

Knowing what your website is actually doing

Google Analytics and Search Console, in four screens and twenty minutes a month. Free, unglamorous, and the fastest way to stop guessing.

The short version

Two free tools tell you almost everything worth knowing about your website. Google Analytics tells you what people did once they arrived. Google Search Console tells you how they found you in the first place, and what they searched for. Most specialist retailers have never opened either.

You do not need to understand them. You need four screens, about twenty minutes a month, and the discipline to act on one thing you find rather than admiring all of it.

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Check which Analytics you are actually running. The old version, Universal Analytics, stopped collecting data on **1 July 2023**. A great many sites still have that code in the page, quietly gathering nothing. If your tracking code starts **UA-** rather than **G-**, you have no data at all and have not had for three years. Fixing that is the first job.

Search Console: how people find you

This is the more useful of the two for a shop, and the less used. It shows the actual searches that put you in front of somebody, whether they clicked, and where you ranked. It is the closest thing to reading your customers' minds that you will get for free.

Screen 1 — Performance, sorted by impressions

Impressions are how often you appeared; clicks are how often somebody chose you. Sort by impressions and look for rows with plenty of the first and almost none of the second. That is a search where Google is already offering you and people are picking somebody else — usually because the page title or the description underneath it reads badly. Rewriting those two lines is an hour's work and often the cheapest win on the whole site.

Screen 2 — Performance, filtered to queries containing your town

Filter the queries to your town, and the neighbouring ones. This tells you whether the local work in guide 01 is doing anything. If a town you serve produces no impressions at all, you have never given Google a reason to connect you with it.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR RATHER THAN WHAT TO MEASURE

You are not trying to make a number go up. You are looking for **surprises** — a brand you barely mention bringing people in, a question you had never thought to answer, a town you had written off. Each surprise is a page waiting to be written.

Analytics: what they did when they arrived

Screen 3 — Traffic acquisition

This splits your visitors by where they came from: search, direct, social, referral. Two things are worth knowing. First, what proportion arrives from search — if it is small, the work in guide 01 has not been done. Second, whether social is sending anybody at all. For most specialist shops the honest answer is that social sends very few people to the website, which is useful to know before you spend another year on it.

Screen 4 — Pages and screens

Which pages people actually look at, ranked. This is where most retailers get their first real shock. The pages you laboured over are often near the bottom, and the opening hours, the contact page and one brand page you wrote in ten minutes are near the top.

Act on that. If the contact page is your second most-read page, it should be the best page on the site — a photograph, parking, the nearest station, and what to expect when you walk in. Most are a postcode and a form.

What to ignore

- **Total visitors.** On a shop's website the number is small, jumps about, and tells you nothing you can act on. One local newsletter mention doubles it for a week.
- **Bounce rate** and its modern equivalents. Somebody who lands on your opening hours, reads them and leaves has been served perfectly well.
- **Average time on page.** It measures patience, not interest, and it is measured badly.
- **Anything an agency emails you as a monthly PDF** that contains no sentence beginning “so we should”.

The twenty-minute month

Once a month, in this order:

- 01 **Search Console, Performance, last three months.** Sort by impressions. Find one row with high impressions and low clicks, and rewrite that page's title and description.
- 02 **Filter to your town names.** Note anything at zero that should not be.
- 03 **Analytics, Traffic acquisition.** Glance at the split. You are watching for a change, not a target.
- 04 **Analytics, Pages and screens.** Take the top five. Ask whether each is as good as it should be, given that is what people are actually reading.

05 Write down the one thing you are going to change, and change it before next month.

ONE THING, NOT TEN

The failure mode here is not ignorance, it is paralysis. A retailer who fixes one page title a month for a year has done twelve real improvements. A retailer who reads the whole dashboard every month and changes nothing has done none, and has spent longer at it.

A word on who owns the accounts

Make sure the Analytics and Search Console accounts are in **your** name, with your email as an owner — not only your web developer's. This is the single most common problem when a shop changes agency: the history goes with the old one, and years of data become unreachable overnight. It takes two minutes to add yourself as an owner and it is worth doing this afternoon.

ALSO IN THIS SERIES

01 Getting found locally — the work this guide measures.

05 Writing about a product in your own words — what to do with the surprises Search Console hands you.

All seven guides are free to read, member or not, at [the Clarity guides page](#).

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