as part of the overall site – giving us different levels of depth to a fairly basic chart type.

1 Jan 2018 - 31 Dec 2018

Month of the year	Sessions	% Δ	Unique Page Views	% Δ	% New Sessions	% Δ	Goal Completions	% Δ	Users	% Δ	New Users	% Δ	Avg. Page Load Time (sec)	% Δ	Avg. Session Duration	% Δ	Bounce Rate	% Δ	Avg. Time on Page	% Δ
November	338	-75.3%	349	-75.8%	92.31%	2.2%	0	-	321	-75.3...	312	-74.7...	4.96	-70.8%	00:00:37	-13.5...	89.35%	-0.9%	00:05:47	13.2%
October	1,919	36.5%	2,073	34.3%	90.67%	1.8%	0	-	1,849	37.5%	1,740	39.0%	33.74	206.7%	00:00:43	-17.4...	87.39%	-0.5%	00:05:13	22.9%
September	1,338	25.5%	1,500	31.0%	91.03%	-1.1%	0	-	1,318	25.4%	1,218	24.2%	10.59	-24.8%	00:00:49	-19.0...	86.1%	-2.5%	00:04:17	-26...
August	1,529	12.0%	1,691	16.2%	90.12%	-2.9%	0	-	1,468	10.3%	1,378	8.8%	7.79	-43.7%	00:00:59	32.9%	85.55%	-4.1%	00:04:57	0.5%
July	1,610	9.4%	1,700	6.3%	92.42%	0.8%	0	-	1,565	10.8%	1,488	10.3%	6.74	-63.7%	00:00:50	-2.8%	86.27%	-1.8%	00:05:39	22.1%
June	1,588	25.2%	1,681	26.0%	91.69%	2.1%	0	-	1,528	28.1%	1,456	27.8%	13.35	2.6%	00:00:53	6.0%	86.78%	-2.4%	00:05:30	-3.1%
May	1,728	36.0%	1,830	33.1%	90.22%	0.1%	0	-	1,648	35.1%	1,559	36.2%	10.57	-0.4%	00:00:51	2.5%	76.85%	-13...	00:03:21	-23...
April	1,777	84.7%	1,880	76.0%	91.22%	-1.6%	0	-	1,714	82.1%	1,621	81.7%	14.97	10.2%	00:00:47	-5.3%	88.8%	2.7%	00:04:47	33.0%
March	1,590	46.1%	1,755	50.1%	90.38%	-3.4%	0	-	1,520	43.3%	1,437	41.2%	9.99	-27.5%	00:00:47	-4.3%	89.25%	1.4%	00:04:11	-10...
February	1,313	42.1%	1,444	44.4%	92.08%	0.6%	0	-	1,286	43.4%	1,209	42.9%	9.39	-19.2%	00:00:38	-23.0...	90.78%	4.3%	00:03:52	1.6%
January	1,425	44.4%	1,501	35.6%	92%	-1.2%	0	-	1,371	40.8%	1,311	42.7%	21.56	57.5%	00:00:42	-9.8%	90.18%	3.3%	00:04:12	30.8%

1 - 11 / 11

This process – or, at least, a similar one – can be used across the full spectrum of available charts, allowing you to produce geo maps for conversions, device specific traffic reports and a whole range of others that can help you to better communicate your success with stakeholders.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This chapter brings to a close the run of substantial eBooks making up our SEO Uncovered series, and while analytics and measurability may be the last instalment, it is by no means the least important. Measurability should be a key part of the thinking behind each stage of a brand's search marketing endeavours.

Whether it is in the assessment of technical issues, the calculation of KPIs or in monitoring the effects of a link building campaign, measurability is necessary to ensure that the right decisions are being made based on the right data.

In addition, the measurement of a campaign should not be the endpoint. Instead the results from one campaign should feed directly into the building of the next. Search marketing is a learning curve for anyone joining the industry and it is extremely important for marketers and brands alike to ensure that they never stop learning.

If you haven't read the first four instalments of SEO Uncovered: An Advanced Guide to Organic Search, then you should do so now – and if you have, why not go back to the start with the results you've achieved on your journey and look again at how your newly gathered knowledge and data can influence your next step?

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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 Search Agency of the Year 2018, 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.

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