Post-Pandemic

SEO Strategy Playbook

Crowdsourced from the largest SEO team

conductor

COVID-19 SEO Playbook

EXPERIENCE THE INTERACTIVE VERSION

conductor

Letter from our Editor

Dear SEOs,

The pandemic has had a dramatic, global impact, and people everywhere are working hard to adapt to the new normal: remote work, alarming headlines, and uncertainty. For those of us in SEO, work is compounded as we navigate the effects of the pandemic on our businesses today and plan for our recovery in the future.

At Conductor, we are seeing clients in the travel and hospitality industries fight to persevere through dramatic drops in traffic and revenue, while others in ecommerce, online services, and healthcare are navigating new demand and stresses on their infrastructure and supply chain networks. Across all industries, people are taking this time to reassess situations and put together action plans to move forward.

Our team of SEOs, the largest in the industry, collected and shared their best advice to adapt to the changing landscape we all face. I hope that their combined submissions, brought together in this document, will be helpful for you and your teams. Please don't hesitate to share your thoughts and feedback with me: aastolfi@conductor.com.

All the best,

Ashley Astolfi

Why SEO Right Now?

The World Economic Forum released a study related to COVID-19, which uses Google search intensity as an economic indicator. Google search frequency across topics is on the rise; we've seen estimates that 20 billion searches are being done every day.

With more people working from home and turning to Google for answers, it is more important than ever that businesses have information available that helps customers as they research and consider purchases and needs. SEO is the best way to get the information your organization has into the hands of people searching.

We've Seen Estimates That 20 Billion Searches Are Being Done Every Day.

SEO is one of the best, low-cost ways to ensure long-term visibility for your organization, which is increasingly important as budgets are slashed and ad dollars are wasted. If you're looking to make the case to your team that they should invest in SEO now, we have a resource for that.

SEO From Home: Adapting to the New Normal of Remote Work

Many recent articles discuss [approaches to working from home](#), and a common recommendation is to establish schedules and processes to define your day. As an SEO, you know that this advice is doubly true: SEO is collaborative, and most SEOs interact with others across Marketing, Development, and Communications teams at a minimum. For most of our clients, launching a single piece of content means working with a copywriter, web manager, email marketer and social media manager. With that many interdependencies, now is the time to establish or update your communication processes and workflows.

## MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE IMPLEMENTED 3 KEY OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Define your remote communication style

- Create meaningful reporting

- Train your team to be self-sufficient

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Define Your Remote Communication Style and Workflow

In the office, it's easy to drive by someone's desk for quick help with a question. Since that isn't possible when everyone is remote, you'll need to figure out how the team will handle one-off and more in-depth communication.

At Conductor, we use Slack for informal communication like check-ins, quick questions or clarifications and email for formal communication about projects, deadlines, and opportunities. Meetings help everyone connect in real-time, and different formats should be used depending on the agenda: for example, 15-minute daily standups are ideal for timely, high priority projects, whereas less frequent 30-minute or 1-hour team meetings are great for sharing updates and brainstorming. Document communication standards and formalize meetings.

Need help deciding where to start? Here's a sample communication template that we've seen work for many teams:
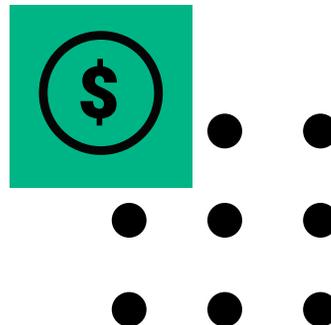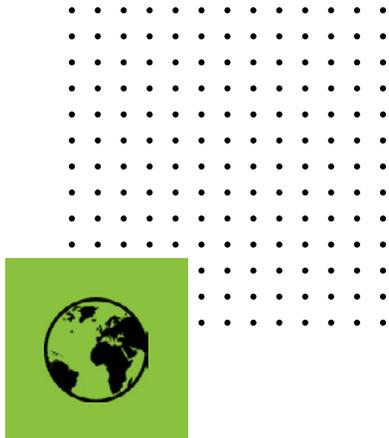
SAMPLE COMMUNICATION TEMPLATE

- 15 minute standup on Monday and Thursday with your SEO team only. Everyone takes 2–3 minutes to provide an update on what they're working on.

- Weekly office hour you host. Invite stakeholders and peers who may want to virtually "drop by" to ask a question, make a request, or discuss an idea.

- Weekly visibility reporting: Share key reports with members of your team and stakeholders once a week. We'll talk more about reporting in a bit.

Document the Team's Workflows

It is critical to create an environment of transparency and accountability on your team and at your organization. Giving stakeholders and other members of your department visibility into priorities, long-term projects, and workflows will help you have more productive conversations about bandwidth and resources now and later. Task and project management technologies are tools that help people in all roles document processes and initiatives, and SEOs should not hesitate to use these technologies on their teams.

Welcome to Actions

Get more done by sending tasks and insights directly from Conductor to the task management apps you're already using. So easy, it feels like magic?

Get Started with

| Asana | Jira Cloud | Jira Server | Trello |

Learn more about how to use actions

Not seeing your task management platform here? Let us know
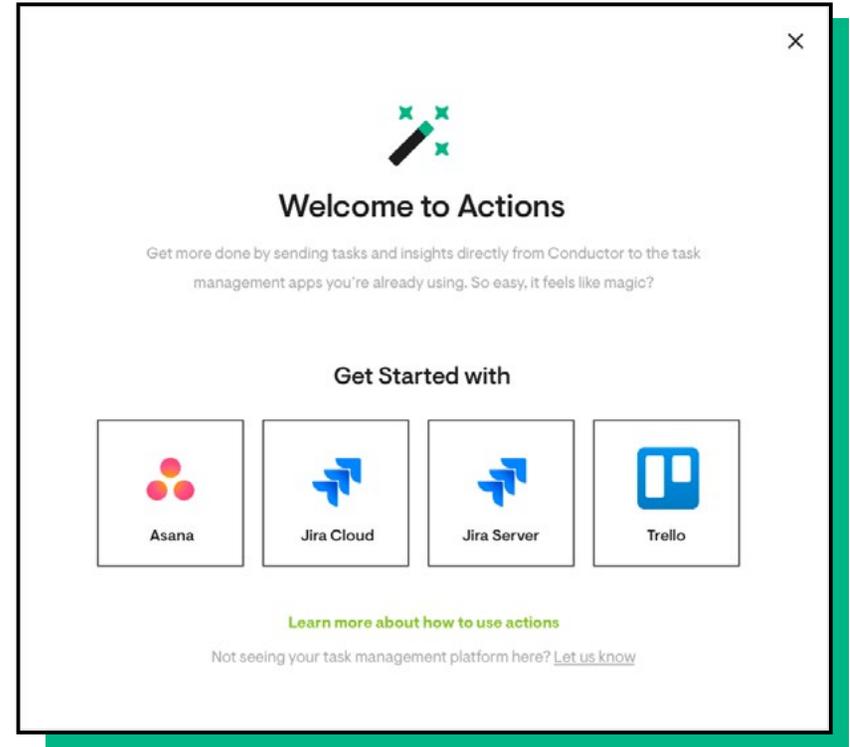
Every team has a preferred solution. At Conductor, departments have flexibility to use the tools that best align with their needs. Our Marketing team, for example, uses an Asana instance to track all marketing activities and communicate with freelance writers. Our marketing team also leverages Jira, the system of choice for our web team, to assign and prioritize SEO requests. This is an important note: work directly in the systems that other teams use. You will have an easier time making SEO a priority if you are integrated in a team's workflows.

💡 PRO TIP

If you're a Conductor customer, we suggest integrating your work management app with Searchlight to simplify your workflow. Actions and content briefs can easily be uploaded and shared using this integration. We currently support integrations with Asana, Jira Cloud, Jira Server, and Trello.

Actions in Your Account

🔍 Search actions

| Name		Type	Last Updated	Last Updated By ∧	Shared To
Content Brief - River North Chicago Attractions	•••	Content Brief	Jan 23, 2020	Jeremy Kao	🔴 Open in Asana
What is the best way to tour San Francisco? Post	•••	Content Brief	Jan 23, 2020	Jeremy Kao	🔴 Open in Asana
Best Running Shoes | 2019	•••	Content Brief	Nov 15, 2019	Jeremy Kao	🔴 Open in Asana

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Give Other Teams a Voice

Surveys aren't just for Family Feud! Leverage surveys to gather feedback from website, marketing, and leadership stakeholders to understand how they feel recent changes will impact the business. Use their feedback to develop your plans, complete with immediate and longer-term action items.

Here is a sample survey that is based on one we shared with our team when it first became clear that COVID-19 would have a significant impact on business operations. Make a copy of this survey and customize it to suit your organization's and team's unique needs.

Bonus: distributing a survey or set of questions and allowing all team members time to consider and write responses is a proven way to be fair to any introverts as well as remote team members (**Harvard Business Review**).
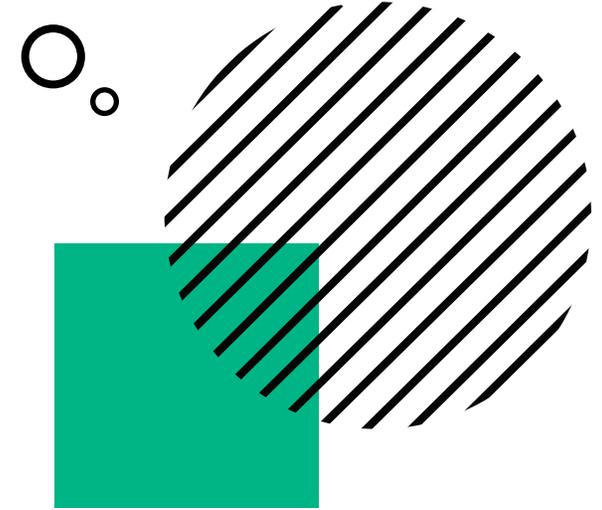
Create Meaningful Reporting

No one likes surprises, and tumultuous times can be full of unexpected twists. Provide web, content, SEO, and marketing teams at your organization with visibility into activities, progress, and performance to stave off unwelcome surprises at work.

There are long-term benefits to creating meaningful reporting as well. Transparent communication benefits your team no matter where they are. It also provides stakeholders across the business with timely and digestible reports. The result is a culture that values clear and concise intelligence.
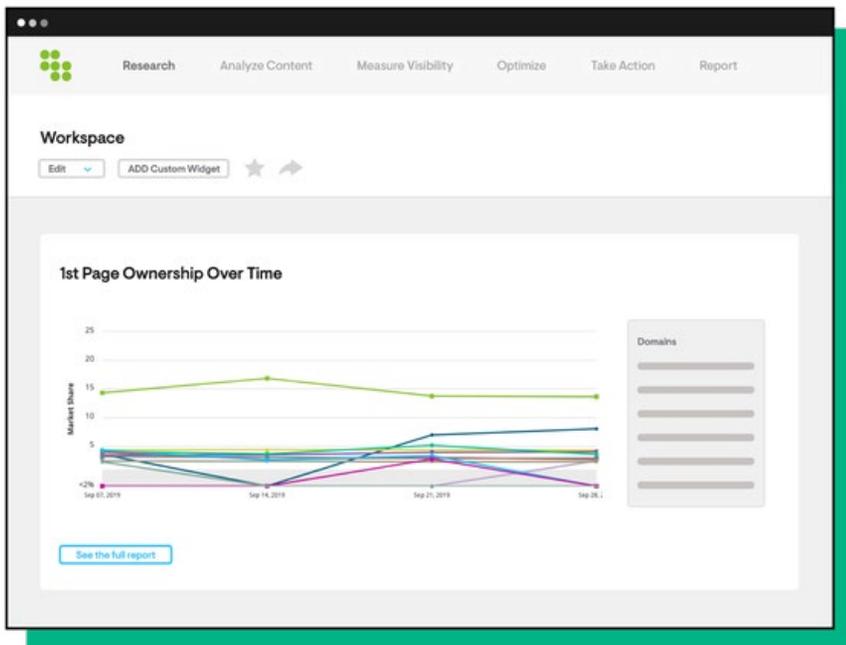
At a minimum, our team likes to look at month-over-month and year-over-year traffic, keyword ranks, and competitive performance. These views help us answer questions like **Are traffic dips/jumps seasonal?, How is our visibility for key terms, and How are we faring compared to competitors?**

Don't forget to share search volume insights with other teams, which can provide value across the organization. Search data provides almost real time information about the products and topics that are trending up or down in different locations. Teams that SEOs might not traditionally work with, like retail or product groups, benefit from data like this as they plan budgets against demand for different products.

PRO TIP

For Conductor customers, we recommend looking at social and search data in Explorer, which helps SEOs easily find trending topics across different channels.
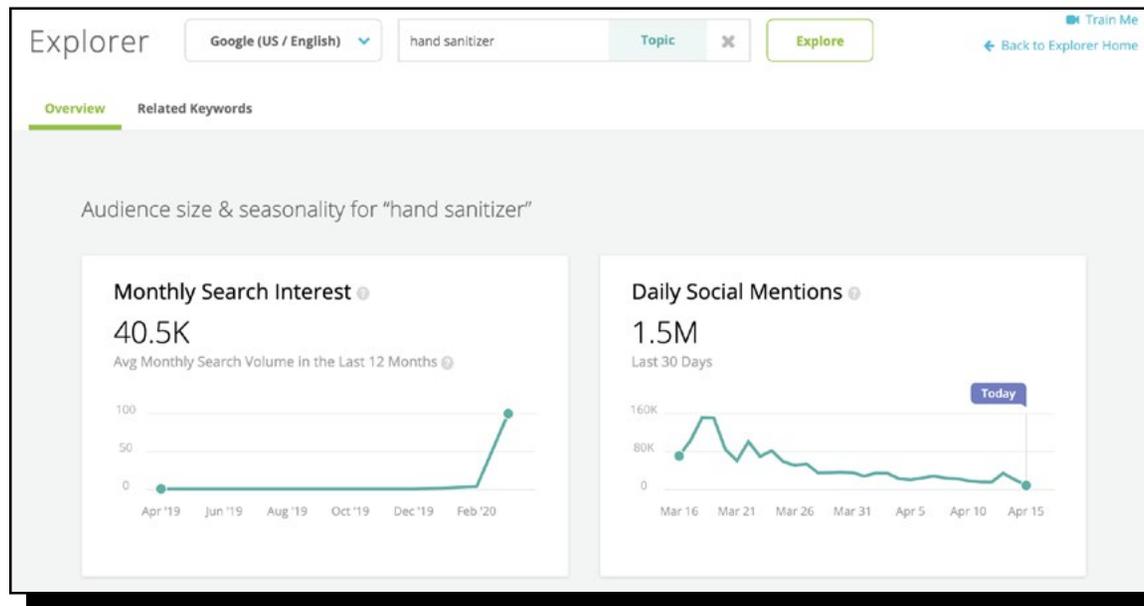
Reporting for Executives

Consider what executives in your organization focus on and care about. From what we have seen, executives prioritize information about traffic, revenue, big ups and downs that impact the entire business, and, perhaps most importantly, why these changes happened. The why will influence decisions made about the direction of existing projects and new initiatives to address the factors driving changes. Incorporating information about multi-channel attribution is beneficial as well, as executives weigh the performance of several channels against each other.

⚡ PRO TIP

Can't get 15 minutes to review the report with leadership? Create a video recording of yourself reviewing results and the reasons why changes happened. Aim for a video that is 5 minutes or shorter.

OUR RECOMMENDED FORMULA FOR EXECUTIVE REPORTING TODAY:

- 1 graph with trended traffic and revenue for the last 8-12 weeks across multiple channels

- A market share overview (or two) showing how your visibility compares to others in key locations

- Social top trending topics related to your business and COVID (if relevant)

- Search top wins and losses for your priority keywords and location

Reporting for Content Teams

Your content team is likely fielding requests for content in many different formats on a number of topics. Help that team understand what works, what doesn't and topics that your audience wants the most with search and analytics data.

OUR RECOMMENDED FORMULA FOR CONTENT REPORTING IS:

- 1 graph with trended traffic and conversion for the last 8-12 weeks on pages that your content team worked on

- 1 table showing the top 10 pages with the biggest increases in traffic

- Social top trending topics related to your business and COVID (if relevant)

  Search top wins and losses for your priority keywords and for topics that you content team has prioritized

PRO TIP

Don't wait on reporting to share ideas for content with your teams. Leverage your content team's task management system (or use Condutor's Content Briefs) to share ideas for trending topics

Train Your Team To Be Self-Sufficient

Overwhelmed by the number of instant messages, emails, and "quick meetings" requesting your help? We can relate. If you are noticing a trend among the messages, like questions about the same two or three topics, create and share a training with your team sharing the answer. This will help your team self-serve their own questions, and it will hopefully reduce the outreach you receive on a regular basis – about these questions, at least.

At Conductor, our SEO Strategists use Zoom to record videos and screenshares of themselves explaining topics and workflows to customers.

Consider starting by answering these questions that are some of the ones we receive most often:

- **How do I research topics for new content?**

- **How do I optimize metadata for a page?**

- **How do I measure if what I did was successful?**

If you're looking for ideas about how to answer some of these questions, check out the videos in Conductor Academy, which has free SEO courses to explain concepts across all levels of SEO proficiency.

Responding to COVID with SEO

With this guide, we want to help you set yourself and your business up to use time and resources effectively and to see the biggest results. We consulted our in-house team of SEO and content strategists to build Conductor's action plan for SEOs around the globe.

We have divided our recommendations into three core sections:

- **Make timely, high-priority updates first**

- **Update your strategy**

- **Plan for the long term**

It's important to communicate the changes that you have made and plan to make to leadership at your company. Use our PowerPoint template as a starting point.

Make Timely, High-Priority Updates First

Unanticipated changes to business operations are happening as a result of governments', customers', and stakeholders' decisions. Your customers and prospects need to know what changes, if any, they should expect in working with you. With millions of people now physically isolated, Google is a more important and relevant source of information than ever.

THINK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY HIGH-PRIORITY CHANGES TO MAKE NOW.

- How do customers rely on my company's Google My Business profile for important information?

- What do customers need to know about your business and COVID-related changes?

- What events, if any, were customers planning to attend?

- How can I keep my customers updated about my business?

Update Google My Business with COVID-Related Changes

If customers leverage your GMB profile for hours, locations, and other essential details, prioritize updating your profile with accurate information. Google has posted an essential guide for businesses to reflect emergency measures they have taken due to COVID-19, which includes changing business hours, managing your business description, and creating a post.

Specifically related to COVID-19, Google has also created an option for businesses to mark themselves as "temporarily closed." (Read about it here.) This allows local businesses to let their customers know that they are not open during this time. You can find this capability in the "Close this business on Google" section.

When you log into your GMB dashboard, you will see these instructions on how to do so:

Update your Business Profile

To make your profile appear as temporarily closed on Google Maps and Search:

1. On your computer, sign in to Google My Business ⧉ .
2. In the menu on the left, click **Info**.
3. To the right, point to the section "Close this business on Google".
   - To expand this section you might need to click the arrow.
4. Click **Mark as temporarily closed.**

If you have multiple profiles, select the profile you want to change then follow steps 2 and 3 above to mark your businesses as temporarily closed.

Tip: If your business has temporarily adjusted hours and non-persistent closures, use the "special hours" feature to keep your customers up to date.

Update Your Website with High Priority COVID Messaging

While most businesses have messaging to share about staying healthy during COVID, customers really need to know about the immediate impact that new regulations or closures have on working with you. Make this information the first thing that customers see when they land on your website or social pages.

- **Ecommerce companies that ship non-essential goods proactively share information about COVID-related shipping delays**

- **Ecommerce companies that ship essential goods ask customers to be responsible and thoughtful in their purchasing: buy what you need and shop less frequently**

- **Brick and mortar businesses like restaurants and bars update their sites with information about curbside pickup, delivery options, and new hours**

- **Businesses financially affected by COVID-forced closures share links to purchase gift cards that will be redeemable after the crisis**

- **Companies that need to temporarily shut down their sites have put a message front and center to let customers know what is going on and what the timeline is for the site to come back.**

Many companies lean on throwing the 503 maintenance code for temporary site closures but Google has recently advised against that. You can read more about that here. On Reddit Gary Ilyes said, "closing the cart and putting up a message that explains to the user what's happening should be the way to go if you're planning the closure will last a long time."

Use Schema To Publish Changes

If you have upcoming events, make sure you update your event schema markup to reflect Google's new schema markup properties for virtual, postponed, and canceled events. This ensures that Google is showing accurate information about your event in this fast-changing environment and that users only see the latest information.

Google has released documentation for structured data specific to COVID-19 announcements. Read it here. According to Google, "due to COVID-19, many organizations, such governments, health organizations, schools, and more, are publishing urgent announcements that affect schedules and other aspects of everyday life. This includes the closure of facilities, rescheduling of events, and new availability of medical facilities (for example, testing centers)."
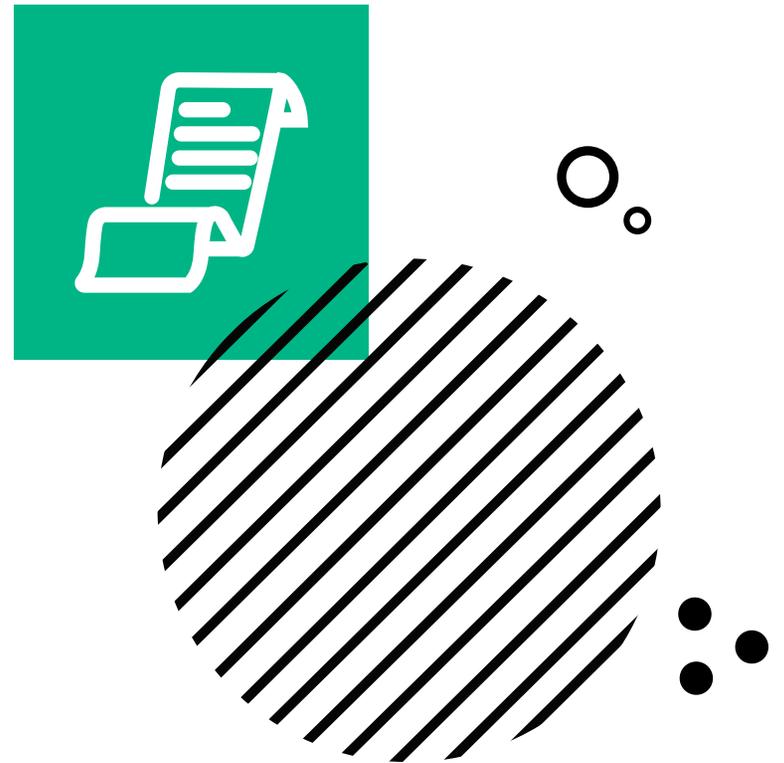
Update Your Site Map

Make sure that you notify Google of any changes to your URL, either through Google Search Console or through your XML sitemap, so that they know you made a recent update to your page.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Announcement of a shelter-in-place directive

- Closure notice (for example, closing a school or public transportation)

- Quarantine guidelines

- Travel restrictions

- Notification of a new drive-through testing center

- Announcement of an event transitioning from offline to online, or cancellation

- Announcement of revised hours and shopping restrictions

- Disease spread statistics and maps

Leverage Long-Form Content

Create an honest, transparent post for multi-channel distribution and plan to keep your communication channels open. This type of longer-form post on your website can further explain the impact of the crisis on your business and can serve as the foundation for communication across social media platforms and email. Plan to add monitoring of Google search rankings for key terms and social media mentions to stay on top of any communication from your community and any unexpected fluctuations.

Update Your Strategy to Support Your Business Recovery

Once you've taken care of urgent site updates, create an action plan to best position your business to help those searching.

Monitor Changes Daily

Organic traffic is a massively important indicator of how demand for your products and services is shifting. Daily reporting adds a layer of granularity and visibility that is critical in quickly changing atmospheres. We recommend daily monitoring of your core terms' impressions, clicks, and ranks with Google Search Console, Google Trends, paid search data, and Conductor Searchlight.

Search Console provides the most up-to-date information available directly from Google about impressions and clicks. Check on your top 20 click-driving keywords. Are you seeing a dramatic increase or decrease in clicks? Your click-through rate will likely be affected too.
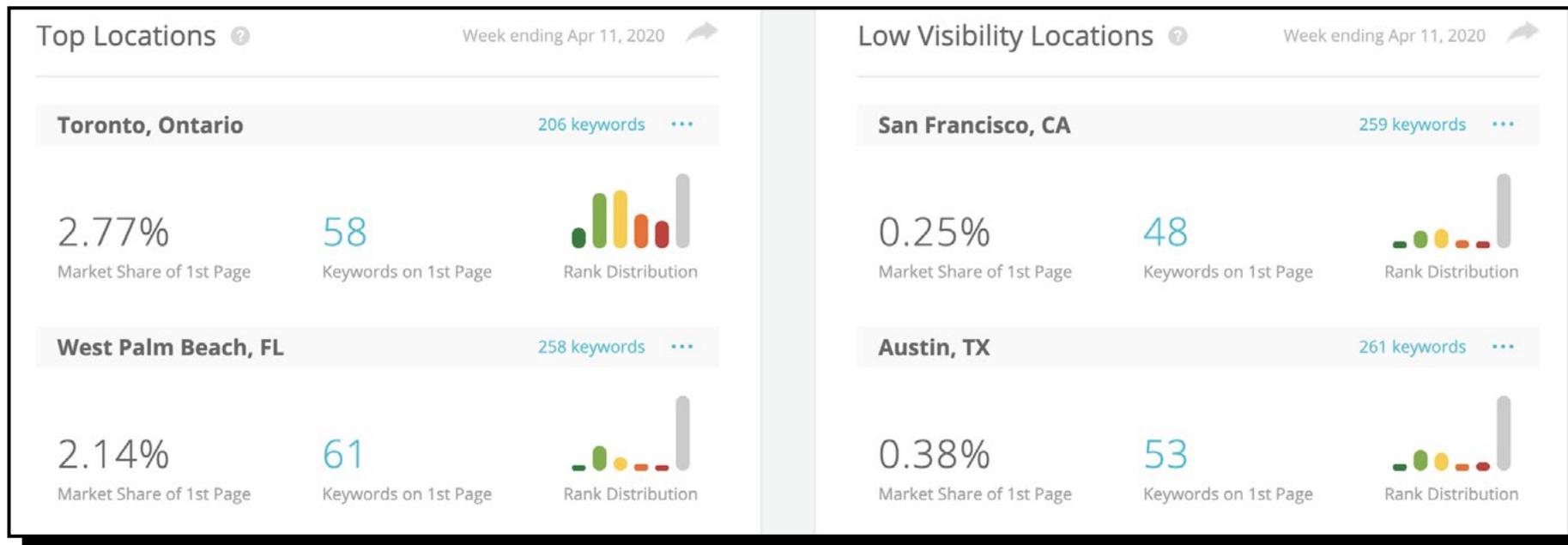
WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU:

- Stay on top of change with daily monitoring

- Get the full picture of impact

- Collaborate with other, closely connected channels
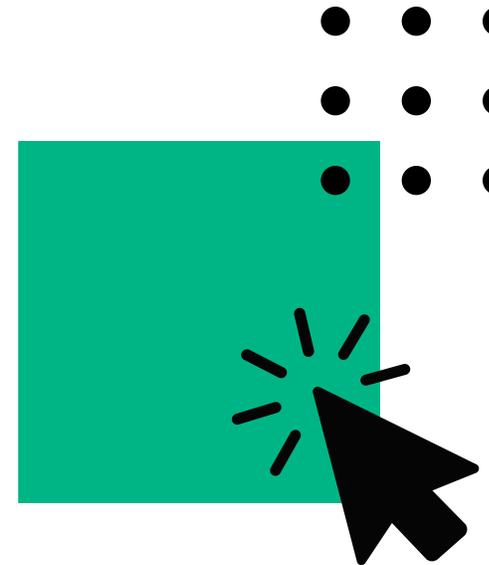
At the moment you aren't going to see search volume for a lot of the terms that are related to coronavirus or COVID-19 because they haven't been calculated yet. Google Trends is a great way to stay on top of what topics are swinging upward on a daily basis in your industry and location. Research those top 20 terms you found in Search Console in Google Trends over the last 30 days in your location. Are you seeing dramatic swings? You'll need to expect volatility – good or bad – in performance.

Leverage paid search to maintain visibility if your organic traffic is being negatively affected. Confirm business processes and scale in response to dramatic increases in clicks.

Conductor provides daily rank tracking across more than 2,200 locations. Track your most important terms and create a workspace to stay on top of high-priority changes.

Get the Full Picture of Impact

While we're on the topic of Searchlight, review the essential Conductor workflows we recommend to [understand the impact of a crisis](#) on your visibility. Make sure you review traffic, rankings, engagement, and competitive visibility. This information may already be in the reporting you set up before getting started; confirm that, and make sure the entire team knows how you are being impacted. Speak up early to avoid any surprises.

Keep An Eye On Early Stage Content

If you have informational or educational posts on your website spikes or precipitous declines in traffic can show you what kind of information is most important to your customers. Any pages that are getting a spike in views should be evaluated. Why are they seeing a spike? How can we provide additional, valuable information to people?

Collaborate With Other, Closely Connectd Channels

With a change this big, all marketing channels will be impacted one way or another. Organic search is closely aligned with paid search and social media. Check in with those teams to understand the impact they're experiencing and to discuss shared tactics to support one another.

Our customers collaborate with paid media by:

- **Use SEO to make up for lost paid traffic by: updating pages where paid media isn't generating the expected number of leads, creating and promoting new content that is customer-first and aligned with today's needs.**

- **Use paid media to support content: if budget is still available, leverage paid media to support new and timely content that is relevant for customers today.**

Social media is an excellent way to monitor customer needs in real time and to understand what information customers are looking for now. Leverage social and demographic data in Conductor, provided through our partnership with Talkwalker, to discover topics that you and your social team can collaborate on.

⬜ PRO TIP

If you don't typically interact with these teams, now is a perfect time to bring everyone together to talk about collaborating now and in the future. Many customers have told us that these conversations are happening and that the willingness to collaborate is higher than usual.

Don't Lose Sight Of Long-Term Goals

Businesses are facing an unprecedented call for urgent action and change in the face of this crisis, and it's easy for the crisis to become all-consuming. Who can blame people for focusing on the emergency at hand? For many industries, this crisis is the most important thing on the agenda.

Remember, though, that this is a snapshot in time; there will be a time when this ends and life and business return to "normal." Companies need to make sure they are addressing what's happening right now, but also plan for the future. This can be a time to address SEO changes that have been on the back burner for a long time. Teams outside SEO may have more time available to help with tasks that are impactful but not urgent. If you haven't reviewed your SEO strategy in a while, it is time to dust it off and refresh it.

Adapting To Change

Assess how well your site is positioned to adapt to recent updates from Google. There have been a number of changes within the last six months: BERT, the core update in January is in 70+ countries; neural matching is part of local search;there is a new shopping experience; and the list goes on.

PRO TIP

Missed these updates? Sign up for Conductor's monthly 30 | 30 webinar It's a half hour session summarizing the biggest changes in search in the last 30 days.

Webpage Updates

Review your current product and service pages, especially those have been impacted by COVID-19. When was the last time that you refreshed the title and meta descriptions on your most visited pages? How will these pages need to change in the future to better match customer and business needs? Start work now with your design or web team to rebuild any outdated aspects of pages, and coordinate with your content team to hold time to create refreshed content for these pages.

Plan Content Targets

While you have to create content that addresses what's happening now, don't be afraid to not address it as well. You are still allowed to run your business and help your customers. No one is going to fault you for planning for the future post-COVID-19.

-ὂ- PRO TIP

Make sure your messaging doesn't make it appear that you are trying to capitalize off of the pandemic. Some businesses are seeing an spike in business due to the COVID crisis. at the moment. If you are one of them, there will be a long-term impact on your business if you seem like you are trying to profit from it.

Research topics that are related to your business, products, or customer needs. How are you ranking for those topics today? If your best ranks are on page 2 or lower, it's time to optimize or create new content. Start creating content briefs in Conductor and in your content team's project management tool so they have a backlog to work off down the road. Include target topics and monthly search volume, recommended title and meta data, and ideas for the URL.

Pay special attention to any question-and-answer content that is appearing in People Also Ask rich results or on page 1. Question and answer content can be relatively quick to write, helpful for searchers, and leveraged by voice search.

Engage with Us

At Conductor, we recognize that there are many perspectives about SEO best practices and how best to respond to the situation. We want to hear your ideas, stories, and feedback about how this situation has affected you. Here is how you can contribute:

- Listen to advice and perspectives shared by leading SEOs as part of Conductor's Search from home series.

- For more updates check out our COVID – 19 hub

- Contribute to this conversation by sharing tips, tricks, and topics you suggest we add to this article

- Share this piece on social media and within your organizations
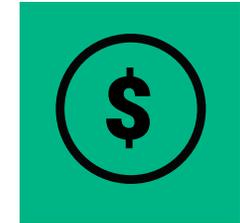
Ready to get started ?

Join global leaders who depend on conductor every day to grow their business.

GET DEMO