

# SEO for Civilians

**An introduction to search engine  
optimization for non-geeks**

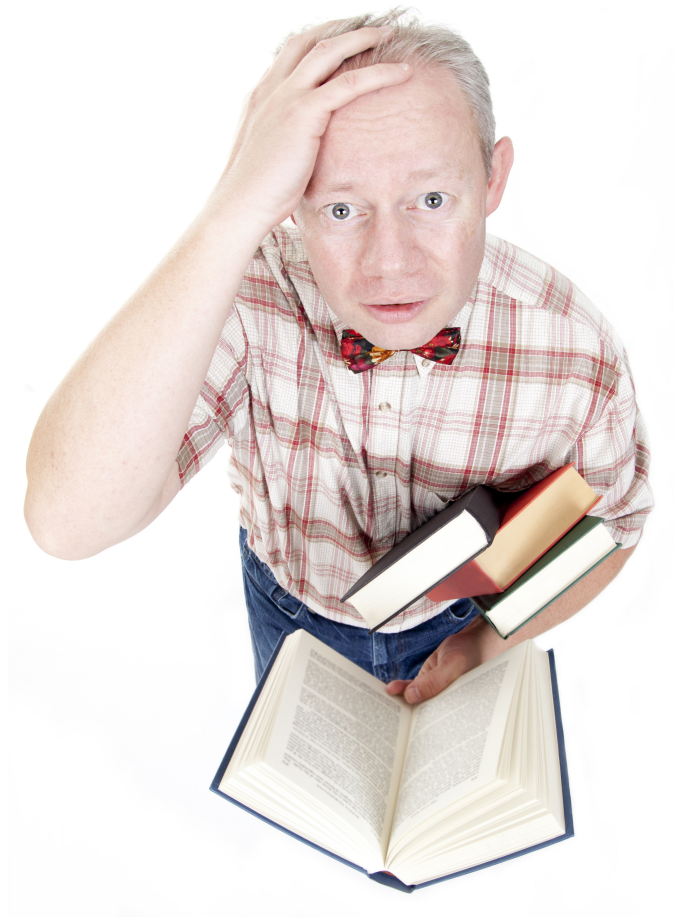
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# Introduction

Hi, you look like the type of person who is SEO-curious but doesn't want to make search and web analytics their life's work. Read on. You're in good company. SEO (search engine optimization) is so intertwined with business, sales and marketing strategies that just about everyone, from Fred in accounting to the CEO, could benefit from a deeper knowledge.

You'll learn about the right questions to ask your internal or external web experts, and the key analytics that illuminate progress toward SEO goals, and flags that might indicate trouble ahead. And, for the uninitiated, you'll learn essential terminology along the way.



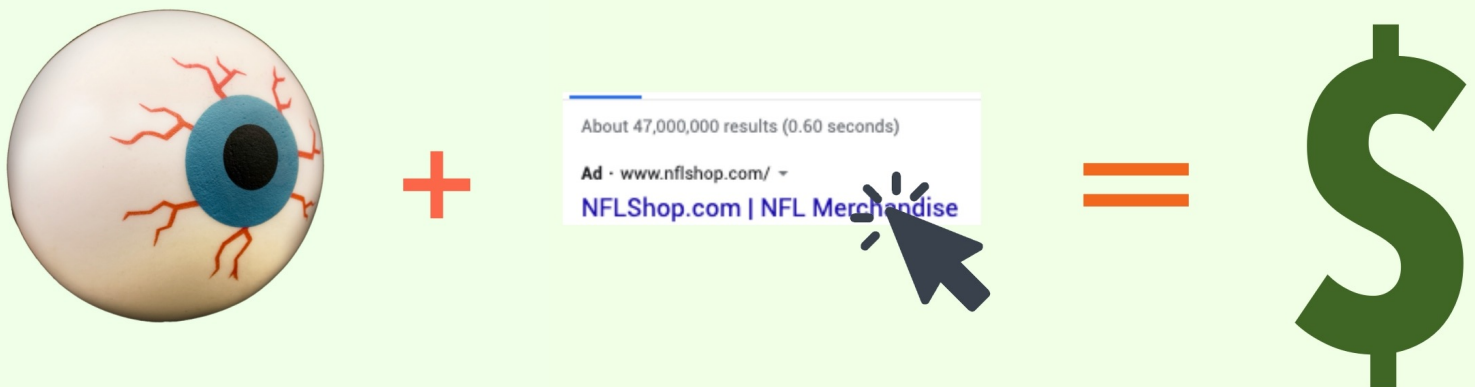
## Healthcare Search Stats

- **72%** of **B2B** medical buyers find products and services through search engines (Source: Media.Vocal)
- **5%** of all Google searches are health-related (Source: Google)
- Search drives more than **3.2 times** more hospital to hospital sites compared to non-search. (Source: Google)
- Patients who booked healthcare appointments ran **3e-times** as many searches than those who didn't. (Source: Google)

# Why You Should Care About SEO

The SEO strategy should align with business and marketing strategy that clearly articulates your products, describes your buyers and key benefits, and your business model. The myth is that SEO is something to be done to your site, like touching up a scratch on your car, when SEO is the engine of the site. SEO drives the content strategy — copy, images and video content and the structure of the site to how you'll capture leads, and match search inputs to the varying needs of your buyers. Given that 73% of consumers begin their buying journey with a search engine, SEO is crucial to making your business discoverable on the Internet, and to lure tire kickers and prospects up and down the marketing funnel.

## How Google Makes Money



For any given search, Google wants to show the most relevant ad and organic result. Why? Ads don't work unless they are a good match for the search, and visitors won't click on organic results unless they're confident that the link will take them to useful content. In other words, Google's reputation is on-the-line with every search query.

# How Google Makes Money<sub>(continued)</sub>

To make these ranking decisions, Google evaluates site quality on over **200 factors, ranging** from how well and how much content matches, grammar, adherence to technical best practices, usability, page load time, and the ease of navigating the site on desktop, tablet, and mobile. In other words, SEO. All of these items are affected by the work of your web, social media, and content groups.

## Why a Top 10 Ranking isn't Good enough

Adwords's — the name of Google's advertising business on the web — serves up to eleven search ads that appear at the top and bottom of result pages. That means a search that ranks number one for your medical company, might be number 12 on the stack. This is particularly true when the search is popular, like “hospitals in New York City”. Yep, SEO is highly competitive, which explains why your site must be optimized for it.

The more popular or arcane the search, the higher the price it commands, from an advertising on Adwords. Per click prices can range from a few to over \$50. In short, you create a brilliant page with tightly focused content. Google rewards you with a top position that also happens to trigger the best matching Adwords ad. It's all about selling eyeballs!





# The Google Business Model (continued)

## **Google evaluates more than 200 factors from your website.**

These data range from how well and how much content matches a search, grammar, adherence to technical best practices, usability, page load time, and the ease of navigating the site on desktop, tablet, and mobile. Most of these factor come under the rubric of search engine optimization. They're all in the interest of giving Google's visitors and advertising results that matter.

Google has built up the trust over two decades, and it doesn't want to squander it because your home page takes a two minutes to load.



# Keywords are Dead, Sort of

In the good old days, Google's search results relied on exact matches with words and phrases on the page. These are also called keywords and keyword phrases. For example, "medical equipment, Peoria", might rank differently than Peoria. This led to the black (bad) hat practice of stuffing keywords in copy and text hidden in code.

**Don't try to trick Google into ranking your site higher.** A good SEO won't even try, because the consequences can be severe. Google may drop all of your ranking or delist your site altogether.

## **Meet BERT and the Breakthrough with Natural Language Processing**

Since Google's adoption of Natural Language Processing (NLP) and its algorithm update to BERT , Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers. BERT is a form of open-source intelligence that allows computers to better understand user queries through natural language processing.

### **The impact of BERT is that —**

- 1) It's much harder if not nearly impossible to trick Google
- 2) While the keyword is still relevant, NLP evaluates it in context of consistent themes in the site, related words, placement of words in the page.

For example, a site for a heart monitor would also contain support words like cardiologist, stress test, bpm, heart disease, exercise, and others. But the home page contains a section on bagel recipes. Since this doesn't clock with heart monitor, it has the potential to drag down the rankings on the entire page. For example, as site about SEO would likely contain themes about keywords, search rankings, search intent, and a bevy of other terms.

# Understanding Search Intent

All searches are not created equal. Think of a grocery store as an example (everyone loves food, right?). Someone who just moved to the market who is trying to get the lay of the land, might search for “Grocery stores in Peoria”.

A more focused search might look like “Asian groceries near me.” And, for someone ready to cook dinner, the search might be, “Chinese eggplants near me”. Search intents mirror stages in the marketing funnel, including include discovery, readiness to purchase — “how much does an MRI machine cost?” Informational intent, “what is the ROI on an MRI machine?”, and consideration — “which MRI machine has the lowest operating cost?”

## The Audience Dashboard in Google Analytics



Familiarize yourself with The Audience Dashboard in Google Analytics (GA). This single group of stats are usually what web companies report. Just like the Check Engine Light on your car’s dashboard doesn’t tell you why to check your engine, these numbers don’t isolate specific problems. But a cursory glance at the :38 session above begs for an explanation. Please see an explanation of these essential terms on the next page.



# Essential Terminology

Intro	Definition	Significance	Evaluation
Sessions	The number of total visits to your website	It's an indicator of popularity of your website, sometimes called web traffic	This number should trend upwards. Look for big drops or jumps that may indicate a change in your site's ranking.
Number of Sessions per User	The average number of times that a visitor returns to the site.	A measurement of the stickiness of your site and the popularity of your content.	This number will vary based on the size of your site. A low number or sudden dip may indicate user interface, technical, or content problems
Pages/Session	The average number of pages each user visits per session	Shows how well your site is moving visitors from page to page and section to section.	Reflects the quality of content needed to maintain interest in the site. Indication of clear navigation and content quality.
Bounce Rate	The percentage of single session visits where the visitor left before engaging with the page.	Shows how content, design, and navigation meet the needs of the user.	A high bounce rate (over 65%) indicates that your pages aren't holding the attention of user.
Avg. Session Duration	The average amount of time each visitors spends with your site.	Session length corresponds to the content quality, amount of content, and clear paths mapped out for the user through the site.	Session duration is affected by the size of your site, but lower numbers reveal a site that's not holding the visitor's attention.
Pageviews	The total number of pages viewed by visitors in all sessions.	Offers a quick picture of the health of the site. More pages are better!	Pageviews are most relevant when compared to another bellwether her stat. For example, Pages per Session relative to Users reveals the Pages per Visit.
Users	The number of unique visitors that have hopped on your site.	A more accurate view of web traffic, because it's independent of the number of visits.	The number of users should grow as your SEO, content and site promotion improves.

# What are Good Numbers, Anyway?

Topline numbers can be deceiving because they're based on averages that are unreliable when there is a large deviation from the mean. For example, our traffic suddenly shot up 3,500 per month due to a single blog post. Subsequently, pages per visit and bounce rates dropped to the basement. After drilling down into the stats, we discovered that the audience for the post didn't visit other pages of the site. While we were thrilled with the traffic, it was a stop and go page from an audience that was otherwise not interested in our services, and it distorted all the other web analytics.

Various factors affect the topline, including technical issues, surges due to new content, sites, for example dry eye, that drive traffic by season, advertising, holidays, world events, pandemics, and more.

## **Benchmark Against the Competition**

Your numbers are relative to the size of your site, your competitive situation, and the stickiness of your content. You want to see an upward trend over time in all your results. Downward trends are a sure flag that something in your site isn't performing. Your web group will find and fix.

However, websites do not exist in a vacuum. In most categories, you'll have four or five competitors vying for the same rankings. An inexpensive SEO platform, like Moz, SEO Book, or SERanking, can tell you how the bad guys are doing in terms of traffic, keyword rankings, and the number of searches they show for (search volume)

# Engaged Visitors are Worth More

Earlier in this article we discussed the basic metrics — time per visit, pages per visit and bounce rate — that reveal the engagement of visitors, or how interested they are in your stuff. This data is also available for every traffic source. So, you can compare the relative engagement between social media and social media networks versus other modes of traffic. We know, for example, that LinkedIn is our single best source of engaged traffic. LinkedIn visitors spend two-and-a-half times more time than visitors from organic traffic and the other social networks, so we invest more time and money resources into it and less on other channels.

## Use Traffic Sources to Evaluate Marketing

To find out how your digital marketing efforts are performing, you'll want to check the four major sources of traffic — Direct, Organic, Social and referral. (Check under the Acquisitions Tab to find Overview).

**Direct traffic** occurs when a visitor arrives directly on a website without having a link click on another site. It's a catchall for a number of sources. Examples include traffic from employees email, or any time a user types your URL into a browser. Because direct traffic can be so large, it can distort your overall analytics picture, someone on your team should learn how to exclude it from GA.

**Organic traffic** is the result of all the blood, sweat, tears and treasure you've invested in your site to capture visits from search engine. Using the calendar tool, it's easy to compare traffic month-to-month, or year-to-year. Keep in mind, that there are many factors that can affect organic traffic up or down, including major events like the Olympics or the Academy Awards, seasonal cycles in your business, news events, introduction of a new campaign, or an update to the Google algorithm.

# Sources of Traffic (continued)

**Referral traffic** reaches your site through links on other domain. These backlinks are hard to come by and they're one of the most influential of the Google Ranking Factors.

**Social traffic** originates from a social platform like Reddit, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. Assuming that sending qualified traffic to your site is one of the goals of your social media program, this is an important number. This feature, like most on GA, allows you to drill down to see the traffic from each social platform.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions
		Users ? ↓	New Users ?	Sessions ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages / Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?	Place an order (Goal 1 Conversion Rate) ?
		326 % of Total: 100.00% (326)	313 % of Total: 100.00% (313)	366 % of Total: 100.00% (366)	74.04% Avg for View: 74.04% (0.00%)	1.63 Avg for View: 1.63 (0.00%)	00:00:54 Avg for View: 00:00:54 (0.00%)	0.00% Avg for View: 0.00% (0.00%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Direct	159 (48.48%)	156 (49.84%)	166 (45.36%)	84.34%	1.43	00:00:21	0.00%
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Organic Search	158 (48.17%)	147 (46.96%)	188 (51.37%)	64.89%	1.83	00:01:25	0.00%
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Social	8 (2.44%)	7 (2.24%)	8 (2.19%)	62.50%	1.50	00:00:12	0.00%
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Referral	3 (0.91%)	3 (0.96%)	4 (1.09%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%



# About GA's Date Picker

The calendar utility on all pages in Google Analytics allows you to select a period to view your data, whether it's a single day or entire years. You can also compare months, days and custom intervals to the same span in previous months or years. Google reports these results in easy-to-read plus and minus percentages.

Dec 15, 2021 - Jan 13, 2022 ▲

◀

November 2021

December 2021

January 2022

▶

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														30	31					

Date Range: Custom ▼

Dec 15, 2021 - Jan 13, 2022

☐ Compare to: Previous period ▼

Apply cancel

# Must Win Brand Name Searches

In the hierarchy of possible searches, branded keywords should be at the top of your must-rank list in positions one through five in search results.

Check right now. Just type your company name into the search bar and you should be number one in the results.

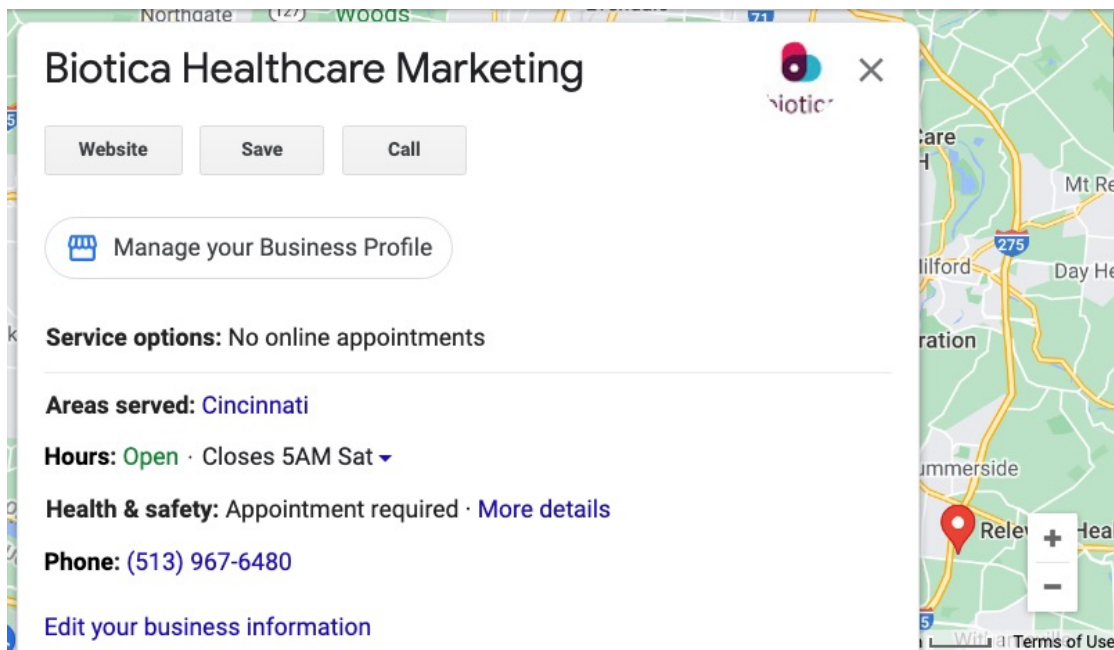
Branded keywords are phrases directly associated with your brand, products and services, like your brand, company, and product names. Searches for branded keywords are especially important because they indicate an intent to make a purchase or at least seriously consider your company.

This can be harder than it looks. Some domestic companies compete with businesses of a similar name or even branch offices in other countries. Ask your SEO for a strategy to overcome this challenge.

Read more about branded terms in our post, “[Why Brand Name Variations are Crucial to Search Success](#)”

# The Importance of Going Local

**Local searches** are also critical, for example, “Cancer hospitals in Peoria.” If your business is a medical practice, lab or hospital that primarily sell locally, it pays to be even more precise with your local optimization, like “sports rehab near downtown. This goes for national and international companies, too. Think of vendors, prospective employees, and clients who visit your facilities. They need directions and contact information.



Creating a **Google My Business site** is another way to ensure that you rank locally. GMBs are the source of the maps and brief descriptions of businesses you see in search results. They contain directions, photos of product, and videos. A GMB is also a sign that your business is credible and has a bricks and mortar location. And, yes, having a Google My Business Site is a ranking factor! They're well worth the investment of a few hours of time to DIY or task someone on your staff to build.

For details, please see [“Why in the Heck do I need a Google My Business Site?”](#)

# Congratulations! You've Learned Enough to be Dangerous

The days of having a web performance report blown past you are over. You've learned a bit about how Google works, key web metrics, traffic sources, local search and more. We hope this knowledge sparks an on-going interest in SEO and analytics. But, at the very least, it should allow you to grasp the gobbledygook from your web team.

For a deeper dive under the hood, please see [Essential SEO Web Code for Civilians](#)

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