

Using Google Webmaster Tools

Webmaster Tools has always been in the shadow of Google's much larger Analytics tool. However, there's some hidden functionality in here that you can use to track the effectiveness of your search engine optimization work.

Tracking search queries


The SSL conundrum

In 2011, Google implemented secure search (<https://google.com>) as a default for all users. Search Engine Land explained what this change meant for site owners:

When someone conducts a search on Google, it is now always done as an SSL encrypted search, so all search queries are now encrypted. It routes the click to the website through a redirect so that the website a user lands on has no idea what actual keywords the searcher found the website under, and what keywords were used that brought the person there.

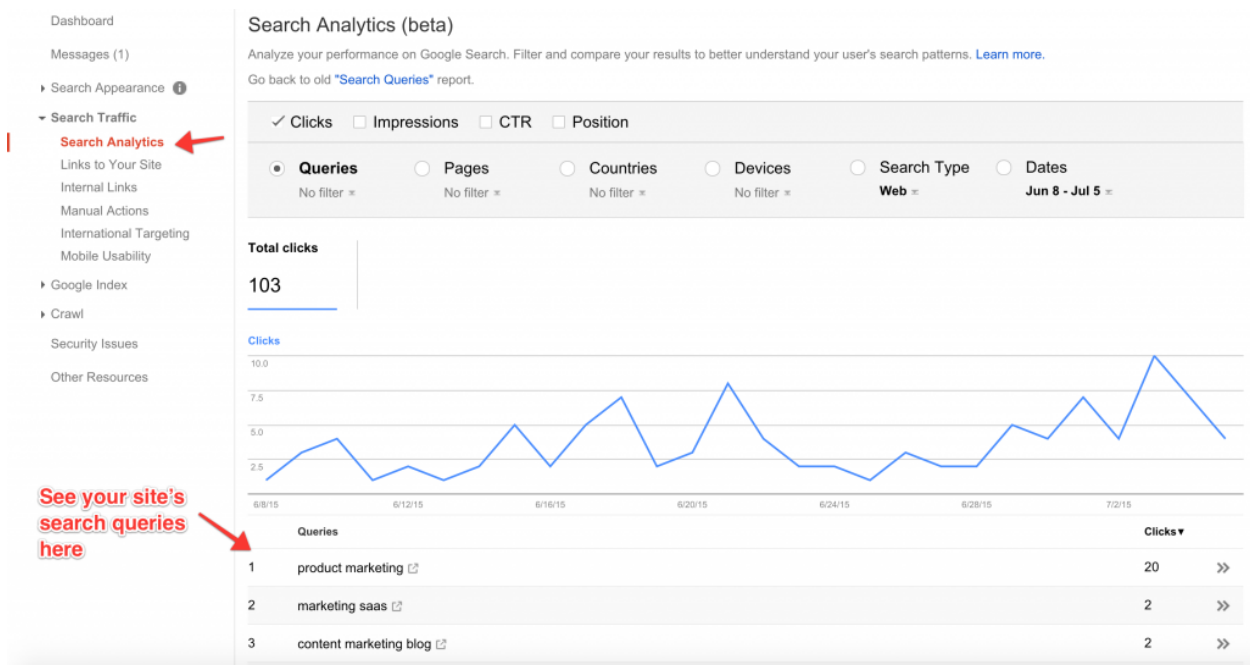
- September 30, 2013, [Search Engine Watch](#)

This meant that when using Google Analytics, you could no longer see organic keywords (the terms people were using to find your site).

<input type="checkbox"/>	Keyword ?	Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages / Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. (not provided) 	380 (91.57%)	82.11%	312 (95.12%)	76.84%	1.37	00:00:39
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. product marketing	17 (4.10%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	41.18%	2.24	00:20:44
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. is it easy to start a business	2 (0.48%)	50.00%	1 (0.30%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00

Webmaster Tools to the rescue

Here's a secret: you can find your keyword data in Google's Webmaster Tools. Go to google.com/webmasters and then navigate to *Search Traffic >> Search Analytics*.



This new report, introduced in May 2015, provides a more accurate picture of search data. Broadly, for Queries, it will provide these metrics:

- **Queries:** which Google search queries show your site
- **Clicks:** the number of clicks for that query (people who clicked on your search result, and visited your site)
- **Impressions:** how many times your search result was viewed in a Google search
- **CTR (Click-through rate):** this is the percentage of clicks divided by the number of impressions for that query
- **Position:** this is the average position of your site on Google search results

Along with Queries, you can group your data by Pages (individual pages on your site and how they rank), Countries, Devices (desktop, mobile, or tablet), and Search Type (web, image, video).

How to use this data

First, your site will need to have some history for Search Analytics to be helpful. If you haven't been writing blog posts, creating

landing pages, and accruing inbound links there won't be much to show here.

Once your site is indexed on Google, and is ranking for a few keywords, the data in Search Analytics will become more useful. Here are the questions you should be asking of your data:

1. For which search queries is my site ranked 1–5? Finding out where your pages are ranking high will help you double-down on queries that are working well. Put out more targeted content aimed at these keywords. These could be landing pages or blog posts that illustrate how your product answers that query.
2. For which search queries is my site ranked lower, 9–15? You can improve your position for these queries! The queries here should provide you with ideas for new content: blog posts, landing pages, and articles. Include the query's keywords inside the title of your new page. This approach should help you rank higher for these queries.
3. Which queries are giving me the most impressions? You'll see that certain keywords get far more views than others. Focus on those!
4. How many click-throughs am I getting? The most important metric is how many people are actually visiting your site from

these search queries. Look for ways you can improve your click-through rate.

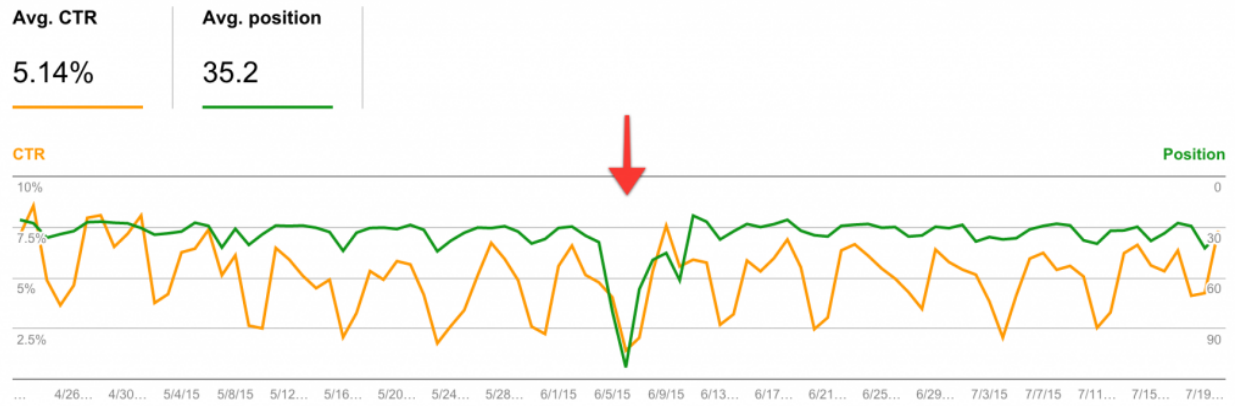
Grouping by Pages and filtering by click-through rates can be particularly helpful in learning what types of content people are searching for on Google.

	Pages	Clicks ▼	Impressions	CTR
1	/words_japan.html	555	12,365	4.49%
2	/	441	11,363	3.88%
3	/blogs/	362	3,685	9.82%
4	/words.html	360	12,642	2.85%
5	/vika-byske-standing-desk/	345	3,769	9.15%
6	/remote/	343	10,832	3.17%

You'll also want to watch for dips and spikes. These could be due to a crawl error (Google can no longer find a page on your site), or an algorithmic penalty (Google has tweaked their ranking algorithm, and your site is being penalized).

Each year, Google changes its search algorithm around 500–600 times. While most of these changes are minor, Google occasionally rolls out a "major" algorithmic update (such as Google Panda and Google Penguin) that affects search results in significant ways.

- Moz, [Google Algorithm Change History](#)



Is your site mobile friendly?

In November 2014, Google started adding a "Mobile Friendly" label to search results that rendered properly on mobile devices.¹

The next year, in April, Google also announced that sites that were not mobile friendly would be penalized by their ranking algorithm.²

You'll want to ensure that your marketing site is mobile friendly. Google has built a utility into Webmaster Tools³ to do that.

The utility will show you how their Googlebot sees your web page and whether it passes their mobile test. If your page does not pass,

¹ Helping user find mobile-friendly pages, November 18, 2014, <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.ca/2014/11/helping-users-find-mobile-friendly-pages.html>

² Finding more mobile-friendly search results, February 15, 2015, <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.ca/2015/02/finding-more-mobile-friendly-search.html>

³ <https://google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly>

it will tell you why and give you steps to remedy the problem.

Mobile-Friendly Test g+1

<http://justinjackson.ca/words.html>

ANALYZE

Not mobile-friendly

Page appears not mobile-friendly

- ✗ Text too small to read
- ✗ Links too close together

How Googlebot sees this page



If your pages aren't mobile friendly, it might be time to update your site's design. Take a look at The Lean Marketing Stack: Overview chapter for recommendations on good site templates.