

How to Use Google's Search Console to Monitor and Improve Your Site's SEO

By Chris Hornak

The Google Search Console provides you with a wide range of tools and resources that you can use to delve into how a website is performing within Google's search index. It's for website owners, webmasters, SEO experts, PR professionals and anyone else who wants to make better websites and/or better content.

When you know how to use these tools and resources, you can receive information about search traffic, errors, usability and more. Use this data to make your website as attractive as possible to Google's search algorithm, and your visitors will love you too. In order for people to fall in love with your content, however, they need to be able to find you.

Google Search Console is extensive. If you have not used it before, you may find it

complex at first glance. Once you know what the most important tools and reports are, and how to use them, you should find that it is easy to work Search Console into your web strategies.

In fact, once you get used to using these tools, you may wonder how you ever managed your website without them.

Follow these steps to find out how you can maximize on all that Google Search Console offers to web users.

1. Check for Manual Actions

Manual actions are instances in which a human reviewer working with Google has looked at your site and decided that a page or pages are not in compliance with the Google webmaster quality guidelines. If you have a manual action in place, your site will not do well. It can be demoted or removed from

Manual Actions

Site-wide matches None

▾ Partial matches Some manual actions apply to specific pages, sections, or links

Reason	Affects
<p> User-generated spam Pages from this site appear to contain spammy user-generated content. The problematic content may appear on forum pages, guestbook pages, or user profiles. Learn more.</p>	mattcutts.com/forum/

[REQUEST A REVIEW](#)

The manual action page will tell you if someone has flagged your site and how to fix it.

search engine results entirely.

This area of the Search Console is an important place to start. Any manual action on your page will counteract whatever good SEO tactics you have employed.

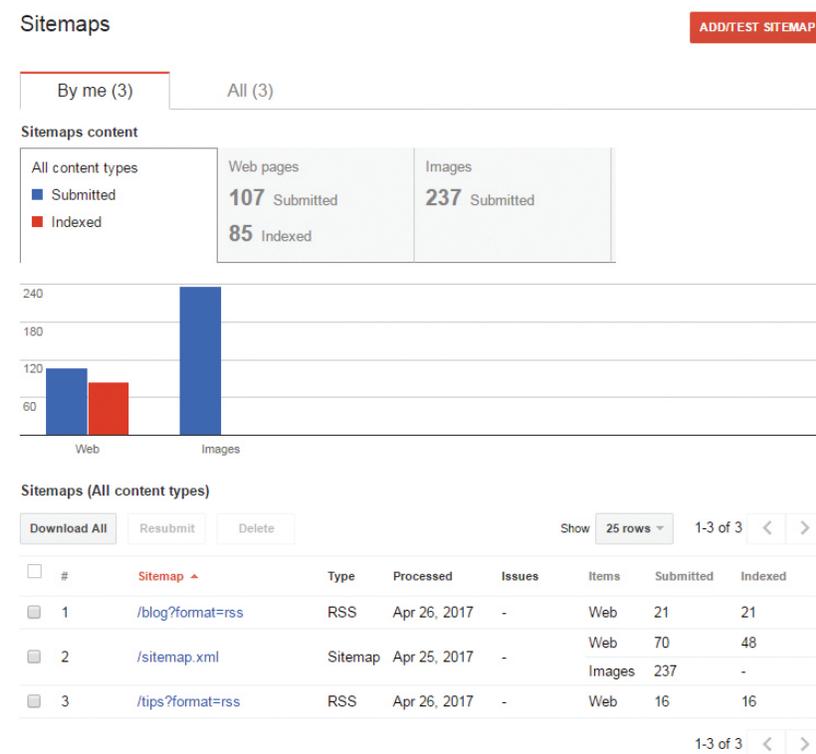
The manual action page on the Google Search Console will tell you if a reviewer has flagged your site, and it will provide the information you need to address the issue. Common problems indicated in the manual action report include spam, hidden text, unnatural links and cloaking.

Once you have taken action against any issues marked as a manual action, and are satisfied that you are in compliance with Google's rules, you can request a review of your site from the report area.

2. Submit XML Sitemap and RSS Feeds

An XML sitemap can be very beneficial to your ranking within Google. At the very least, it won't do any harm to your rank.

The sitemap itself is a file that lists all of the pages of your site so Google will know what



Your sitemap tells Google how your site is organized into various pages.

is there and how it is organized. This provides Google's web crawlers with a better understanding of your website, as well as the meta-data information contained within every page.

Sitemaps are particularly useful for large websites, those with content that does not link to other internal pages and new sites without many external links.

Building a sitemap can take some time but it is worth the effort. If you can help Google look at your site more favorably and more thoroughly, this is something worth doing.

To start, you should determine which pages on your site should be crawled by Google. Build a sitemap manually or use an external tool to generate the map.

One easy way to submit a sitemap is by providing your Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feed URL to Google. If you have a blog, the blog software or website is probably able to create the feed URL. Once this URL is submitted, Google will have information on the most recent URLs you have created.

Simple sitemaps with only URLs can be created as text files with one URL per line.

ADD/TEST SITEMAP

Save the file with a .txt extension.

You can test and submit your sitemap within Search Console.

3. Fix Crawl Errors

If Google's web crawlers encounter problems, they will advise you through the crawl errors section of the Search Console. It's important to address these issues. They represent potentially missed areas of your site that could be affecting your search engine results page ranking. Crawl errors are generated when the web crawler is unsuccessful or encounters an HTTP error code.

Crawl Errors »»

Site Errors

DNS	Server connectivity	Robots.txt fetch
		

URL Errors

35 Not found

If site errors show up in this section, look into the issue and fix it as soon as possible.

Site errors appear if the Google crawler has not been able to access your entire site, while URL errors appear in the event of specific page issues. Site errors often come down to inadvertently changed permissions, reorganization, broken scripts and problems with directories, as well as external causes.

If it's something you can fix, investigate it and solve it as soon as possible.

Site errors are commonly related to DNS issues, server problems, or a problem with your robots.txt file. In some cases, a crawl error is the result of something you did. If you have removed a page, for example, Google will likely return a 404 error. The simple solution is to remove any links to that page, so you do not have dead links elsewhere on your site.

When you fix a URL error, you can mark it as fixed within the Search Console to tell yourself you have addressed it. If it is not actually fixed, it will reappear when the Google webcrawler runs through your site again.

4. Repair Mobile Usability Issues

Many people are accessing websites with mobile devices and Google is placing a higher level of importance on mobile usability for this reason.

Your website will look different on a mobile device and should be optimized for use on smaller screens. The Search Console's

mobile usability report will show you where you can improve in this regard. It will highlight specific errors and the steps you need to take to fix them.

Common problems include using Flash, pages that are not properly adjusted for different screen sizes, a small font size and touch elements too close to one another.

By looking through the mobile usability report and making the suggested changes, you'll see improvements to your Google ranking, as well as greater user satisfaction.

5. Make HTML Improvements

HTML creates the backbone of your website. This code needs to be in good shape for your site to look and act the way you want.

The HTML Improvements report helps you see where you can improve your code to enhance your users' experience and bring traffic to your site through good SEO practices. It will show you problems with title tags, meta descriptions and non-indexable content like rich media files and images. Using proper, descriptive text and code in these areas, you can attract more traffic through keyword usage.

6. Implement Structured Data

The Structured Data Report gives Google's crawlers more—and more useful—information about your site. By using schema.

Mobile Usability

Fix mobile usability issues affecting your site. [Learn more.](#)

Status: 10/25/14

■ **8,206** Pages with errors



Download Show 10 rows 1 - 5 of 5 < >

Usability error ▼	Pages with errors
1 Viewport not configured	8,206
2 Touch elements too close	7,615
3 Small font size	8,203
4 Flash usage	14
5 Content not sized to viewport	7,647

Google is placing a lot of value on mobile usability, so pay close attention to this report to rank higher.

HTML Improvements

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Addressing the following may help your site's user experience and performance.

Meta description	Pages
Duplicate meta descriptions	11
Long meta descriptions	0
Short meta descriptions	0
Title tag	Pages
We didn't detect any issues with the title tags on your site.	
Non-indexable content	Pages
We didn't detect any issues with non-indexable content on your site.	

Clean up your code with input from the HTML Improvements report.

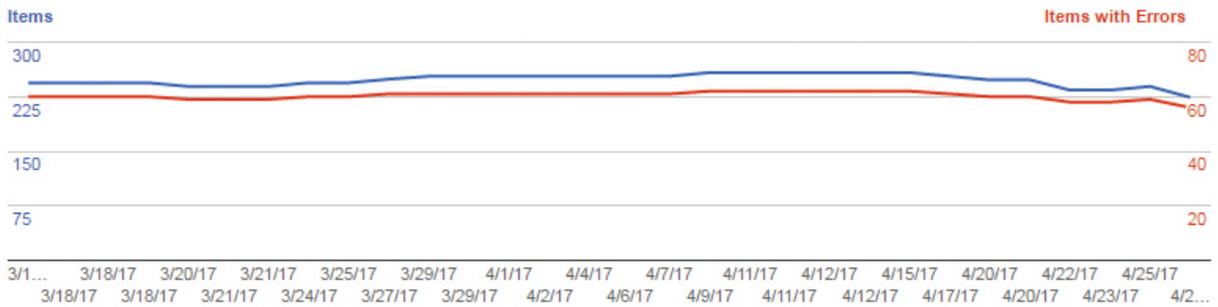
org vocabulary and formatting, or by tagging information on your site with the Data Highlighter tool, you can organize all of the pertinent details of your site, your business and your services.

This area of the Search Console also allows you to see where your structured data types have errors. Happily, it offers information on how to fix and verify markup, and provides a testing tool, too.

Structured Data

Status: 4/26/17

224 Items [?] on 42 pages 56 Items with Errors [?] on 33 pages



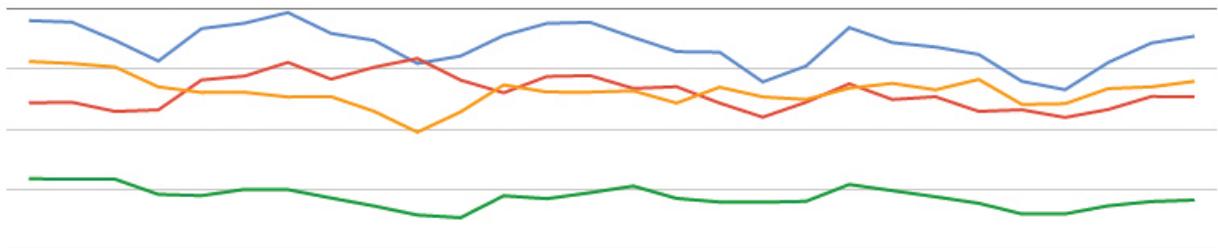
Download Show 25 rows 1-6 of 6

Data Type	Source	Pages	Items	Items with Errors
hentry	Markup: microformats.org	33	56	56
WebSite	Markup: schema.org	42	42	-
Organization	Markup: schema.org	42	42	-
LocalBusiness	Markup: schema.org	42	42	-
Article	Markup: schema.org	31	31	-
WebPage	Markup: schema.org	11	11	-

1-6 of 6

The Structured Data Report provides crawlers detail about your site and tells you how to fix markup.

Total clicks	Total impressions	Avg. CTR	Avg. position
28,552	729,390	3.91%	15.7



Check in often on clicks, impressions and the rest of the information in the Search Analytics Report.

7. Use Search Analytics to Find Low Hanging Fruit

One of the most important areas of the Search Console is the Search Analytics Report. Here, you can track your SEO directly from Google, giving you valuable, free insight

into what is working and what could use a change.

Using this report, you can see how your search traffic is changing, where it is coming from and what keywords are bringing people to your site. This information can lead you to

new topic and/or keyword optimization opportunities. For instance, if people are visiting a specific page using a keyword that you have not targeted, this is a great opportunity to give that subject and keyword more in-depth coverage, either by enhancing the existing content or creating an all-new page.

Note that it's important not to go overboard. You should avoid cannibalizing a topic by creating more than one page optimized for the same keyword term.

By regularly checking in on clicks, impressions, search results page position and click-through rates, you'll be able to tailor your SEO strategies to what is actually happening on your site.

8. Monitor Latest Links

Google's Search Console makes it easy to monitor links to your site with a report that shows a list of all the links the crawler has discovered. It will also display what link sources are most common and what anchor text is most common. You can use this information to expand your reach.

By tracing links back to where they came from, you can take advantage of niche networks. For example, if a specific forum or discussion page has linked to your site, you might interact with that site and its visitors, generating more interest in your site and what you have to offer.

You can also use this information from links to reach out to influencers who are discussing your site. Track links back to bloggers and consider thanking them and/or offering to work with them on a mutually beneficial campaign.

This information will also help you to identify negative links that could create problems for you through manual actions. Beware of spammy links and the other common manual action issues.

Google Search Console is a vital tool and resource for anyone involved with running a

A Beginner's Quick Guide to Using Google Search Console for SEO

Getting started with Google Search Console does not have to be intimidating. It's a good thing to do if you are interested in maximizing on your search engine optimization (SEO). There is a learning curve for most users and you might lose an afternoon or two, but it's well worth it. Get it right and the Search Console will save you time and money.

Follow these simple steps and you'll be well on your way.

1. Add your site and verify it: This is step one. Create or log on to your Search Console account, add property (your site), and follow the steps to verify that you are someone with access to the site. Take your time and get this right. It gets a lot more interesting very quickly afterward.
2. Link Google Analytics: An optional step, but one that will give you the best information between both sets of tools. Recommended.
3. Make a sitemap: This is an ideal way to ensure that Google crawls all of your website.
4. Test your robots.txt file: Google's tester tool ensures that your robots.txt file is error-free. It's a good thing to do.
5. Crawl for errors: This section of the Search Console lets you know what, if any, errors are present on your site. Armed with this information, you can fix the problems before they impact your page rank.

If you are looking for additional help with specifics in the Google Search Console, visiting the Google Search Console Help Center will not disappoint you. It gives you valuable information about the console, how it works and what steps you can take to implement best practices for your site.

website. As a free service, it will not take anything out of your budget to use, but is worth its weight in Google gold for search engine optimization and other marketing techniques.

The Search Console provides web users with accurate and up-to-date data, offers every tool needed to monitor and manage search functionality and provides numerous reports that give a great deal of insight into every aspect of what is and is not working in your search engine ranking strategy. All of this is available to you in an automated format, so you do not need to expend funds or time to generate these reports on your own.

From optimizing and improving your website's appearance for all users, to creating

rich results with structured data, to digging into search terms to find out what your readers want to know more about, you can use the information provided by Google Search Console to make your website all that your users hope it will be.

You do not have to guess what will drive people to your website. Google Search Console will make this information available to you so that you can improve your website and produce ever-better content. It's a must-have for anyone involved in online marketing, especially those who handle search engine optimization and inbound strategies. ■

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