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Tracking SEO Campaign Effectiveness in a Keyword-Not-Provided World

presented by
Bernadette Coleman

Digital Agency with Proprietary Local Search Technologies

260,000+	4+ Million	60+	5
Client's Local SEO	Visibility Audits	Employees	Offices

The last year or so has been pretty great for us lovers of the spy & intrigue movie genre.

We've had funny (***Spy***), stylish (***The Man from U.N.C.L.E.***), blockbuster (***Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation***), subversive (***Kingsman***), teen comedy (***Barely Lethal***), historical drama (***Bridge of Spies***), and classic Bond (***Spectre***).

This is why I so love my job, which is primarily trying to figure out why **Google is constantly scheming to control the SERPs** (search engine results page).

But the conspiracy theorist in me likes to think that the advent of **Google Analytics 'Not Provided' keywords** will likely lead to Hollywood gearing up for a new spy movie.

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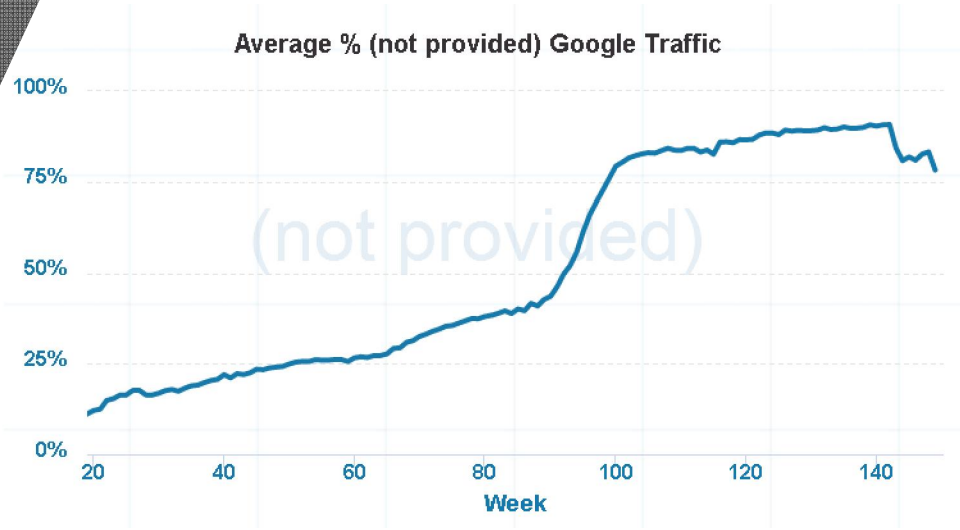
A Dr. Evil-esque scheme to destroy the world of online marketing.

Pretty Crazy Right?

After all, over the past few years there has been an *astronomic* increase in the amount of data being locked away from marketers like you and me.



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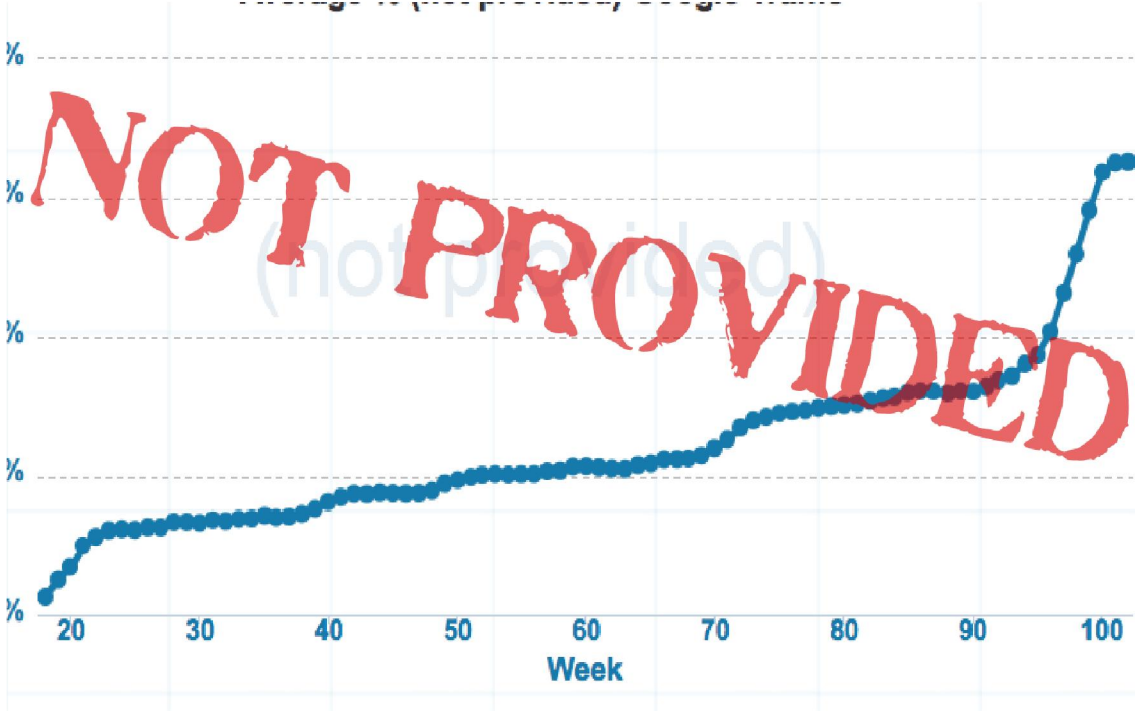
But even if you believe that Larry Page and Sergey Brin (cofounders of Google, for the layman) are villainously cackling from their secret lair while plotting the online scheme of the century, all hope is not lost.

Villains or Just Smart?

Accessing the Data

If you are willing to approach your keyword analytics with an open mind, there are a number of simple (and not so simple) ways to access the data that Google is so meticulously trying to hide.



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Why Are Keywords 'Not Provided'

and Why Should You Care?

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The History

So, conspiracy theories and evil villains aside, why has Google *really* locked so much data away from webmasters and SEOs?

Back in October of 2011, Google changed the way that search data was harvested in recognition of…

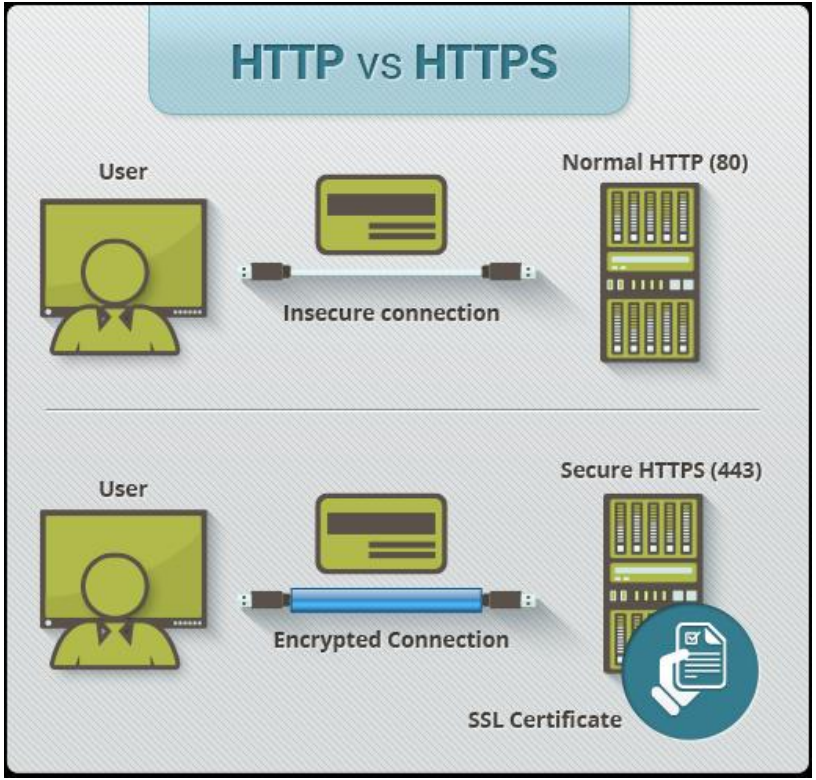
"The growing importance of protecting the personalized search results."

- **October 2011 –** Most keywords removed from Google Analytics and (not provided) starts to grow
- **October 2012 –** Universal Analytics announced
- **May 2015 –** Google Webmaster Tools rebrands to Google Search Console
- **August 2015 –** Search Console API comes online
- **August 2016 –** Google Keyword Planner "bucketing" and throttling

The History & Timeline

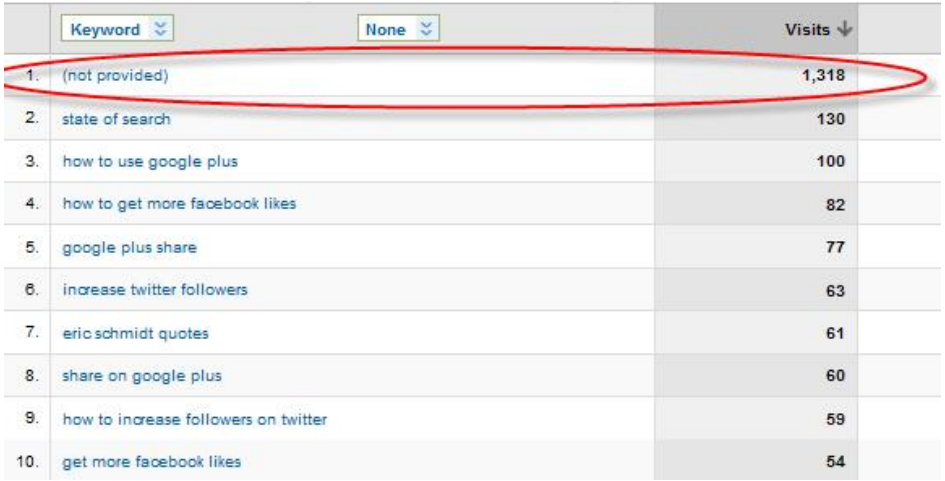
And in their attempt to increase the security of their searches and the privacy of their users, Google simultaneously crippled the powers and abilities of many prominent SEOs.

- With the removal of keywords from Google Analytics, mobile growth, and personalized search results, tracking SEO campaigns has become increasingly difficult
- We need to figure out a way to measure campaign ROI without “breaking the bank” on analytics and analysis
- Forced to use multiple tools to track different areas of campaign effectiveness



It all starts at the search bar.

- But what exactly does this new search security, and its correlating effects on marketing, mean?
- In the days of old, a normal Google search would redirect you to a http:// version of your desired domain.
- with its security update, Google began exclusively redirecting users to an *https* version of the website, with the “S” standing for secure.



	Keyword	None	Visits
1.	(not provided)		1,318
2.	state of search		130
3.	how to use google plus		100
4.	how to get more facebook likes		82
5.	google plus share		77
6.	increase twitter followers		63
7.	eric schmidt quotes		61
8.	share on google plus		60
9.	how to increase followers on twitter		59
10.	get more facebook likes		54

- Huge obstacle and detriment to those of us in the SEO and online marketing world.
- Now, whenever someone finds your site through natural search methods, because of the data encryption and restrictions, **we are completely in the dark** regarding *how* they found you.

This is fantastic...for user privacy.

Tracking Difficulty

- This makes it difficult to track **SEO KPIs** and determine which keywords you should be investing in.

- You are also unable to examine the data related to **unhappy viewers (e.g. a high bounce rate or low time on page)** to determine why a particular page was incongruent or inefficient to fulfill the needs of their search.

To put it in layman's terms...

Google's updates suck.

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What Can You Use to Fix This

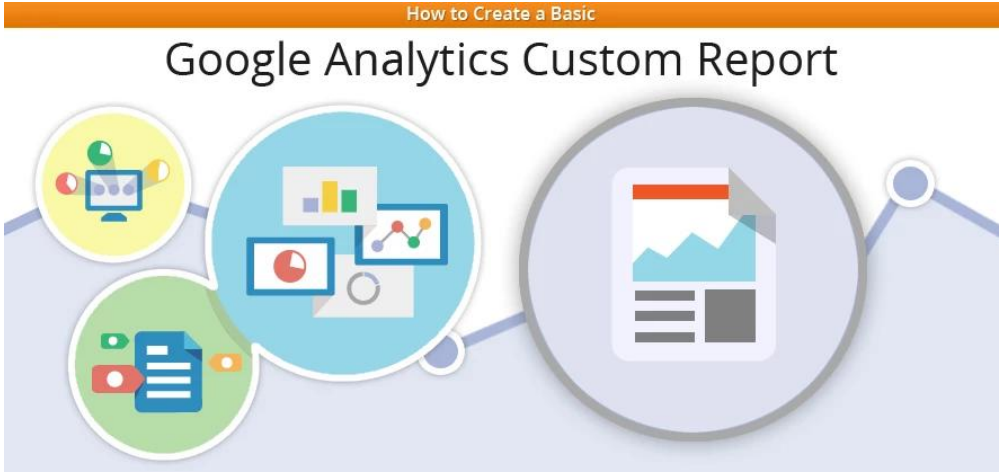
The bad news is you can't completely fix this. Sadly, the villains at Google have stuffed this data right into the back of the larder, though we keep our fingers crossed.

The good news is, there are some things you can do!

Start with Custom Reports

Extremely simple for you to look at this data.

- Visits
- Unique Visitors
- Bounce Rates
- Goal Completions for (not provided)



But…we want to know more.

- Who are these people?
- Are they people I should care about?
- What kind of search queries are these?
- Brand? Non-brand?
- What else?
- Blah, Blah, Blah

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The Keyword (Not Provided) Secret Sauce

Landing Page data is great, but wouldn't it be wonderful to see the actual keywords being used in organic search?

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Tool Tip #1
Custom Reports

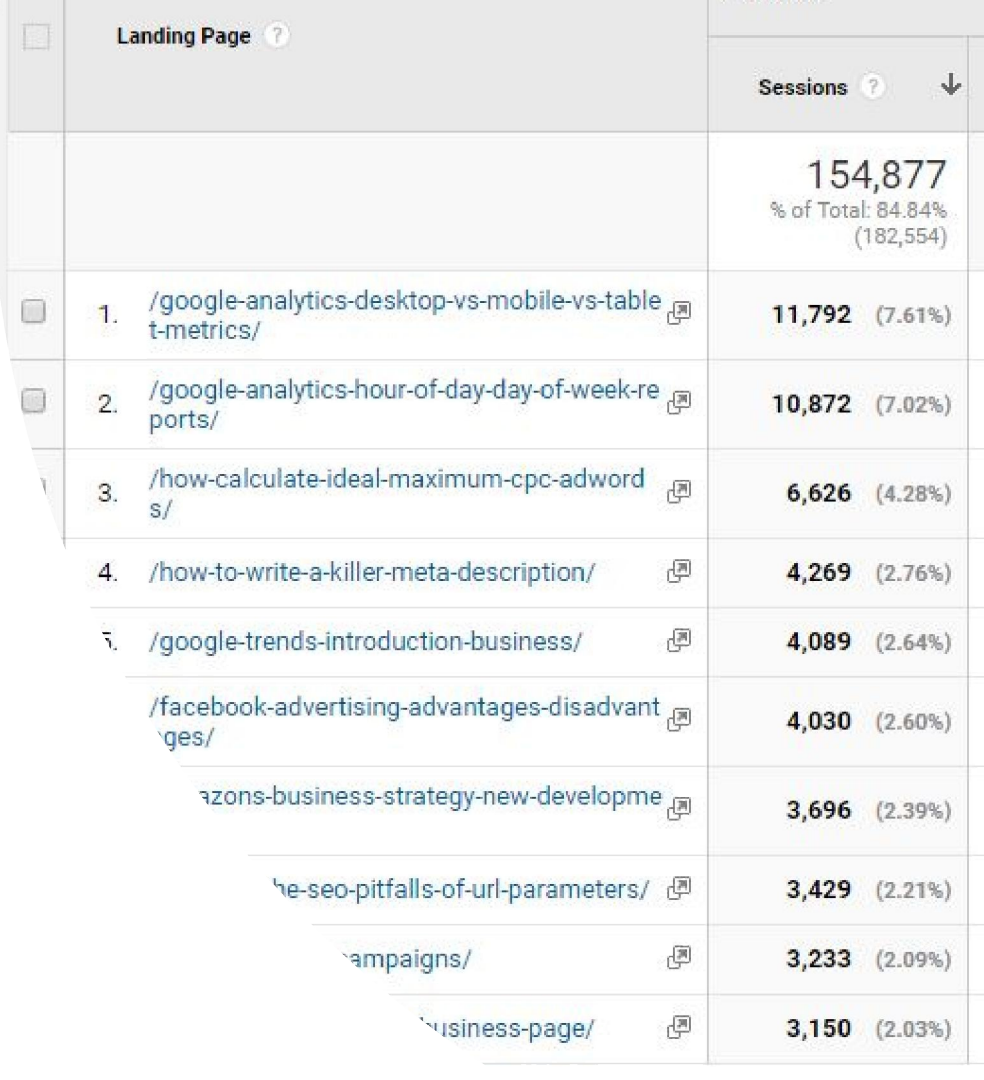
Report Hacks

- Sharing is Loving, so here is a nice little Google Analytics hack to bring some useful data back into your regular Google Analytics organic "keywords" report wherever "(not provided)" would now appear.

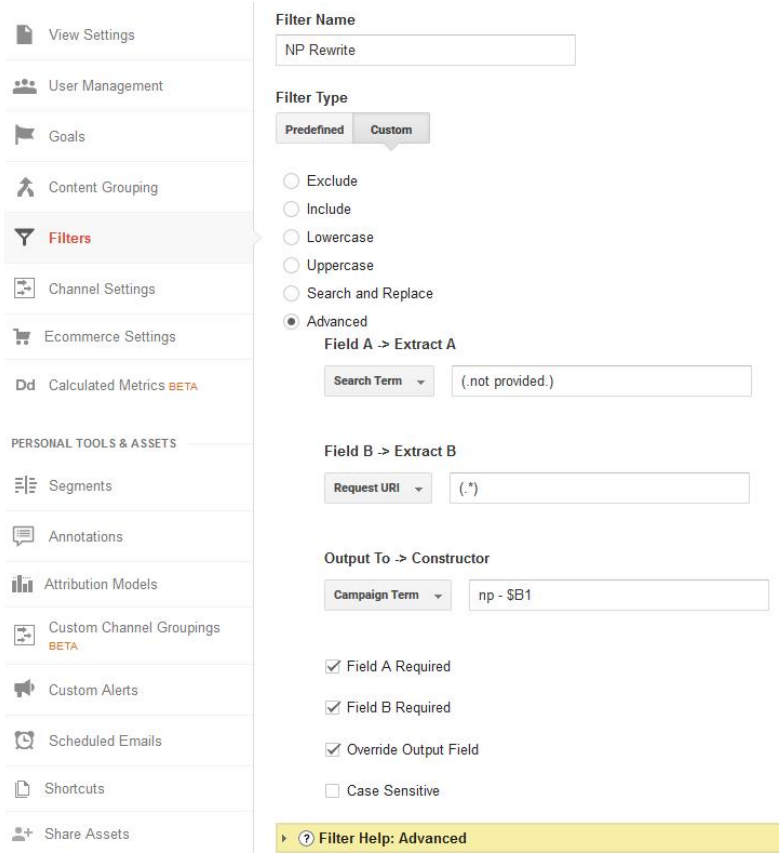
1. Looks for "(not provided)" search terms.
2. Where it finds them, it looks to see which page the visitor landed on.
3. It then changes your keywords report in Google Analytics to show those two pieces of information (the fact that Google suppressed the keyword, *and* the landing page), rather than just the utterly anonymous "(not provided)".

Your Landing Pages Are Important

- By setting up Google Analytics filters **that show you the landing page referrals** for all of your "not provided" traffic, you will be able to make an educated guess as to which keyword searches and queries brought users to those pages.
- Done right, the filenames are a pretty good clue as to what the searcher wants.



Landing Page	Sessions
	154,877 % of Total: 84.84% (182,554)
1. /google-analytics-desktop-vs-mobile-vs-tablet-metrics/	11,792 (7.61%)
2. /google-analytics-hour-of-day-day-of-week-reports/	10,872 (7.02%)
3. /how-calculate-ideal-maximum-cpc-adwords/	6,626 (4.28%)
4. /how-to-write-a-killer-meta-description/	4,269 (2.76%)
5. /google-trends-introduction-business/	4,089 (2.64%)
/facebook-advertising-advantages-disadvantages/	4,030 (2.60%)
azons-business-strategy-new-developme	3,696 (2.39%)
e-seo-pitfalls-of-url-parameters/	3,429 (2.21%)
ampaigns/	3,233 (2.09%)
usiness-page/	3,150 (2.03%)



Create a Custom Advanced Filter and select the filter type "Custom."

- Input the following parameters into their respective fields.
- Field A: (.not provided)
  Field B: (.*)
  Field C: np – $B1
- Ensure that all boxes except for "Case Sensitive" are checked and then your new filter is ready to go.
- This tactic will help reveal which specific terms are "Not Provided," making it easier for you to understand where traffic is coming from and going to.

- It *is* one of the best ways to gain greater insight into your keyword performance.

Not Provided = Provided

Not Provided Before the Hack

	Keyword None	Visits ↓	Pages/Visit	Avg. Time on Site	% New Visits	Bounce Rate
1.	(not provided)	154	2.18	00:00:40	92.66%	71.43%

If we ignore everything else and concentrate purely on the “(not provided)” section, here's the information Google now gives us on these anonymous keywords:

Not Provided After the Hack

	Keyword None	Visits ↓	Pages/Visit	Avg. Time on Site	% New Visits	Bounce Rate
1.	np - /	129	2.18	00:00:40	92.66%	42.20%
2.	np - /laptops	8	1.88	00:08:34	37.50%	37.50%
3.	np - /cheap-laptops	7	1.86	00:00:33	71.43%	71.43%
4.	np - /laptop-bags	7	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	100.00%
5.	np - /sony-laptops	6	1.50	00:00:34	100.00%	83.33%
6.	np - /acer-laptops	5	1.20	00:00:12	100.00%	80.00%
7.	np - /sony-monitors	4	1.25	00:00:14	100.00%	75.00%
8.	np - /acer-monitors	3	1.00	00:00:00	100.00%	100.00%
9.	np - /samsung-laptops	3	1.00	00:00:00	100.00%	100.00%
10.	np - /samsung-monitors	2	1.00	00:00:00	100.00%	100.00%

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Quickly see things like…

- The vast bulk of “not provided” data was from people landing on the homepage. (i.e., a bulk will probably be “Main” terms).
- “Laptops” & “cheap laptops” are next biggest landing pages among “not provided” terms.
- The rest is a little further down the tail of search.
- We could also use this to see any e-commerce or goal data related to (not provided).
- And that's purely an example on a tiny amount of data. On larger pools, there's a whole lot more insight you can gather.

	Keyword None	Visits ↓	Pages/Visit	Avg. Time on Site	% New Visits	Bounce Rate
1.	np - /	129	2.18	00:00:40	92.66%	42.20%
2.	np - /laptops	8	1.88	00:08:34	37.50%	37.50%
3.	np - /cheap-laptops	7	1.86	00:00:33	71.43%	71.43%
4.	np - /laptop-bags	7	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	100.00%
5.	np - /sony-laptops	6	1.50	00:00:34	100.00%	83.33%
6.	np - /acer-laptops	5	1.20	00:00:12	100.00%	80.00%
7.	np - /sony-monitors	4	1.25	00:00:14	100.00%	75.00%
8.	np - /acer-monitors	3	1.00	00:00:00	100.00%	100.00%
9.	np - /samsung-laptops	3	1.00	00:00:00	100.00%	100.00%
10.	np - /samsung-monitors	2	1.00	00:00:00	100.00%	100.00%

Secrets Revealed

This tells Google Analytics:

- "Whenever you see a search term that matches '<any character>not provided<any character>', apply this filter."
- "Within this filter, we also want to use the address of the page reached where '(not provided)' was the referring search term."
- "When you apply this filter, discard the original '(not provided)' search term, and replace it with 'np -' followed by the landing page address."

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Tool Tip # 2
Search Console — Data Integration

Data Integration

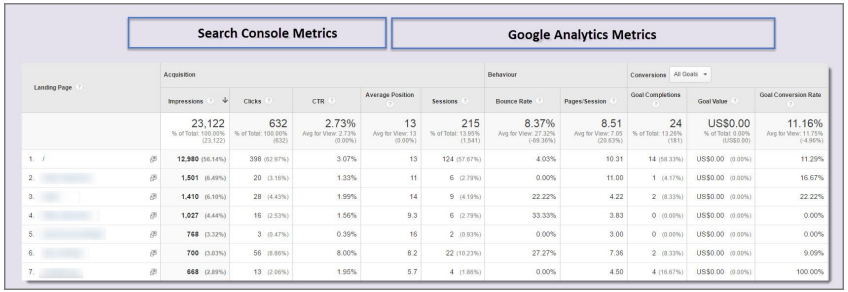
- On the 12th of May 2016, Google announced that they were introducing the ability to display Search Console metrics alongside Google Analytics metrics in the same reports.

- This means that acquisition metrics from Search Console, such as impressions and click-through rate, can now be viewed in relation to behavior and conversion metrics from Google Analytics, like bounce rate and pages per session.

Data Integration

- To see this data, all you need to do is link up your Google Analytics Account to your Google Search Console data.
- If you associate a Google Analytics property with a site in your Search Console account, you'll be able to see Search Console data in your Google Analytics reports.
- Voilà, you have a whole universe of new data to take a look at.

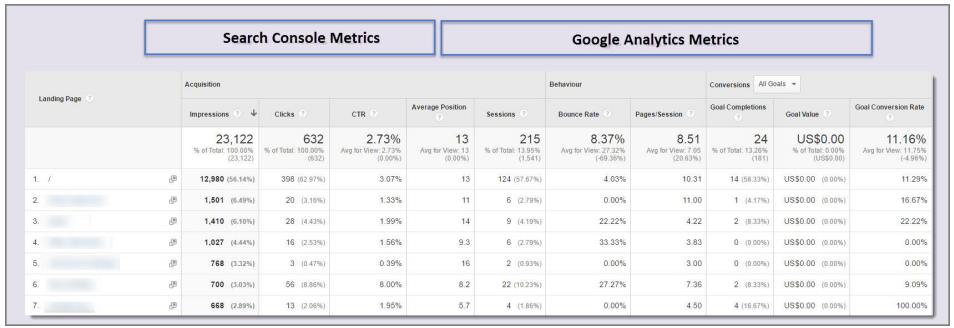
- https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1308621



New Insights

The new reports allow you to examine your organic search data end-to-end and discover unique and actionable insights.

Acquisition metrics such as impressions & average position are now available in relation to your Behavior and Conversion metrics from Google Analytics, like bounce rate and pages per session.



Landing Page	Acquisition				Behaviour		Conversions: All Goals		
	Impressions ↓	Clicks	CTR	Average Position	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Goal Completions	Goal Value	Goal Conversion Rate
	23,122 % of Total: 100.00% (23,122)	632 % of Total: 100.00% (632)	2.73% Avg for View: 2.73% (0.00%)	13 Avg for View: 13 (0.00%)	215 % of Total: 13.95% (1,541)	8.37% Avg for View: 27.32% (-69.36%)	8.51 Avg for View: 7.05 (20.63%)	24 % of Total: 13.26% (181)	US$0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (US$0.00)	11.16% Avg for View: 11.75% (-4.96%)
1. /	12,980 (56.14%)	398 (62.97%)	3.07%	13	124 (57.67%)	4.03%	10.31	14 (58.33%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	11.29%
2. [redacted]	1,501 (6.49%)	20 (3.16%)	1.33%	11	6 (2.79%)	0.00%	11.00	1 (4.17%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	16.67%
3. [redacted]	1,410 (6.10%)	28 (4.43%)	1.99%	14	9 (4.19%)	22.22%	4.22	2 (8.33%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	22.22%
4. [redacted]	1,027 (4.44%)	16 (2.53%)	1.56%	9.3	6 (2.79%)	33.33%	3.83	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
5. [redacted]	768 (3.32%)	3 (0.47%)	0.39%	16	2 (0.93%)	0.00%	3.00	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
6. [redacted]	700 (3.03%)	56 (8.86%)	8.00%	8.2	22 (10.23%)	27.27%	7.36	2 (8.33%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	9.09%
7. [redacted]	668 (2.89%)	13 (2.06%)	1.95%	5.7	4 (1.86%)	0.00%	4.50	4 (16.67%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	100.00%

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What Can You Do?

- Find landing pages that are attracting many users through Google organic search (e.g., high impressions and high click-through rate) but where users are not engaging with the website. In this case, you should consider **improving your landing pages.**
- Find landing pages that have high site engagement but are not successfully attracting users from Google organic search (e.g., have low click-through rate). In this case, you might benefit from **improving titles and descriptions shown in search.**
- Learn which queries are ranking well for each organic landing page.
- Segment organic performance by device category (desktop, tablet, mobile) in the

Countries Report

If you wanted to review how your content performs in different countries, then you'd look at the Countries report.

What you need to be looking for here is a positive search performance, like click-through rate and position, but poor engagement metrics like bounce rate and goal completions.

This would indicate that there might be a need to develop a language-specific version of your site for users in those countries.

Country	Device Category	Acquisition					Behaviour		Conversions All Goals		
		Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Average Position	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Goal Completions	Goal Value	Goal Conversion Rate
		63,953 % of Total: 100.00% (63,953)	1,664 % of Total: 100.00% (1,664)	2.60% Avg for View: 2.60% (0.00%)	12 Avg for View: 12 (0.00%)	1,668 % of Total: 48.07% (3,470)	43.35% Avg for View: 41.01% (5.70%)	3.63 Avg for View: 4.81 (-24.58%)	117 % of Total: 48.55% (241)	US$0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (US$0.00)	7.01% Avg for View: 6.95% (1.00%)
1. United Kingdom	desktop	**15,378** (24.05%)	881 (52.94%)	5.73%	7.1	914 (54.80%)	35.67%	4.05	75 (64.10%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	8.21%
2. United States	desktop	**13,052** (20.41%)	70 (4.21%)	0.54%	17	69 (4.14%)	55.07%	2.59	6 (5.13%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	8.70%
3. United Kingdom	mobile	**3,358** (5.25%)	156 (9.38%)	4.65%	5.4	150 (8.99%)	52.00%	2.93	7 (5.98%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	4.67%

Devices Report

Using the Devices report, you can compare desktop, mobile and tablet search performance and engagement metrics together to quickly identify how users on each device engage with your content.

On top of this, poor user engagement on specific devices highlights a need to improve the user experience on that particular device.

Primary Dimension: Device Category

Secondary dimension | advanced

Device Category	Acquisition					Behaviour		Conversions (All Goals)		
	Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Average Position	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Goal Completions	Goal Value	Goal Conversion Rate
	64,446 % of Total: 100.00% (64,446)	1,671 % of Total: 100.00% (1,671)	2.59% Avg for View: 2.59% (0.00%)	12 Avg for View: 12 (0.00%)	1,679 % of Total: 47.94% (3,502)	43.06% Avg for View: 40.63% (5.97%)	3.65 Avg for View: 4.85 (-24.79%)	117 % of Total: 47.56% (246)	US$0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (US$0.00)	6.97% Avg for View: 7.02% (-0.80%)
1. desktop	57,561 (89.32%)	1,395 (83.48%)	2.42%	13	1,418 (84.46%)	40.48%	3.84	108 (92.31%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	7.62%
2. mobile	5,502 (8.54%)	226 (13.52%)	4.11%	6.9	207 (12.33%)	57.97%	2.58	7 (5.98%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	3.38%
3. tablet	1,383 (2.15%)	50 (2.99%)	3.62%	6.3	54 (3.22%)	53.70%	2.78	2 (1.71%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)	3.70%

Queries Report

Lists the top queries that caused your site to show up in Google and is the only report that doesn't integrate with Google Analytics.

However, what's useful here is that you can choose Country and Devices as a secondary dimension to help you understand the type of content you should be generating for different content or devices.

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Things to Remember

- Landing Pages, Countries and Devices will show both Search Console data and Google Analytics data, while the Queries report will only show Search Console data for individual queries.
- The Search Console data is still limited to the previous 90 days, so if you'd like to analyze this data over time, consider downloading it every month.
- As with the Search Console, the data is still delayed by approximately two days.
- Keyword data is still limited as Google does not display some queries (not set or not provided) including personal or sensitive information.
- Clicks from Search Console may differ from total sessions in Google Analytics.
- Any segment that is applied to the new combined reports will only apply to Google Analytics data.

Conclusion

- If you haven't linked your Google Analytics and Search Console properties, then you really should do so now. Even though you can still access all of the same data independently on both properties, it really does help you get a broader picture of your SEO performance when you can see the data from both sources combined.

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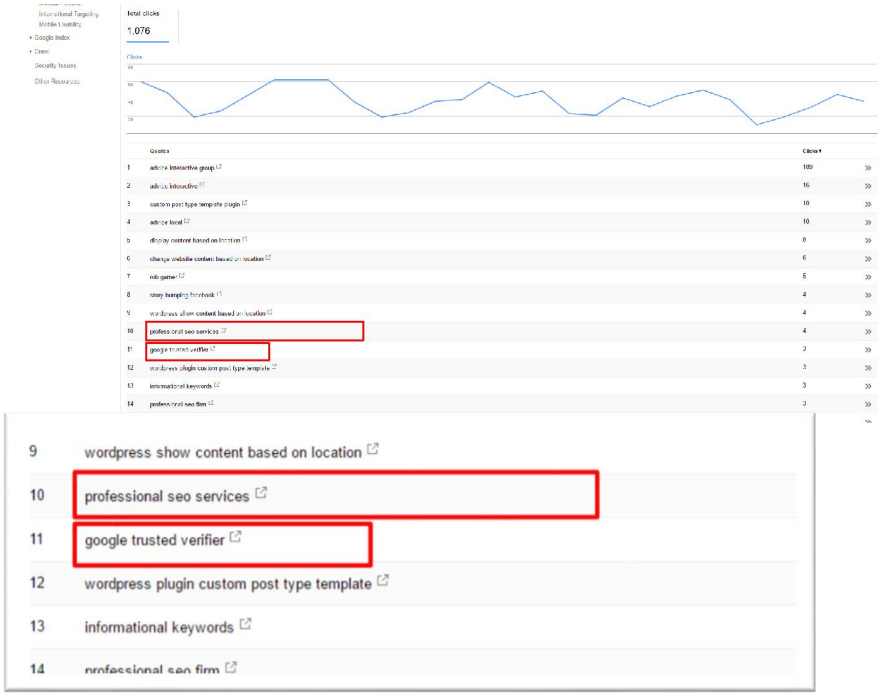
Tool Tip # 3
Search Console — Search Traffic

Search Traffic

- Search Console does not even begin to hold a candle to the raw information and comprehensive nature of Google Analytics.
- However, for the purposes of uncovering “Not Provided” keywords, Search Console is actually able to provide a unique service that Google Analytics cannot.
- Not only does it allow you to see a basic overview of the keywords that are leading visitors to your website, it also gives you the ability to determine the click-through rate of the keywords from Google Search.



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Tool Tip # 4
Google Trends

Google Trends

- Almost every SEO and marketer is familiar with it, but very few actually use it to enhance their work.
- Which is a shame, because it packs a powerful punch for anyone looking to reclaim their “not provided” keywords.
- The first, and easiest way to get a decent overview of your keywords’ performance is to simply type in your brand name and analyze how your brand has been performing over the past months or years.

For example, you might notice that the primary search term associated with your brand has changed from “Blog” to “Pricing” due to a shift in public perception.

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Tool Tip # 5
Google Tag Manager

So what's a "tag manager" anyway?

- Tag managers were built to give us a way to update our sites and, at the same time, free up the IT team to focus on more important projects… like that new cart design the boss wants.

- Google Tag Manager gives us, as marketers, a whole new level of tracking ability.

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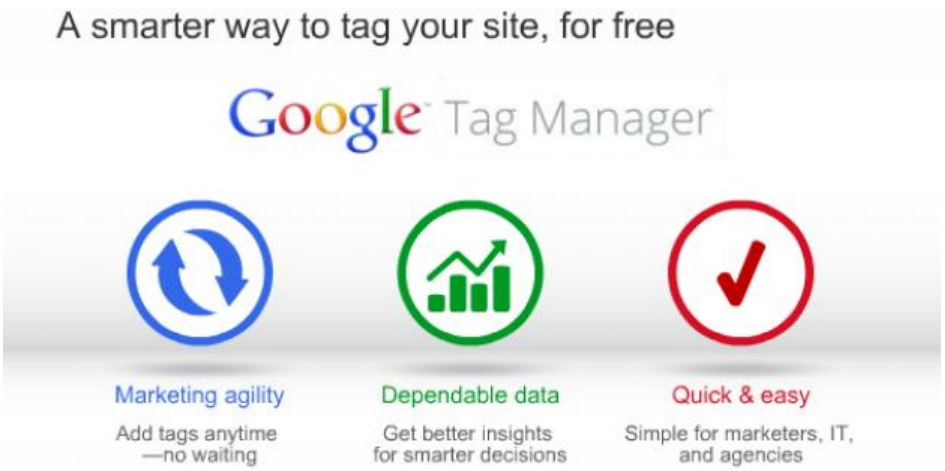
Google Tag Manager

Simple to use tag manager for adding and managing marketing tags like:

- Conversion Pixels
- Analytics Codes
- Remarketing Pixels

Can be used to build advanced analytics like:

- Outbound link tracking
- Rich media tracking
- Data layer integrations
- Integrating with other platforms, ad networks and tools



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Tool Tip # 6
Use Tools

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Keyword Research

- After Google limited Keyword Planner results and volume in 2016, we needed an efficient way to do keyword research.
- No tool, even Keyword Planner, displays a list of ALL keywords – instead we find keywords from a number of sources.
- Now, we use a number of tools depending on the client, type of keyword and content.

Invest in SEO Software or Service

- While this is certainly not the cheapest option, it is the simplest and most convenient.
- Companies like SEMrush, Ahrefs, KISSmetrics, and Authority Labs have created numerous tools to help you properly analyze your keyword data and sort of unlock the “box” where Google has placed all of your data.
- Luckily, you can get access to these tools for a relatively low cost.

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Rank Tracking

- Accurate rank tracking is critical to planning, running and optimizing SEO campaigns.
- Keyword rank tracking has become increasingly difficult with the rise of mobile and personalized results.
- Set up rank tracking by tagging each keyword with Geo and Customer Journey for advanced tracking and metrics.

Rank Tracking Tools

- We recommend tracking with at least 1 of the following:
  - Agency Analytics
  - Nozzle
  - Pro Rank Tracker
  - SERPFox
  - Authority Labs
  - Ahrefs
  - SEMRush
  - SERPWoo
- We use Agency Analytics and Ahrefs due to reporting integrations and accuracy.

AgencyAnalytics ahrefs

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Link Building

- Targeting the right sites is key to launching successful link building campaigns.
- We use Ahrefs, Majestic and common sense to identify and target potential linking partners.
- Outreach campaigns are launched, managed and reported on using Pitchbox.

ahrefs

MAJESTIC

pitchbox

Link Analysis

Our minimum link metrics:

- Contextually relevant
- No spammy anchor text
- Domain Rating (Ahrefs) – Above 25
- Citation Flow ÷ Trust Flow (Majestic) = Less than 2
  - Topical Trust Flow (Majestic) is an EXCELLENT indicator of a strong link
- No minimum metrics for Domain Authority

Citation Management

- Outreach link building or citation building campaigns?
  - Both are needed for successful SEO campaigns!
- How do I build, manage and track my listings?

advicelocal
yext
MOZ
BrightLocal
Synup
Loganix

It doesn't have to be a death sentence.

- Google's "Not Provided" data is admittedly a hindrance to internet marketing success.
- By using the above methods, you can access all of the data necessary to continue on your journey to keyword domination.
- It might not be as simple or effective, but these tactics will still get the job done.

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Last But Not Least…

More conspiracy stuff to think about.

You pay your money, you get your data.

- Google is continuing to provide complete keyword data for its AdWords advertisers.
- Google is in the business of selling advertising and cannot afford to alienate their paying customers.
- The harsh reality is that Google doesn't really care one way or the other about reporting the full data to the web site owners receiving traffic.
- So if you don't advertise, you lose.

Don’t Click on the Ad

- Google is not protecting the privacy of visitors who click on ads.
- Google has introduced the (not provided) in the interest of protecting user privacy, but clearly some Google users are more equal than others.
- In this case, visitors foolish enough to click on Google ads are having their privacy violated.

Monopoly on the Search Market

- Google initially said that only a small proportion of data will be keyword (not provided).

- Google may not have any obligation to report this data, but given its **monopoly on the search market**, think of the ramifications if it decided to withhold **all** search query data?

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Can You Say…
Conspiracy Theory?

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Questions?

Email: BColeman@AdviceLocal.com
Tweet: @BernieColeman