

VA.gov Search Analysis Report

January 2021



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Overview

Search Analysis Report | Reporting Period: January-December 2020

Topics covered in this update

1. Goals of Data Analysis
2. The Audit and Methodology
3. Summary Findings
4. Next Steps

Teams

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VA



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Goals

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1. Using on-site search data for FY 2020 to understand:

- What information users are searching for – in rank order of popularity and by percentage of “search share”
- What terms they use to search (e.g., users’ expressions of what information they want *in their own words*)

2. Measuring the effectiveness/relevancy of Search.gov-driven results, in particular:

- For Type-Ahead, are the most obvious or preferred terms displayed one of five suggested terms?
- For Type-Ahead, how helpful is the result page generated by the most obvious or preferred suggested term (e.g., is there a relevant Top Recommendation and/or is the most optimal result easily found on the initial search results page)?

3. Understanding what VA Forms generate the most searches in order to:

- See if this corresponds with the Find a Form tool top searches and downloaded PDFs
- Guide our ongoing approach to prioritizing which Forms should be given curated detail pages



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The Audit & Methodology

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1. Top 1000 searches – January-December 2020 (source: Search.gov)

[Source data and audit available here >](#)

- Downloaded the full year (through December 28) of search query data
- Calculated the total number of searches (approx. 1.9m) and calculated percentage for each search term to understand search share (note: a de-duplication version of this data is needed to account for term variations – e.g. *certificate of eligibility*, *coe*)

2. Top 100 searches

- Created a list of Top 100 searches to examine the effectiveness of Type Ahead, Top Recommendations and search page results
- The criteria for effectiveness was defined as:
 - the “preferred/optimal” suggestion/link would be a modernized VA.gov (or secondarily, eBenefits page) that provides the most information about that search term
 - for type-ahead, if the preferred/optimal suggestion was displayed as the #1 or #2 suggestion – it would be rated as “perfect” (#1) or “near perfect” (#2). If the preferred/optimal term was the #3 through #5 suggestion, that would be considered “acceptable.” If the preferred/optimal term was not suggested, it would be rated a “0” – and indicate whitelisting is needed.
 - for Top Recommendations, the expectation is every Top 100 term would generate a “best bet” – and if not, that was noted and a curated recommendation was created.
 - for the organic search results page, if the preferred/optimal link was displayed in top three results, that would be considered “perfect,” if in results positions 4-5, that would be considered “near perfect,” if in the 6-10 listing position “not optimal” and if on the following pages “unacceptable”

3. VA forms searches

- Created a separate top form searches list with all form queries in rank order by searches and percentage of overall search
- To complete comparative analysis, the top query and download data is needed from the Find a Form tool

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Top Line Findings

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1. Top Searches

- The top 100 terms account for 50% of the top 1000 searches
- *forms* is the top search term overall, representing nearly 2% of search share
- Top task oriented searches included:
 - “request military service records (dd 214)”
 - “update/change direct deposit information”
 - “how to apply for a VA home loan certificate of eligibility (coe)”
- *Covid* was the 86th most popular search term, with *covid testing* ranking #221 and *covid vaccine* #458 among the top 1000 searches
- Without Top Recommendations, organic results for top terms were at best inconsistent – with 15% of preferred/optimal links displayed at the bottom of page 1 or on pages 2 to 3, making them difficult to find.
- Some popular search terms – *urgent care*, *mission act*, *blue water navy*, *flu shot(s)*, *grave locator* – deserve more robust, modernized VA.gov landing pages and/or tools.

Observations:

- Top Recommendations is a crutch that makes the VA.gov search experience “acceptable”
- Click-tracking data is vital to truly gauge the effectiveness of VA.gov search as it is a better indicator/validator of the intent of the user’s query



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Top Line Findings

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2. Type Ahead

- For Type-Ahead, ~50% of the results were perfect (#1 suggestion) or near perfect (#2 suggestion).
- Nearly 20% of the top 100 terms **did not** generate an **obvious or preferred** term (0 suggestions)
- The overall performance of type-ahead confirmed that a “white listing strategy” for the top ~400 search terms would likely elevate the feature from “somewhat helpful” to “very helpful”

Findings in Summary

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3. VA Forms

- In aggregate, searches for specific VA forms represented a significant share -- nearly 14.5% -- of the top 1000 queries
- Users search for the same form in a variety of typed formats -- *dd214*, *dd 214*, *dd-214*, *214*, *dd form 214* -- and these formats need to be “accepted” for site search and Find a Form queries -- or we need to specify to users upfront what format is acceptable.
- There are an estimated 100-125 unique forms in the Top 1000 queries and these should be part of the consideration (if not already included) for Find a Form tool detail landing pages.

Next Steps

Leveraging the Analysis and Findings for Product Decisioning Enhancement

