Part I

Introduction

Since the early days of search engines, organic search has been a highly effective marketing channel for driving and converting traffic. In part that’s due to the very nature of how search works – search engines fulfill a demand. They answer a question. They help us find what we are looking for.

It’s no wonder then that search engine optimization (SEO) consistently ranks highly as a top priority of digital marketers. If marketers can answer that demand – answer that need – then they can attract prospects and buyers to their websites.

![Top Inbound Marketing Priorities](image)

But SEO doesn’t come without its own set of challenges. With constant shifts in ranking factors and updates to algorithms, understanding and employing SEO can be difficult. Marketers have dozens of channels to address, both digital and offline, and staying abreast of all of the search engine updates and guidelines can be overwhelming.
One of the reasons that SEO has become even more challenging is Google’s update to the search results page. Prior to February 2016, Google search results consistently contained 10 organic search links, surrounded by ads above, below and to the right of the organic results:
In February 2017 Google redesigned the search results page, removing the ads at the side and reducing the organic results on the page from 10 to approximately seven. More ads were moved to the top of the search results, leaving organic search results often hidden until the searcher begins scrolling:

![New Google Search Results Page](image)

This was a dramatic shift for many marketers. Sites previously on the first page of results now may end up on the second page of results, even though these sites did nothing wrong and may have changed nothing to diminish their ranks. But if your site was ranked at positions 8, 9, or 10, your site was essentially demoted to the second page of results.
Part II
SEO Begins with Goals and Measurement

Understanding SEO and its impact on your marketing programs, however, begins long before you choose your first keyword. To understand the impact of any SEO tactics we employ, it’s important to understand first how organic search as a marketing channel is impacting the site today. In order to understand our tactical impact, we have to benchmark our organic traffic and observe how changes affect our organic traffic, conversions and ultimately our return on investment (ROI).

Determine Your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are quantifiable measurement used to gauge performance relative to a goal. What are KPIs that signify a prospect might be a qualified lead or turn into a sale? Determine which KPIs you really need to measure based on your goals. KPIs should be measurable to track improvements and success.

Many KPIs may be easily tracked via web analytics. KPIs such as pageviews, time on site, new visitors and pages per visit from organic search can be clear indicators of SEO-influenced ranking improvements.

But go beyond the surface KPIs. What is the true value of SEO? It’s not just in pageview. Rather the value of SEO lies in driving not just organic traffic but also the right organic traffic – organic traffic that converts. Consider adding conversions and conversion rate from organic traffic to your KPI measurements. It’s not enough just to have high organic rankings. What you’re really trying to achieve are high organic rankings that generate clicks to your website and convert to leads and sales. You may drive high volumes of organic search traffic, but does it convert? If not, you may need to determine how to make your site work better at converting through conversion rate optimization tactics. To learn more about these tactics, refer to the “Optimize for Conversion” section. (NOTE: insert link here to that section of the final document)

Google Search Console

Google Search Console (GSC) is an important tool for SEO which serves many purposes. Most importantly for SEO, GSC alerts website owners when Google employs a manual action against a website. Manual actions identify when a Google human reviewer deems that a website or page is not in
compliance with Google’s Webmaster Quality Guidelines. Manual actions often result in a penalty from Google such as being delisted or demoted in the search results. However, it is important to note that not all of a website’s SEO mistakes or issues are listed in manual actions. In fact, most of them will not be.

GSC also offers a plethora of information about a website’s performance such as pages crawled by Google, inbound and internal link information, organic search impressions and more. This measurement data, though, is limited at best. Unlike other third party tools that measure this data, GSC only provides a sample of data.

Analytics

Search engine rankings themselves are no longer an adequate measurement of SEO outcomes. Over the past several years, Google (and Bing) have begun to personalize search results based on a number of criteria, including geographic location, device and search history. This means that a search performed by two different people may yield different search results. Thus, search rankings are not consistent in every situation.

Correcting Attribution

Analytics is an essential tool to understand the traffic generated from organic search and your SEO efforts and ultimately its ROI. One common misstep, however, with Google Analytics can cause your organic traffic attribution to be allocated to an incorrect channel.

A session is defined by Google Analytics as “a group of interactions that take place on your website within a given time frame.” Some may call a session a “visit” as it is often associated with a site visitor’s visit to a website. The default timeframe for a session in Google Analytics is 30 minutes.

In today’s tabbed-browser world, however, it’s not uncommon for a visitor to come to a website, leave a tab open, and return later to re-engage with that site via that tab.
In this scenario, when the site visitor re-engages after 30 minutes, the now new session is attributed to the website itself rather than the original source and medium. It appears as if the website is a referral source to itself.

How significant is the problem? Up to 20 percent or more of your organic search traffic may be reported as self-referral traffic. In the case of one client, fixing the issue increased attribution to the organic search channel by 16 percent in only two weeks.

To ensure that your organic search traffic (and traffic from other sources) is tracking properly, add your domain to the “Referral Exclusion List” in Google Analytics.
Analytics Goals

It’s also important to track your KPIs where possible via Google Analytics goals. Each reporting view for a website property is allowed up to 20 goals. Establishing KPIs as Google Analytics goals will allow you to see at a glance through analytics reports just how effective organic search and SEO have been to achieve your KPIs.

Audit Your Analytics

Regardless of your web analytics platform, be sure that it’s tracking properly so that your data is accurate. Regularly perform an analytics audit to ensure that everything is tracking properly. Have you set goals for your KPIs? Are they tracking properly? If you have an ecommerce site, do you have the ecommerce package in Google Analytics activated? It’s easy to accidentally introduce analytics errors into a website, especially when so many people may be working with the site code or with the analytics settings. A regular audit will help ensure that your tracking data is precise, accurately informing you about your SEO efforts.
Part III

Successful SEO for 2017

Auditing Your Website for SEO

Once you’ve set up your measurements, you’re ready to understand what may need to be fixed to improve your SEO. Having measurements in place will allow you to make tweaks to your SEO efforts and then see the results through improved organic traffic.

The first step to understanding the improvements your site may need is to audit the website. Consider performing an SEO audit at least once per year to help you to identify both strengths and weaknesses in your current site as well as opportunities for improvement.

Tools like Screaming Frog, ahrefs, SEMRush and Deep Crawl provide measurements on a variety of SEO ranking factors and are helpful to ascertain the SEO health of your website. Once you’ve performed an audit, you’ll have a roadmap of SEO priorities to follow. If you’re not sure how to get started or need help, Marketing Mojo offers SEO audits to help identify where problems may lie and how to fix them.

Keyword Research

The way that searchers enter queries is constantly evolving. According to Google, 15 percent of the queries entered into Google each day have never been entered before. That’s over 500 million queries every day that have never before been searched. Keyword research, therefore, must also continuously evolve as the way that searchers enter queries, the way that they search, evolves as well.

It’s long been estimated that approximately 80 percent of queries on Google are informational and a mere 20 percent are navigational or transactional. When developing a keyword target list, consider addressing informational queries related to your product, service or industry. What questions do your prospects have about your products or services? Answer them with informative content that links to these informational query keywords.
Google Answer Box and Knowledge Graph

Not only do SEO tactics seem to change with regularity, but how searchers perform searches is also changing rapidly. Given that nearly 80 percent of queries are informational, Google and Bing have begun to provide more information directly in the search results.

The Google Answer Box is a box that contains answer text and appears at the top of Google search results for some informational queries:

![Google Answer Box Example](image)

Stone Temple Consulting has been following the growth of Google Answer Boxes over time and found in 2016 that nearly 40 percent of search queries generate an answer box.

Google Knowledge Graph and Google's Answer Boxes are based on how Google understands entities. Entities are simply things, and Google tries to understand their relation to one another. For example, the sentence “Juliet Gordon Low founded the Girl Scouts in 1912.” tells us several things:

- Juliet Gordon Low is a founder
- She founded the Girl Scouts organization
- She founded it in 1912

When writing content, be sure to “structure” your content to connect entity information. This will help your answers and other information to be included in the Google Answer Box and Knowledge Graph.
Linking Strategy

Links have been part of Google’s ranking algorithm since the first patent Google filed for its PageRank algorithm, and they are still important today. There are three types of links: inbound links, outbound links and internal links. Inbound links are links that point to a website from another website. Outbound links are links from your website to other websites. Internal links are links within your own website.

Inbound links are not always easy to come by, and “unnatural” inbound linking can cause a penalty. Google’s Penguin algorithm specifically looks for links that seem spammy and built specifically for SEO benefits. When seeking an internal link, be careful of who you allow to link to you, and be sure to disavow any links that look spammy through the Disavow Tool in Google Search Console.

Outbound links may also be a ranking factor for Google, although Google has indicated they detect unnatural outbound linking. Outbound linking is clearly within a website owner’s control, so use it judiciously.

Also within the website owner’s control is internal linking. In 2016 Marketing Mojo performed a test on our own site, creating new, internal links from our blog posts to our online advertising services page. We built 100 new internal links and it propelled that page to position four in the Google results. Even though some pages in the top rankings had significantly more inbound links, the internal links appear to have had an effect on Marketing Mojo’s page ranking even without as many inbound links. In the graphic below, the number in the orange circles adjacent to the search results displays the quantity of inbound links that each of those pages had at the time. Note that Marketing Mojo’s site was elevated to the first page after the internal linking effort, even though there were no inbound links to this page.
Because you control internal links, this is an easy way that’s within your control to help improve organic search rankings.

**Page Speed**

For several years Google has clearly defined page load speed as a ranking factor. With over 200 ranking factors, though, just how important is page speed as a factor?

Recently it appears that page speed has indeed become a very important ranking factor for Google, especially where search queries are highly competitive and highly searched. In the case of one company who sought our help, a site update to a new content management system slowed the page load time...
on average by only about a second or two, but that was too much for Google, causing the site to have several high-ranking, competitive term pages drop from the first page to the second page of search results, causing a 7.5 percent drop in organic search traffic within only one month of the relaunch.

Be sure to track your site's speed performance using tools such as Google PageSpeed Insights, which provides actionable tactics to improve load time. PageSpeed Insights, however, only measures page speed on a page-by-page basis, so be careful not to rely on one page's results as the indicator for page speed for your entire site. Use the tactics Google recommends to address each factor affecting your page's load speed, using the guidelines on the page to guide you in your prioritization of repairs to see the most impact in speed soonest.

**Mobile**

Mobile has seen a substantial uptick over the past several years. According to a 2016 study from ComScore, mobile now represents 65 percent of digital media time. Companies who want to compete to win the mobile audience need to consider their mobile search visibility and how they convert overall with mobile users.

Google has specifically indicated that mobile-friendliness of a site is a ranking factor for mobile results. In fact it's becoming more uncommon for sites that are not mobile-friendly to rank in the top results in Google mobile search. In 2015 MoovWeb released a study showing that on average sites in the top ten mobile results in more than half of instances in each position were mobile-friendly:

![Mobile-Friendliness of the Top 10 Positions in Search Results](image)

*Fig 9 – Impact of Mobile on SEO · Source: Moovweb, August 2015*
First, be sure that your site has a responsive or mobile-friendly design. Google and Bing have similar requirements for mobile-friendliness. Both search engines have a mobile-friendly testing tool which identifies specific page factors that affect mobile-friendliness. However, like the Google PageSpeed Insights tool, the Google and Bing Mobile-Friendly Testing tools evaluate only one page at a time – not the entire site. Be sure to test various pages on the site to determine if your site is actually mobile-friendly.

In January 2017 Google also released a new penalty for mobile sites that generate interstitials (popovers) that make content difficult to access on a mobile device. If you must use an interstitial, make it easy to close and navigate around and avoid blocking the whole page of mobile content with the interstitial to avoid a Google penalty.

**Optimize for Conversion**

Driving more organic search traffic to your site is valuable, but is that traffic converting on your website? The goal for marketers is not to just drive website traffic but ultimately leads and sales for the organization. Once your site has increased its organic search traffic, review the site for its conversion performance. For example, here’s a blog post that is generating thousands of visitors per month to the website, yet it is not producing conversions on the website:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landing Page</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Acquisitions</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Conversions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 organic</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,812</td>
<td>2,481</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>88.23%</td>
<td>88.98%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Fig 10 – Analytics Reporting – High Traffic, Low Conversion](image)

Now that you've brought the traffic to the site, how can you improve conversion performance for these visitors? Begin by identifying pages on your site that generate the most organic traffic but have the lowest goal conversion rates.
A few things to consider when optimizing conversion rate for your website or a particular page include:

- Review your website for dead ends and add a call to action (CTA) on every page.
- Test design, visual elements and copy. Test, test, and test some more. For example, is your CTA on the page blending in with the rest of the web page because the colors are similar? Consider trying a complimentary color for the CTA instead.
- Answer the question: “Can someone on a smartphone easily convert on this CTA?” If they can’t, then re-think the page in a mobile context.
- Incorporate elements of authority, social proof and human touch to appeal to natural human behaviors and emotions such as testimonials, case studies, reviews and ratings.
Part IV
Conclusion

Timeframe for Success

There are over 200 ranking factors for both Google and Bing organic search results respectively, so it’s no surprise that maximizing the effects of those 200 factors on your own website takes time. But how much time does it take? When can your company expect to see measurable results?

[Google released a video describing how to hire an SEO consultant](#), and in the video Google says to expect 4-12 months to see results. This matches with a study that ahrefs released indicating that it takes approximately one year for most new pages to be able to rank in the top ten results of Google.

![Fig 11 – Source: ahrefs Study – Ranking Performance in First Year](#)
Measure, Evaluate and Refine

Analytics and ROI tracking continue to increase in importance. Digital marketing moves fast, so it’s important to track and understand the results of your marketing campaigns as quickly as possible to take advantage of market opportunities. Marketers continue to struggle with how best to create the right marketing mix and quantify those efforts. In a 2016 survey of CMOs, 56 percent indicated that their marketing team needs better analytics skills in order to prove ROI.

The first step to proving ROI is gathering accurate data. The next step is the continual evaluation of your strategy to ensure future effectiveness in your digital marketing efforts. Measure, evaluate and refine your campaigns to improve outcomes.

Depending on your access to various datapoints, you may not be able to measure full ROI. But go as far as you can – fill in this table with specific organic search channel data to understand your ROI from organic search.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Total Marketing Cost</th>
<th>Total Leads from Channel</th>
<th>Cost/Leads = Cost Per Lead (CPL)</th>
<th>Total SQLs</th>
<th>Cost/SQLs = Cost Per Qualified Lead</th>
<th>Total Opportunities</th>
<th>Cost/Opportunities = Cost Per Opportunity</th>
<th>Total Sales</th>
<th>ROI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organic Search</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beyond ROI is the measurement of lifetime value. Ultimately, does the initial ROI matter if the lifetime value of a customer is great? Sometimes it can be easy to give too much weight to the initial investment to attain a customer. Consider lifetime value by channel or by campaign using this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Customer</th>
<th>Total Lifetime Revenue of Customer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

These tables are also available in Marketing Mojo’s free ROI workbook, which makes calculating your ROI from various channels simple.
Going Beyond SEO

Everyone who visits your site is a potential customer. You’ve made an investment to get them to the website, so do everything you can to make the most of your effort. We also know that it takes multiple exposures with a prospect to generate a sale. The buyer is on a journey, and that journey doesn’t typically conclude with just initial marketing outreach. A 2016 Brightfunnel study found that on average it takes 16 marketing touches to close a sale in the United States – double the touches required in other countries around the world.

SEO is just one method – one marketing touch – on that buyer journey. What other marketing tactics and channels can you use to capitalize on your SEO investment and generate additional opportunities for marketing touches over the course of the buyer journey? Consider tagging all site visitors with retargeting cookies so that you can continue to market to them even if they don’t convert on the first visit. These visitors have already expressed an interest in your brand by visiting your website, making them more likely to convert in the future than a first-time visitor.

Consider adding retargeting code from multiple platforms, including the following where appropriate:

- Google AdWords
- Bing Ads
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Pinterest

Additionally, if you can capture the visitor’s email address through a sign up form, consider using email addresses for Custom Audiences in Facebook and Customer Match campaigns in Google AdWords to send special messages to those audiences.
Now Lets Get Started

As you consider where to begin, an SEO audit is helpful to ascertain what aspects of your website need to change to improve SEO. Along with an SEO audit, you'll likely want to regularly audit your web analytics to ensure that your tracking data is accurate.

SEO presents us with a series of opportunities. Some we can easily, readily employ. Others, however, may take time, resources or a financial investment to engage. Work on what you can. Prioritize your efforts. And above all, measure and assess your progress along the way.

About Marketing Mojo:

DIGITAL INNOVATION FOR DEMAND GENERATION

Marketing Mojo is a full-service, data-driven online marketing and demand generation agency. With experience in a wide range of digital marketing disciplines, the Marketing Mojo team uses the latest information and techniques to help companies maximize the sales funnel and get the highest quality results based on their goals.

See how Marketing Mojo can help you reach your digital marketing goals