

SEO: A ROADMAP FOR NAVIGATING AN EVER-CHANGING LANDSCAPE

SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW SEO? THINK AGAIN.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a moving target, not only because the number of websites increases by millions¹ every day, but also because the search engines change their ranking algorithms frequently. The major algorithm updates are not even half of the full story. There are often hundreds of updates every year and that's what keeps us, SEOs on our toes.

SEO is like an onion,
there are many layers.

Let's start with the basics and here are 29 of them to get you on the right track...

¹<https://news.netcraft.com/archives/2019/08/15/august-2019-web-server-survey.html>

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SEO, A DEFINITION

Search Engine Optimization is about getting a good ranking for your website with several key terms that people are looking for on search engines. This sounds simple enough, but there are several elements that create a page with a strong ranking. (Spoiler Alert: We'll be looking at those in this ebook.)

For example, anyone can get a #1 ranking for a keyword search term that no-one is looking for. That's easy. What's challenging is finding ways to get on page 1 of search results for keywords that many people are searching for.

Say you are a company doing research on antibiotic resistance. You get a call from an SEO firm. We'll call them SEO Gurus for fun. They tell you they can get your company on page 1 of the search listings. You're excited because you know how much traffic that will provide.

But wait! What they didn't tell you is that the search term they will get you a page 1 listing for is "antibiotic resistance dataset." Well you think, that's still something we offer, so we would be happy with the page 1 ranking. Hold on! Let's take a look at how many people are searching for that keyword:

What you see just below the search query in Google is the following:

1. Volume is the number of times this phrase is searched per month in the U.S.
2. CPC is the cost you would pay to advertise on this term
3. Competition indicates how many other competitors there are for the term

Now what do you think? That's right, the SEO Gurus aren't looking that great anymore and you've now signed up for a 6 month contract with them that you can't get out of. Don't do it. Call E29 Marketing first and we'll explain everything in detail and guide you on all your options.

Your next question:

How do I get a page 1 ranking on Google?

By doing keyword research, understanding what search engines are looking for, promoting the website on other marketing channels and being strategic about on-page and off-page SEO.

Sounds good, yes? Let's learn some more!



antibiotic resistance dataset



Volume: 0/mo | CPC: \$0.00 | Competition: 0 ★

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SEO IS NOT PAID SEARCH


One of my biggest secret annoyances about search is that so many people confuse paid search and SEO. Since smart marketing folks often call paid search "SEM" for Search Engine Marketing, it gets confused with SEO and then both are referenced as the same thing. If you are using SEO and SEM interchangeably, please don't. It is wrong!

Paid search is very different from SEO.


Paid search is when advertisers pay to show up with text listings (and/or display ads) on Google's Search and Display network. These listings look very different from Organic or free search listings and the process for getting ranked for paid search is based on ad quality, how much you're willing to bid on specific keyword terms and how much money you're willing to spend per day.

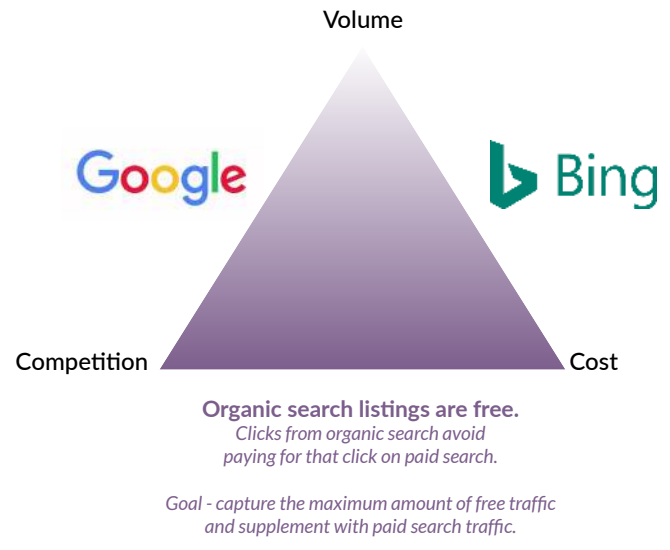
For example, if we are selling gift boxes, we might place an ad on Google which would look like this:

Retail Gift Boxes | In Stock. Ships Today | ULINE.com

 www.uline.com/
 ★★★★★ Rating for uline.com: 5.0 - On-time delivery: 99%+
 ULINE - Over 36,000 Products. Huge Catalog! Same Day Shipping. Fast Delivery.
 [Retail Gift Boxes](#) · [Apparel Boxes](#) · [Food Boxes](#) · [Retail Display Boxes](#)

Gift Boxes: 6,000 Styles | Cardboard, Plastic & Colors

 www.papermart.com/
 We Ship Today on In Stock **gift boxes** at the lowest prices. PaperMart Since 1921



Note the Ad specifications in green. These appear at the top of the page and would likely cost upwards of \$1.41 per click. I know that because of my handy dandy Keywords Everywhere tool. In the image below, CPC means cost per click. Oh and notice that the competition is 1, which is actually 100%, i.e. ranking for this keyword term organically, is very difficult.

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DID YOU KNOW?

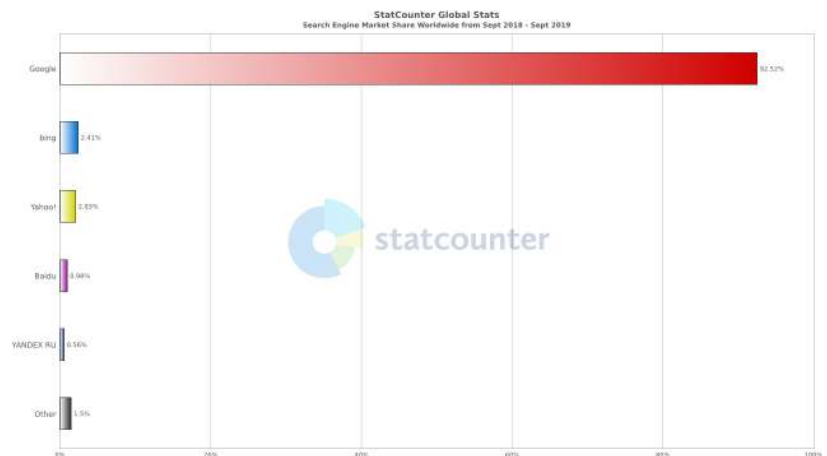
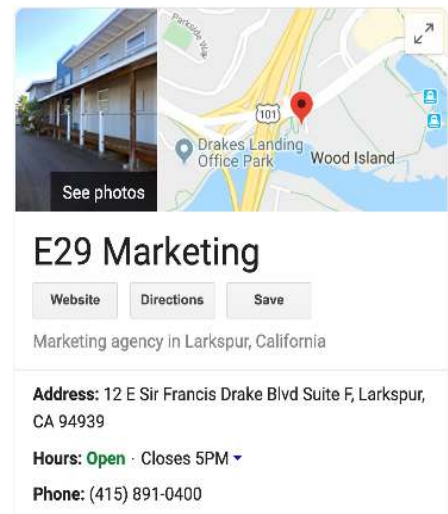
Not All Search Results on Google Lead Searchers To Your Website.

It's 2019. If you enter a search into a search engine, do you expect the results you see to take you to a relevant website? Your initial answer may be yes, however you may also be seeing enough information in the search engine results so that you don't need to visit a particular website. For example, if you want to know the address of E29 Marketing, you could get that information on Google without ever visiting the E29marketing.com website.

Rand Fishkin, CEO of SparkToro and former CEO of Moz, did a survey and study on this recently, which showed that less than half of Google search results actually end up on a website.²

This means we have to think carefully about how search results are provided by search engines and adapt to an everchanging landscape. Think about maps, voice search, social media, rich content and review sites. All of these may be taking valuable SEO traffic away from your website, but still providing valuable information to your potential customer.

Enter Search strategy. Here's where you need someone who understands search from a holistic point of view. A Search Strategist will guide you through the ever changing search landscape and steer you in the direction best for your business.



Why do we focus on Google only and not other search engines?

Good question! In case you're wondering:
Google has more than 90% of search engine market share worldwide.

Image source: <https://gs.statcounter.com/search-engine-market-share#monthly-201809-201909-bar>
²<https://sparktoro.com/blog/less-than-half-of-google-searches-now-result-in-a-click/>

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SEO: ON PAGE AND OFF PAGE

There are two ways to get good organic search rankings. They are on page and off page.

ON PAGE SEO

On page refers to code and text changes on the actual page of the website to be ranked.

OFF PAGE SEO

Off page is about how many other sites are linking back to the page you want ranked and how many

other signals are showing the search engines that the page is valuable. Signals may include:

- Mentions on Social Media
- Press releases
- Video content
- Blogs referencing the page and focus keywords
- Reviews
- User generated content

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SEARCH RANKING

What is a search engine ranking?

It's also called a SERP or search engine results placement.

Very simply, your ranking is how far down the list of results your website's listing appears. For example, if you are showing up at the top of the list of organic search results, your ranking is #1. If you are at the top of page 2 of the search results your ranking is somewhere between 10 and 12 depending on the engine.

Why is ranking important?

Well, if you don't show up on the 1st page of search results, it's unlikely you will be seen or clicked on. People have attention spans less than that of a goldfish and want their information as fast as possible. This means they look at the first page of search results and either click on a few or do another search.



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KEYWORD RESEARCH

SEO is all about keywords. After all, search engines serve up search results based on keywords entered into the search box. This is called the search query.

Keyword research is a process to figure out which keywords are best to include on a website and on each page, in order to optimize the content for best organic search engine results.

The focus keyword (or search phrase), is the core of what the page is all about and should also be the keyword or phrase you are trying to rank for.

BONUS CONTENT FOR READING THIS FAR:

Tools for Keyword Research: Keywords Everywhere⁴, Google Trends⁵, Google AdWords Keyword Planner

Keywords must appear in strategic places throughout the HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) document. This is so search engines can understand what the content of each page is about.

Let's talk about some of those strategic places next...

⁴<https://keywordseverywhere.com/>

⁵<https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=US>

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TITLE

The title tag is what displays in a tab in your browser when you're visiting a certain page. It is also an excellent place to include keywords because search engines use the title to see what the page is about.

The title tag is particularly important for SEO, because search engines use it when displaying a search engine result.

E29 Marketing | Flexible, Customized Marketing

 www.e29marketing.com/marketing/advertising ▼

Consumer, Shopper, Brand & Social **Marketing**. Tailored to Your Business's Needs. Tailored to Your Brand. Customer Insights. Social Media Strategy. Services: Full-Service Agency, Data-Driven Approach, Social Media, Retail, Branding, Strategy.

[Contact Us](#) · [What We Do](#) · [Extensions Blog](#) · [Our Work](#) · [Resource Center](#)

In the above example, the title is "E29 Marketing | Flexible, Customized Marketing."

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META DESCRIPTION

The meta description is a short paragraph of text that describes the content of the page. This is often used by the search engine as the description for the page under the search results title. It's important to include keywords in the meta description.

In the above example (in #7), the meta description is "Consumer, Shopper, Brand & Social Marketing. Tailored to Your Business' Needs. Tailored to Your Brand. Customer Insights. Social Media Strategy. Services: Full-Service Agency, Data-Driven Approach, Social Media, Retail, Branding, Strategy."

⁴<https://keywordseverywhere.com/>

⁵<https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=US>

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META KEYWORDS

This one used to be a place where people tried to hack the engines by placing lots of high-volume keywords into this area, even if there was no content about those keywords on the page. That's why you don't see too many websites using the meta keywords tag today.

Search engines often ignore the meta keywords because it was abused by black-hat SEOers and it has the potential to include spam keywords.

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HEADING TAGS

These are H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, etc. and show headings in various sizes from largest to smallest. The best practice for SEO is to have only one H1 tag and include the focus keyword in it. You may use as many of the other heading tags on the page, i.e. several H2s, but only one H1 tag.

Secrets from the trenches: The H1 tag is the most frequently ignored by web developers and a common SEO recommendation we make.

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ALT TAGS

These are image descriptions for people with vision impairment. Their purpose is to provide accessibility, but they may also include keywords especially if the images are related to the focus keyword for that specific page.

Alt tags are not just good for SEO. They also provide useful information for people who are vision impaired.

⁴<https://keywordseverywhere.com/>
⁵<https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=US>

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BODY CONTENT

The text on the page that the visitor reads is called the body content and should include a certain percentage of the focus keyword relative to the number of words on the page. SEOs call this keyword density.

Veer right.

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LINKING – EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL

We are still on on-page SEO, but not specific to keywords now. On each page, it is an SEO best practice to include at least one external link, i.e. a link to another website that you do not own.

Why would I want to link to another website and send my precious traffic somewhere else? Here's why: The Internet is a web of links. Search engines use links to traverse the web. Like a spider using nodes on a web, search engines use links as nodes to crawl the website and index it as best they can. When a page has no links, the engine must stop and turn around which takes some time.

It's also a best practice to include internal links, i.e. link to other pages on the same website. For example, if you write about SEO on blogpost A and paid search on blogpost B, it would be good to link

to any references of SEO on blogpost B from blogpost A and vice versa.

- Blogpost A links to Blogpost B
- Blogpost B links to Blogpost A
- Blogpost C links to Blogpost A
- Blogpost B links to Blogpost C

In short: Make it easy for both people and search engines to traverse your content and the web. As is true for most businesses, provide a good experience and your customers will return.

This brings us to user experience or #UX. This is a huge trend in business today and it applies not only to websites, but also to customer care as well (#CX).

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USABILITY

While not technically an SEO tactic, making sure your website is as user friendly as possible can have a big impact on your SEO. The more people that stay and engage on your website, the more that search engines believe your content is high quality.

Web page content should be read by web developers, which is a common SEO recommendation we make.

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LINK BUILDING

Let's build some links. I link to you and you link to me. Then we all get rich. Yay!!!

You wish!

Many people believe that links can be purchased and reciprocated to get a high PageRank or number of backlinks. However, quantity is not the only factor. The quality of the site linking to yours plays a very large role as well. For example, a link from a high authority website like Forbes.com or HuffingtonPost.com is better than getting a link from your nephew on his brand new website that he built about gaming.

External links can also give context to the content on your page.

There is a relatively new term in SEO land called "authority hacking." This is a way to build authority for a certain page by encouraging other people to talk about it. The hacking part doesn't necessarily mean doing black hat or evil things to trick search engines, but rather, act the way humans do, encourage friends to talk about and link to unique content. Here's where you need to be innovative.

What creative ways can you think of to get people talking about your product and brand on their favorite online spaces?

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PAGE SPEED

Queue the Top Gun music. Google feels the need... the need for speed.

Google wants your website to be as fast as possible because this makes for the best user experience.

When a searcher gets to a webpage that loads fast, has good information and is easy to navigate, they stay longer and engage more with the website. This in turn sends signals back to Google that the content is what the visitor was looking for, and then Google rewards the website by giving it a better search ranking.

Google also provides a handy page speed test tool for you to use with tips for how to improve your website speed. Take a look.⁶

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TRAFFIC

This one is interesting. The more traffic a URL gets, the better it looks to a search engine. Let's say you're spending a lot of money to promote a website and all of a sudden your budget runs out and you don't get more funding. Your search engine rankings will likely decline, because the amount of traffic has dropped off.

The decline in overall traffic tells the search engines that not as many people are engaging with the content, so it may not be as good of a resource to provide to searchers.

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URL STRUCTURE

How you set up your site can make a big difference for SEO. It's important to use keywords in directory names and categorize information so that search engines can easily understand the website content.

Advanced/Technical SEO Considerations...

⁶<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>

ROBOTS.txt

This is a developer tool⁷, but often gets misused. It is meant to provide search engines with direction about which pages to index and follow, but often developers forget to set it correctly at launch and then you have a website that is basically telling search engines to go away until the Robots.txt file is changed to welcome search engines again.

Quick Story: A client came to us and said: “Why am I not getting any organic search traffic?” A quick check of the code showed that the developer had incorrectly set the robots.txt file, effectively telling search to go away. For 6 months the website was sitting and hoping for search traffic, but the engines were not invited to the page. It was a one character change in the robots.txt file and the engines were then welcome again.

Not getting any organic search traffic? Check your robots.txt file!

CANONICALIZATION

Since duplicate content is a no-no for search engine optimization, canonicalization can help guide search engines to your main or original piece of content.

When search engines crawl many URLs with very similar content, multiple pages with identical or similar content can dilute your ranking potential and search engines may pick the wrong URL as the “main” page of content. The rel canonical tag helps you control your duplicate content. It effectively tells search engines which version of a URL you want to appear in search results.

Canonicalization can be complicated. Learn more at Moz⁸.

⁷<https://www.robotstxt.org/>

⁸<https://moz.com/learn/seo/canonicalization>

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XML SITEMAPS

XML stands for extensible markup language which tells search engine robots important information about each page of your site. XML sitemaps make it easier for Google to find and index your pages. Remember that Google ranks web pages, so all the pages on your website are valuable, not just the homepage.

Including an XML Sitemap is an SEO best practice, so it's always good to have one. It's also easy to create one. Check out these free tools:

Sitemap generator tools:

<https://www.xml-sitemaps.com/>

<https://xmlsitemapgenerator.org/>

People also ask

What is an XML sitemap SEO? ▾

Why is an XML sitemap important? ▾

Do I need an XML sitemap? ▾

What is the difference between XML sitemap and HTML sitemap? ▾

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SCHEMA AND MICROFORMATS

These are special ways to code your site so that Google understands what type of content each element is. Having these structured data elements in place, allows you to get what is commonly referred to as rank zero. Rank zero is a ranking before the number one organic search result. Check whether your webpage has structured data using the Structured Data Testing Tool⁹.

⁹<https://search.google.com/structured-data/testing-tool/u/0/>

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OPEN GRAPH AND TWITTER CARDS

These enable people to share your content on Facebook, Twitter and other social networks with images that you specify. If you don't have Open Graph code references or Twitter cards, an image may not appear correctly when people share links to your website on social networks.

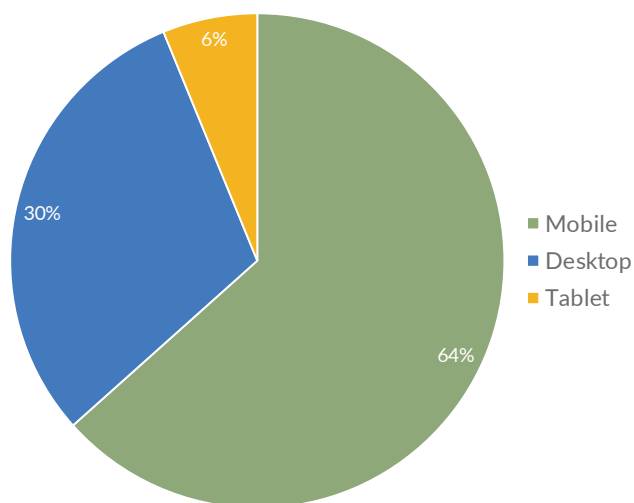
A wonderful tool for testing how your page will display when someone links to it on Twitter is the Twitter Card Validator¹⁰. Try it on your site. You may be surprised.

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AMP

Accelerated Mobile Pages were introduced to provide faster website content on mobile devices. Google loves this so much that it may provide higher rankings to sites that offer AMP. Google encourages website owners to provide mobile friendly and super fast sites because the majority of website content is consumed on mobile devices.

Remember to check your Analytics to understand what devices your audience is using to view your site. It is highly likely that the majority of your traffic will be coming from mobile devices.



¹⁰<https://search.google.com/structured-data/testing-tool/u/0/>

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LANGUAGE ENCODING

This is an easy one to do. Just add your lang ref tag and your SEO will be a tiny bit better. Every little bit counts!

If you have an English site and are located in the U.S. your website should include lang="en-US" in the opening HTML tag.

```
<html lang="en-US">
```

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RICH SNIPPETS

For SEO, rich snippets offer ways for your search listings to stand out. Instead of the usual search listing with a title, URL and meta description, a rich snippet includes more information like review ratings. For example:

Here's a normal search listing:

Probiotics for Babies. Clinically Proven. Evivo Baby Probiotic ...

<https://www.evivo.com> ▾

Evivo probiotics for babies are clinically proven to protect your baby's gut from potentially harmful bacteria. Learn more about Evivo baby probiotic powder, an ...

and here's a listing with rich snippets:

Evivo Baby Probiotic Starter Kit with Activated B ... - Amazon.com

<https://www.amazon.com> ▸ [Evivo-Probiotic-Starter-Activated-infantis](#)

★★★★★ Rating: 3.5 - 46 reviews

Buy Evivo Baby Probiotic Starter Kit with Activated B. infantis - 3-Months Supply (12-Weeks) Amazon.com ✓ FREE SHIPPING on qualified orders.

Note that the stars make the listing stand out a bit more. This can have an impact on your click through rate. A higher click through rate leads to more traffic. And as we know from what we've learned in Traffic above (#17), more traffic means better rankings.

If you'd like to know more about how to get rich snippets on your website, [let us know!](#)

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

First, note that Google Analytics is not the be all and end all. While your organic search traffic may be the largest source of sessions to the website, organic traffic is very much impacted by activity on other marketing channels.

Make sure you are reaching customers at all stages of their journey. You may need display advertising, social media (organic and paid), public relations, paid search, influencer content and referral partnerships to build awareness of your brand.

Once people are aware of your brand, and can recall it when they have a need, they will likely search for either your brand or what you're offering. This is the consideration phase and where you have to

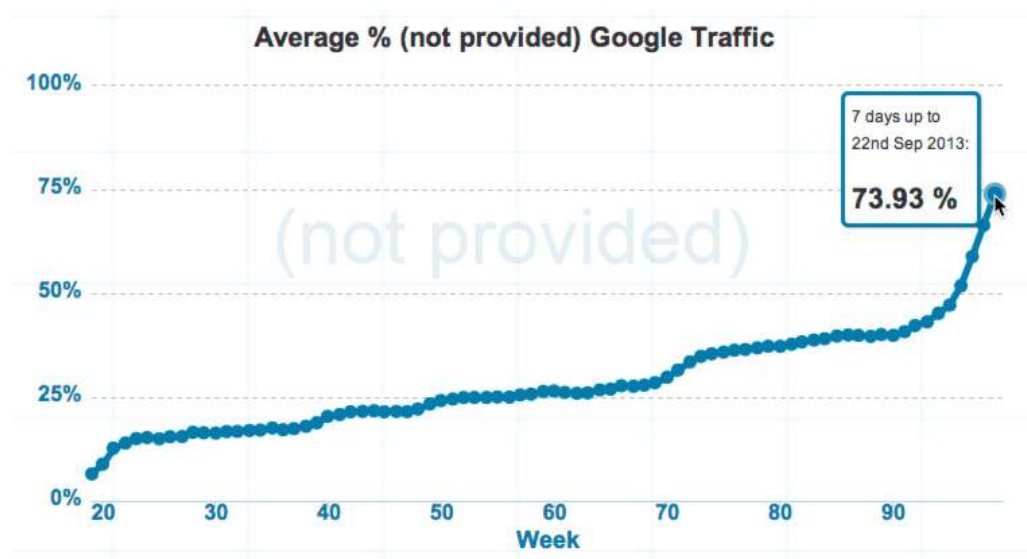
compete for search rankings. It's a good idea to be in both organic search results and also in the paid search results so that your company is always visible for your main keywords.

Check your analytics to see where your visitors and purchasing customers are coming from. For many sites it will appear that organic search is the top referrer always, however what many marketers don't realize is that SEO alone is not enough.

All other marketing channels impact how you appear in search and also whether a customer will search for your business.

SEARCH CONSOLE

It's important to monitor your SEO results with Google Search Console, because Google Analytics doesn't provide a lot of keyword information. There used to be a site that monitored the Not Provided count. It was so popular among SEOs that a company decided to purchase it because of its domain authority.



What the above chart shows is that Google slowly moved away from showing keyword data on Google Analytics until now, where they don't show much at all. Instead, SEOs use Google Search Console to understand which keywords are generating the most traffic.

Need help understanding or setting up Google Search Console? Give us a holler!

ATTRIBUTION

Google Analytics is a last interaction attribution channel. That means it only tracks the last visit and reports that channel as the source of the transaction or goal completion.

While this seems fine at first, you have to think about it like a basketball game. Just like how there are many assists that contribute to scoring a basket, there are many assisting views of the site from other channels before we see a conversion in organic search or paid search.

The key is to remember that all roads lead to search, but organic and paid search both rely on all those other advertising and marketing initiatives. Getting the right marketing mix in terms of building awareness, consideration and then driving trial and purchase is not only good for your brand in general, but it also impacts your search results.

Now you're an SEO expert with an understanding of 29 considerations. If that's not enough to keep you busy, don't worry there are lots of rules, tools and tactics to discover. Just ask your friend Google and let us know if you need some help along the way. *Happy optimizing!*

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<https://search.google.com/structured-data/testing-tool/u/0/>

ABOUT E29 MARKETING

E29 is a boutique, full-service marketing agency specializing in Digital and Shopper Marketing. Our commitment at E29 is developing and implementing strategic work of unparalleled quality. We are a seasoned team of experts, with deep experience in CPG and Retail. Located on the sunny side of the Golden Gate bridge, our office is nestled in Larkspur, CA. We also have several remote locations across the US.



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