

Making Sense of Search Positions

What does monitoring your Google organic search positions mean to you?

The obsession of search positioning is a strange phenomenon. Each data centre produces a different set of results, yet so often people seem fixated on the position, rather than the result of the click through or the part the click through played in the conversion funnel.

Just imagine if you could work out what the value of each organic search query was worth to you.

A few savvy search marketing agencies shied away from the blinkered approach of getting high rankings for the sake of it a long time ago. But just imagine if you could work out what the true value of each query, was worth.



Well, we are all one step closer to getting there. Using your favourite analytics tool, Google Analytics, it's now easy to monitor the real time organic search position for each click, regardless of which data centre it came from. From this you can monitor click through rates and conversions.

Yes, you guessed it, Google is measuring the search queries, the positions and the click through on organic positions. From Google's perspective, it will help them have a better understanding of the nature of the intent of the search query. Did you want an image, a video, a news feed or a traditional web page? Perhaps it wasn't the medium that was the problem; perhaps there was a different meaning to the search query.

Naturally, Google realise the use and understanding of the English language varies from country to country; a search for "luxury travel" on Google.com brings up a totally different set up of results to that on Google.co.uk. However, this goes way beyond the usual sway of the US results pages showing results based on trusted links from US websites. The main body of the Google.com organic results for 'luxury travel', show 10 web page results followed by eight additional "searches related to luxury travel".

The UK results show a need to use Universal Search. The top 3 organic listings are traditional web page results, based on traditional SEO factors; title, content, trusted links, internal structure, domain age etc.

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www.luxurytravel.com/ - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

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This is **Luxury Travel** is a trading name of Studio West, 1st Floor, Mclean House, 7-8 Bluecoats Avenue, Hertford, SG14 1PB Registered in England and Wales ...
www.inluxury.co.uk/ - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[Luxury holidays, tailor made holidays, escorted tours & safaris ...](#)
Handpicked **luxury** holidays from Kuoni **Travel**, Britain's best **luxury travel** and tour operator. Kuoni tailor make **luxury** holidays, escorted tours and safaris ...
www.kuoni.co.uk/ - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

The next three listings we see are based around a suggestion that we may be looking for a “luxury travel magazine”.

See Results for: [luxury travel magazine](#)

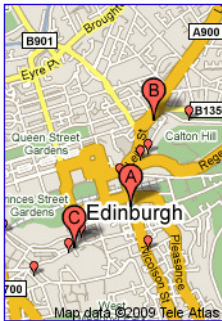
[Book **Luxury** Hotels, Resorts, Spas, Inns & Lodges on **Luxury Travel** ...](#)
 28 May 2009 ... Luxury hotels, 5-star resorts and spas, chic boutique hotels, luxury lodges and villas - a world of luxury travel experience
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This is followed by three local listings based on the user’s IP address, showing local hotels that have used SEO strategies, such as using the word “luxury” in the title or in their user reviews.

Local business results for [luxury travel](#) near [Edinburgh](#)



A [The Scotsman Hotel **Luxury** Valentines Breaks - The Eton Collection](#) - www.theetoncollection.com
 20 North Bridge, Edinburgh - 0131 556 5565
 "A very nice hotel in a great central location."
 ★★★★★☆ 238 reviews, directions, and more >

B [Edinburgh January Sales Breaks - The Eton Collection](#) - www.theetoncollection.com
 2 Greenside Place, Edinburgh - 0131 525 8200
 "Positive: Comfortable room. Excellent breakfast."
 ★★★★★☆ 402 reviews, directions, and more >

C [Apex City Hotel **Edinburgh** - Apex Hotels](#) - www.apexhotels.co.uk
 61 Grassmarket, Edinburgh - 0845 365 0000
 "Positive: Hotel was clean and well presented."
 ★★★★★☆ 329 reviews, directions, and more >

[More results near Edinburgh >](#)

The next seven results are standard web page results, merited by common contribution factors including page titles, content, in bound links, link text used, internal link clusters, page rank, age of the page and freshness of content.

The last result on page one is the news feed result, proving that in some circumstances, the age of the page and page rank have nothing to do with the relevancy of getting a first page result on Google. After all, who needs a news page that has age to it? In certain circumstances freshness, trust and relevancy are all we need and Google knows this. So page rank isn’t dead, it’s just taking a back seat when it is relevant to do so. This is a move in the right direction.

News results for [luxury travel](#)

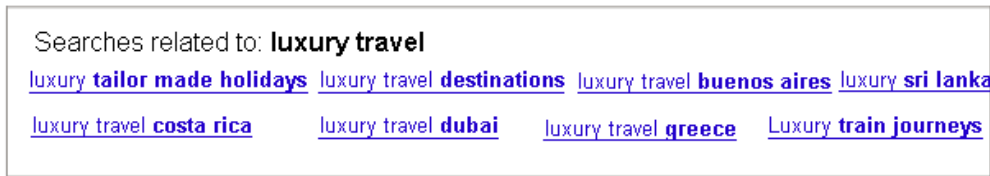


[Luxury Travel Aims to Promote Vietnam as a Preferred New...](#) - 7 hours ago
 Hung Nguyen, Mice Department Manager of **Luxury Travel** Company said, "Vietnam is for everyone all sizes of MICE in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and newly Centre ...
[PR.com \(press release\) - 14 related articles >](#)

At the footer of the page we see “searches related to luxury travel”, yet again the suggestions put forward are very different to those of our US counterparts.



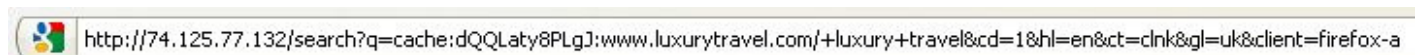
The US variation of the result:



So where are we going with all this?

It's well documented that Google is measuring engagement on its Chrome browser. It is monitoring bounce back rates and the choice of medium used; gaining a better understanding of what type of result we are actually looking for. What we see now in the UK and the US results pages will change as Google collates more and more user information, to generate more relevant results on a country by country basis.

What we can do now as users is monitor the organic search position at the point of click through. This is normally done by monitoring the "cd" parameter in the URL search query string and can easily be set up on Google Analytics or read by looking at the Google cache URL. The example below used "cd=1" in its URL string, indicating that this organic result is position one.



The latter half of the cached URL shows the domain, the search terms used, the search position, the language used and other information such as browser type.

Other parameters are being used for revised versions of the results. The suggested results for "luxury travel magazine", for positions four, five and six are being monitored by Google to see if the suggested change of search query is relevant or not. The parameter used to identify that this is a revised suggestion of the search query is "oi=revisions_result".

The parameter used to measure the organic position on this occasion is "resnum", so "resnum=5" indicates the result is the fifth organic result on the page, indicating the result is currently in this position as part of a revised suggestion of the original search query. An excerpt of the recorded URL was "oi=revisions_result&resnum=5".

The results for positions seven, eight and nine are local Google maps listings, these are identified in the URL string as "oi=local_result". They also use the "resnum" parameter to identify the organic position of the result, it also identifies the geographic location of the search. Again in time, Google can ascertain the relevancy of this result in relation to the query.

The news feed result is identified in the search query as “oi=news_group&resnum=17”. In real terms this means that the news result is the 17th result on page one and it comes from a news feed.

Our “searches related to: luxury travel” at the foot of the page are an important indicator of the effort that should be put into optimising a page for the suggested related search queries. The first related search query is identified as “oi=revisions_inline&resnum=0&ct=broad-revision&cd=1”. In real terms this means that “luxury tailor made holidays” is the first related search query, it identifies itself as a revised search term query, not a web result that will take you off Google.

Again, Google will be monitoring the relevancy of this, but from a search marketing perspective, you should be thinking about the effort it takes to get a prominent organic position for this search term, allowing for the fact that Google is suggesting a less generic, more targeted, less competitive refinement and searchers need to refine their queries to find exactly what they are looking for. I suppose it all boils down to what we’ve known for a decade or more; being found for each part of the search journey is imperative if you want to increase the chances of conversion and beat off the competition.

Working out the numbers:

Being able to compare your paid search media spend, click through rates and conversions and the subsequent contribution they make toward organic and direct entry conversions is easy enough and every one should at least be at this level. Similarly, we have always been able to work out what contribution organic search has played in the marketing mix and how it converts in relation to traffic numbers and the overall cost of consultancy, writing content and finding links. What we haven’t been able to do in the past is monitor the real time organic position and draw a clear idea of position, click through rates and subsequent conversion.

We are now in a position to look at each part of the universal search options and work out what channels are available to us and the effort in man hours or relevant spend it takes to get on the front page and the contribution it makes within the “hidden channels” of Google and the main web page results. Beyond this, we can start to make sense of “positions” and what they really mean in monetary value. Sometimes you may find that the difference of gaining an extra three places in the rankings just isn’t worth it, after you start looking at the real conversions you are gaining. On other occasions it will be the difference between getting a page one result or not and a huge rise in profits.

If you start looking at the big picture, you should be looking at shelf space and where we can find the most profitable route to market within a specific time frame. Shelf space is generated through news feeds, shopping feeds, maps, images, videos, web pages, having answers to the suggested related searches, paid search results and social media visibility. It gives you the opportunity to create brand awareness even on the back of your competitors’ brand names. It’s about finding the balance of creating profitable brand awareness whilst shutting out the opportunities of your competitors, at their expense, not yours. The nice thing about monetising positions is it gives you the ability to start putting things into perspective.

How long this will take to filter through to the board room is anyone’s guess. Internal politics, budget and lack of understanding are still getting in the way of solid, robust business strategy based on sophisticated and accurate measurement. The tools are there, the profits are there. We just need to start asking the right questions and even more importantly, listening to the answers.