How to increase traffic in 3 simple steps

Over the past year, Google has taken away lots of the keyword data it used to provide for free, which is a pain. Keywords are a great way of understanding what potential customers are searching for. Particularly annoying was when keywords disappeared from Google Analytics. Yet, it’s not all bad news. At the start of the year, Google improved the quality of the keyword data it provides in Webmaster Tools. Which means there are now three easy steps to replacing your lost keyword data.

**Step 1: Where is the traffic?**

Before we start looking for keywords, we need to understand Google’s listings.

We’re all so familiar with Google and its search results page that we stop analysing what we see.

Crucially, we want to know where our audience is. Which positions do searchers click on - and why? Let’s assume I run a small business and I’m looking for supplier of name badges for my employees. Here is a search I ran for ‘name badges’ - showing just the top three organic results:
It’s no secret that the first organic result usually gets more traffic than any other. Cleverer marketers than me have studied the search results, using a combination of eye tracking studies and search engine data, to produce estimates of the proportion of traffic that clicks on each result.

So, what do we know?

Well, the research suggests that roughly 30-40% of the organic traffic will click on the first result. Search data that leaked from AOL in 2006 suggested that first position receives 42% of clicks. A survey by Chitikta, the online advertising network, suggests a figure of 33% for first position. At Receptional we often use a figure of 40% when planning our campaigns.
Even if we don’t take the numbers literally - and we shouldn’t, because the click-through rates (CTRs) will be different for different keywords - it’s clear that number one spot is a very good place to be.

Not everyone can get to first position. So, let's look at the lower listings. What proportion of searchers do you think click on the listings in 2nd position?

Well, second spot does well; it gets about 12% of clicks. But that’s quite a drop. And the decline in click-throughs continues down the listing:
If you're in 4th spot, you're getting (roughly) 6% of search traffic. That is a big difference from 1st place. Which only reinforces how important that top spot can be.

Now let’s consider the whole of the first page - the first 10 results in Google's listings. What proportion of the clicks go to the first 10 results? Some quick math tells us it's about 86% of traffic.

* These figures are taken from AOL’s leaked search data from 2006. Actual figures will vary by keyword and fluctuate over time.

Even though we know that CTRs vary by keyword, we can be confident that the majority of organic traffic will click on the first page listings. And almost half of searchers will click on the first organic result they see.
The rewards for getting to first position in Google’s results can be enormous. Which is why it’s crucial that you understand which keywords have the potential to drive traffic to your site.

**Step 2: Get Keywords from Webmaster Tools**

During the summer of 2013, following revelations that the US government had been covertly monitoring its data, Google tightened up security on its search results. The outcome was that keywords disappeared from Google Analytics - search queries now show up as ‘not provided’. Which, if you work in digital marketing, is a pain.

But there are workarounds. In December 2013 Google announced that it was improving the quality of the keyword data that it provides in its Webmaster Tools (WMT) software.

From now on, Webmaster Tools will be a key place to look for keyword data. If you’re running an SEO campaign - optimising your pages and building links to them - you’ll still be able to see whether that work is getting you more clicks by looking in WMT.

**What you see**

Here’s how to find your keyword data.

1. Log into your Webmaster Tools account.
2. Select the website you’d like to work with:
3. In the left-hand navigation click on ‘Search Traffic’ then ‘Search Queries’.

You’ll see the “queries” report, which shows all the keywords your site ranks for, regardless of whether the searcher clicks through to your site. By default, the report is sorted by the number of impressions you are receiving.
You’ll also see the number of clicks your site received for each keyword, along with your site’s average position in Google’s listings, and the click through rate (CTR) for each keyword.

We have already seen that Average Position (your site’s ranking) is important, as it has an enormous impact on the amount of traffic your site receives.

As you can see from the first result in the table, if your ranking is low (the bottom of the first page and beyond) or your listing isn’t appealing, your click-through rate can be 1% or less.

Whereas, the third result in the table shows that if your ranking is good (first position in this case) and your listing is well written with a strong call to action, then your click-through rate could be 40%, 50%, or even higher.

Here is an example of a listing for Morgan Pryce, the office lettings agency. As you can see, the listing is well written, connects to the firm’s Google+ page and includes contact details. All of which add credibility to the listing - and encourage searchers to click through to the firm’s website.
Limitations to the data

We’ll shortly look at how to increase the number of clicks your site receives. But first, there are some limitations to the WMT data. And while I wouldn’t want to get hung up on them, it’s worth knowing what they are.

1. Crucially, only the last 90 days of data is available. At my agency, Receptional, we have worked around this by building our own tool to collect and store keyword data, so we are able to track changes over a longer period.

2. You’re not seeing the actual terms used by searchers. The keyword data you’ll see is sample data, it’s not exact. So when you cross reference WMT’s ‘Click’ data against ‘Visits’ in Google Analytics you’ll see different numbers. But, of course, we see the same issue with other keyword data sources. Even the most high profile keyword research tools - Google’s Keyword Planner and Wordtracker - both use sample data.

3. Likewise, when you compare Google’s rank tracking data with any of the major rank tracking tools you’ll see discrepancies. Again, we have to be pragmatic.

4. The data in the report is delayed by two days. So, if it’s instant reporting you’re after ... tough. Sorry, but it’s not available.

5. Finally, there’s important information missing. For instance we have no sense of how well your keywords are converting. Getting lots of traffic is great, but if it’s not converting, it’s not helping your business.
That said, there’s little point in getting hung up about small differences in data. We are looking for clues to guide us, and any discrepancies in the data are unlikely to make much difference to the action we take.

So, I’ll repeat myself. Let’s not worry about differences in data.

**Step 3: Get more clicks**

Our next and final step is to use the keyword data to help us plan our SEO campaigns.

If your business is anything like ours, your marketing ‘to-do’ list is probably several pages long. Every month, there are thousands of improvements we’d like to make to our website, there are hundreds of improvements we really really need to make, and yet we only have time and resources to make a handful of changes. So, it’s important that we prioritise our work and focus on the improvements that are likely to have most benefit.

Some of our clients’ websites see visits from tens of thousands of different keywords each month. It’s only ever possible to build links and improve rankings for a small proportion of those keywords. So, we have to prioritise our work and choose keyword targets carefully.

We only ever want to target keywords that are relevant to your business. We are rarely interested in traffic for its own sake; we want to find keywords that are likely to convert into sales or enquiries. Let’s look at a real example.

In your Webmaster Tools account, you can download a spreadsheet of your rankings. Sort the spreadsheet by ‘Avg. position’.

In the table below you can see data from Receptional’s Webmaster Tools account. You can see three keywords where we rank in first position. One of the keywords is ‘cheshire cat face’. We’re relaxed about the fact that no-one clicks through to our site for that keyword. It’s not a relevant term.
So, next, let’s look for keywords that we know we can rank well for AND are relevant to our business.

**Keywords that already rank in first position**

We start our optimisation efforts by looking for quick wins. That means working with keywords that already rank in position 1, get lots of impressions, but fail to get clicks (a click-through rate of less than 7%).

Here is a fictional example. It shows the keyword ‘Receptional’ ranking in first position. Yet it’s only getting a 10% click through rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Query</th>
<th>Impressions</th>
<th>Clicks</th>
<th>CTR</th>
<th>Avg. position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>receptional</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Receptional is our brand term, so we’d hope to see a 30-40% click rate for a first-position listing. We know that 60-70%, even more, is possible.

There might be several reasons why the keywords isn’t attracting as much traffic as we’d like. Here are some quick checks you can make:

1. **Check your description in Google’s listings.** Is it accurate? Does it sell your services effectively? In real life, I ran a search for ‘call tracking’ software and here is one of the results I found. The description is barely relevant to the search, and doesn’t sell the company’s services.
As a comparison here is the next listing, for Mediahawk’s call tracking service. The listing explains the service much more clearly. The only element lacking is a strong call to action:

For more information about how to optimise your listing, check out Copy That Ranks Well Or Copy That’s Compelling? Why Not Both?

2. **Check on the number of competing ads.** If you’re operating in a competitive market, the chances are that lots of your competitors will be advertising against the keywords you’re targeting.

Let’s say we’re looking at a highly competitive market such as ‘online poker’. See how these UK listings are dominated by paid search ads. The presence of advertising is likely to reduce the click-through rates your site gets from the organic listings.
Similarly, if you’re competing in a retail market, you’re also likely to see Google’s shopping results, which push the organic results down the page. Again, here are the results for a search on ‘name badges’:
What can you do about it? Well, you can’t beat ‘em, so you might want to join ‘em. If you want to compete at the very top of Google’s results you should consider setting up a Google AdWords campaign. Many of our retail clients are getting great results from Google’s shopping listings (as shown above).

3. Are you fighting rich snippets? What do we mean by rich snippets? Well, we’re really talking about a Google listing that’s not just plain text.

Let’s look at an example. Imagine I’m looking for somewhere to buy ‘gin and tonic lip balm’ (hey, why not, it’s moisturising and tastes great!). I search on Google and in the result that’s shown below, we would say that the stars are a ‘rich snippet’. They stand out from the rest of the listing:

These rich media are likely to attract more clicks than plain text listings. They can
increase CTRs by around 20% compared to plain text results. For instance, which of these two recipe listings are you most likely to click on?

Most likely, you’ll click on the lower listing. The image and four stars give it more impact than the plain text listing that sits above it.

There are many types of rich snippets. You may have seen images...

... videos ...
... as well as event listings, social media activity and so on.

If you don’t yet have rich snippets set up on your site, it’s worth reading our rich snippets guide to find out more.

Keywords that rank in positions 2-4

At Receptional, our SEO consultants love finding keywords that rank in positions 2-4 in Google’s results. These keywords are their quick wins.

Why? Well, we know that the ranking page contains relevant content. And we know that the pages have sufficient authority to rank well. Often, a small amount of optimisation work can lift the page to the top of the listings, where it might attract 2-3 times as much traffic.

There are two main ways of improving your search engine optimisation (SEO): on-page changes and off-page changes (otherwise known as link building).

**On -page optimisation**

Start with **on-page optimisation**. As a starting point you’ll want to add relevant keywords to your page. And you can find out how in this short video.

Next, follow the process we outlined for keywords that rank in first position. You should check the click-through rates you’re getting and take action accordingly.

In the example shown below, we clearly need to check whether Receptional’s listings could be improved, because we’re not getting many clicks for ‘SEO success stories’:

![YouTube video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGITFJr_4Po)
Hang on though. Before you start any SEO work, it’s worth checking that there are sufficient impressions available to justify the work. If you were to rank in number 1 position, how much traffic can you expect to attract (take the impressions figure from WMT and multiply by 30%)? And how many of those visits can you expect to convert into new business?

In the table above, there would be little point in trying to improve our ranking for ‘first position seo’ as even if we were ranking in first position, there are too few visits for us to be interested.

**Off-page optimisation**

Once you’re happy with your on-page marketing, successful link building will be an important factor in improving your rankings.

You’ll want to promote the page so that it attracts links from external sites and gets shared on social networks. Link building is a big subject and the key to improving your rankings, but outside the scope of this article.

**Keywords that rank in positions 5-10**

Pages that rank in positions 5-10 in the search results have great potential. SEO work can help boost them into the first three positions - and we know that’s where a majority of the traffic will click.

You’ll need to follow the same steps that we have already discussed - check your listings, upgrade your on-page optimisation, and build links. But it’s likely that you’ll need to invest more resources than for keywords that are already ranking in higher positions. So, make sure you’re targeting terms that are going to generate traffic and sales.
In the table below are two examples of keywords that Receptional won’t be targeting. We get lots of impressions for the query ‘chromestore’ but it’s largely irrelevant to our business.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Avg. position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chromestore</td>
<td>4126</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find competitors AdWords keywords</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The query ‘find competitors AdWords keywords’ is more relevant, but there are too few impressions for it to be interesting. Even if we were to rank in number one spot, we’d be likely to receive fewer than 10 clicks per month (24 x 40%). So, in our SEO campaigns, we’ll ignore those keywords.

Keywords that rank below the first page

If you’re targeting keywords that rank below the first page, you want to be sure they’re going to generate good business. The process for improving your rankings remains the same, but the investment needed is even greater. So choose your targets with care.