

LOVES DATA

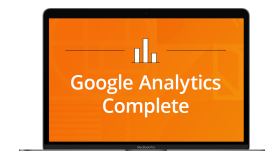
DIGITAL ANALYTICS

Setting up Google Analytics site search (with and without parameters)

Benjamin Mangold

If you have a search function on your website, then you need to be tracking what people are searching. The Google Analytics Site Search reports allow you to see the search terms people use, the pages where they start their search, and the pages they navigate to from your search results page. These reports can provide insights into your content, navigation, and even your search campaigns.

Before you can begin using the reports, you'll need to configure Site Search in Google Analytics. Let's walk through the different ways you can set up the reports, starting with the simplest option (finding the



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query parameter) through to configure the reports using Google Tag Manager. Here are the approaches we're going to cover...

1. [Using a Query Parameter](#)
2. [Using a Filter](#)
3. [Modifying Your Search Function](#)
4. [Using Google Tag Manager](#)

Time to get started!

1. Using a Query Parameter

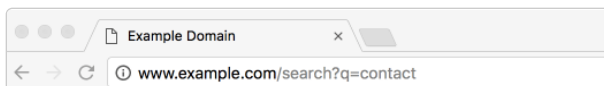
The easiest way to configure the Site Search reports is to find the query parameter that drives your website's search function. Start by performing a search for 'contact' on your website and look at the URL for the search results page. If your search function has a query parameter, you'll have a URL a bit like one of these...

```
example.com/search?q=contact  
example.com/index.php?id=search&term=contact  
example.com/search.asp?search_term=contact&id=ac9024
```

Now if your URL looks completely different. If you can't see a question mark, an ampersand or 'contact' in the URL, then you'll need to use another approach for setting up the Site Search reports. If this is you, then feel free to jump to 2. Using a Filter.

STEP 1

The first thing you need to do is identify the query parameter for the search function. You need to look for the term you searched for and then just before the term you should see an equals sign. Before this, you should see a character (or word), and before this, you should see a question mark or an ampersand. The character or word between the question mark or ampersand and the equals sign is your query parameter.



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Looking at the examples where we searched for 'contact', the first URL was example.com/search?q=contact in this case we can see 'q' is the query parameter because it's between the question mark and the equals sign.

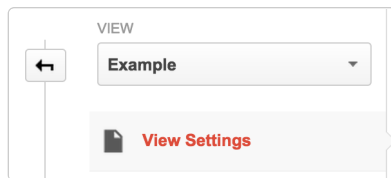
In the second example the URL was example.com/index.php?id=search&term=contact and in this case 'term' is the query parameter because it's between the ampersand and the equals sign.

In the final example, the URL was example.com/search.asp?search_term=contact&id=ac9024 and this means the query parameter is 'search_term'.

Once you've found the query parameter for your website, it's time to configure Google Analytics.

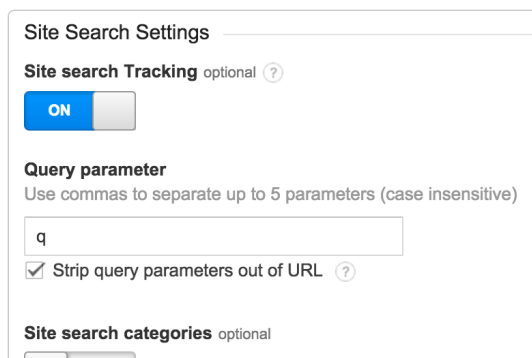
STEP 2

Log into your Google Analytics account and head to the 'Admin' section. Then find the view you want to configure and click on the 'View Settings' option.



STEP 3

Scroll down to the 'Site Search Settings' area and set 'Site Search Tracking' to 'On', and enter your query parameter. As some websites have more than one query parameter, Google Analytics allows you to enter up to five of them separated with commas. For example 'q,query'.



campaigns to achieve maximum impact.

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Selecting 'Strip query parameters out of URL' will prevent your search from showing up in your content reports. If you leave the option deselected, you'll see rows in your content reports for each distinct search term used, for example, '/search?q=contact'.

Site Search also allows you to set up categories. You should use this if people can refine the search results or search within particular sections of your website. To set up categories, you'll need to know the parameter that is used to refine the search results. You can use a similar approach to the one we've just covered to find the query parameter used for the search term. If your search function doesn't have categories, then you can leave this option off.

2. Using a Filter

If you don't have a query parameter for your website's search function, then you'll need to take a different approach to configure the Site Search reports. Search for 'contact' and look at the URL for your search results page. You might have a URL like one of these...

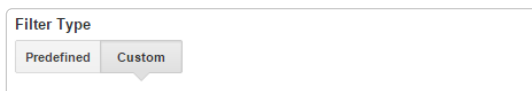
```
example.com/index/search/contact  
example.com/search.php/keyword/contact/id946  
example.com/searchterm/contact
```

These examples include the term you searched for, but since there is no query parameter we'll need to use a filter to get the search terms into your reports.

Possible filter:

If your URL looks like 'example.com/index/search/contact', you'll need to set up the following filter:

Field A -> Extract A: Request URI: '^/index/search/(.*)'
Output To -> Constructor: Search Term: '\$A1'
Select 'Field A required' and 'Override Output Field'



Exclude
 Include
 Lowercase
 Uppercase
 Search and Replace
 Advanced

Field A -> Extract A

Request URI

Field B -> Extract B

Select field

Output To -> Constructor

Search Term

Field A Required
 Field B Required
 Override Output Field
 Case Sensitive

If your URL looks like

'example.com/search.php/keyword/contact/id946' you'll need to set up the following filter:

Field A -> Extract A: Request URI: '^/search.php/keyword/(.*)/id'

Output To -> Constructor: Search Term: '\$A1'

Select 'Field A required' and 'Override Output Field'

Filter Type

Predefined Custom

Exclude
 Include
 Lowercase
 Uppercase
 Search and Replace
 Advanced

Field A -> Extract A

Request URI

Field B -> Extract B

Select field

Output To -> Constructor

Search Term

Field A Required
 Field B Required

Override Output Field

Case Sensitive

If your URL looks like 'example.com/searchterm/contact' you will need to set up the following filter:

Field A -> Extract A: Request URI: '^/searchterm/(.*)'

Output To -> Constructor: Search Term: '\$A1'

Select 'Field A required' and 'Override Output Field'

Filter Type

Predefined Custom

Exclude

Include

Lowercase

Uppercase

Search and Replace

Advanced

Field A -> Extract A

Request URI

Field B -> Extract B

Select field

Output To -> Constructor

Search Term

Field A Required

Field B Required

Override Output Field

Case Sensitive

You will start to see the search terms within the Site Search reports after you've created the filter. You can use a similar approach if you also have a search category you want to see in your reports.

3. Modifying Your Search Function

Okay, so if the URL for your search results page doesn't have a query parameter and doesn't even include the keyword, then there are still two ways you can configure the Site Search reports.

After you've searched for 'contact' look at the URL for your search

After you've searched for 'contact', look at the URL for your search results page. You're probably going to see a URL like one of these...

```
example.com/search  
example.com/index.php?id=search  
example.com/search-results.asp
```

Start by heading back to the page where you started your search (just hit the back button). Now view the source code for the page and look for the form used for your website's search function.

If the form looks something like this...

```
<form action="search.php" method="post" name="gs">
```

Then you can try changing the method of 'post' to 'get'. Your source code should then look something like this...

```
<form action="search.php" method="get" name="gs">
```

Now when you perform the search again you should see a query parameter in the URL for the search results page. Now you can head back to 1. Using a Query Parameter to configure the Site Search reports.

If you can't change the method for your form or changing the method to 'get' doesn't provide a query parameter in the URL, then you can use Google Tag Manager to capture the search terms people use.

4. Using Google Tag Manager

You can also use Google Tag Manager to pass search terms through to Google Analytics. Start by searching for 'contact'. If your search results page includes the search term then we can get the term using Google Tag Manager.





```
<h2 id="search-term">contact</h2>
```

We can then use the ID of this heading tag to capture the search term. To do this create a new Google Analytics tag inside Google Tag Manager and select the option to 'Enable overriding settings for this tag'. Then select 'Fields to Set' and click 'Add Field'. Select 'Page' as the 'Field Name' and then enter '/search?q=' as the value.

Now you'll need to create a new variable that uses 'DOM Elements' and enter the ID that corresponds to the ID of the heading tag. In our example, this is 'search-term'.

Selection Method

ID

Element ID

search-term

Attribute Name ?

Finally, you'll need to add a trigger to your new tag. I recommend creating a trigger that will only fire the tag on the search results page (and none of the other pages on your website). You can then add this as an exception trigger to your existing Google Analytics tag inside Google Tag Manager – this prevents double pageviews for your search results page.

Conclusion

Now that you've configured the Site Search reports in Google Analytics you'll be able to see what people are searching for on your website. People are taking the time to tell you what they want, so take a moment and listen! You might be surprised at what people are searching.

Need inspiration? Read my post on [ways to use the Site Search reports](#), and you might also find my post on [understanding search intent](#) useful too.

Need help identifying your query parameter? Have a tip for using the Site Search reports? Let me know in the comments below

Tagged: [Google Analytics](#), [Site Search](#)

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POST COMMENT...

Lewis Kang'ethe 3 months ago · 0 Likes

Hi Benjamin, the article was super useful. After watching your video

and looking at our website, I just realised we don't have a search function in it. So Google Site Search wouldn't be a useful feature for us. Thank you.

Sanjay Subudhi 7 months ago · 0 Likes

Hi Benjamin Mangold,
I need your help in Site Search
When any one search in my search bar, the URL is showing is like this
"https://humainhealth.com/search-packages/THYROID%20STIMULATING%20HORMONE" after selecting any test or package the URL will show like this
"https://humainhealth.com/test/thyroid-stimulating-hormone-tsh"
Now what filter I will use in Google Tag Manager, So I can track the site search

Inna Ianchuk 10 months ago · 0 Likes

Hi there,
thank you for great insights. I've applied the recommendations, but still there's no data in GA((.
The URL somewhat like this:
example.com/product/catalog?
s=Monkey%20Toy&p=1&sort=scoreDESC&filter=null
I've used 's' as a query parameter and it didn't work.
Do you think I'm missing something? Would be grateful for any advice.

Benjamin Mangold 10 months ago · 0 Likes

Hi Inna,

Looking at your example, entering 's' as the query parameter (without quote marks) should work. I would start by checking that Google Analytics is correctly implemented on the search results page for your website and that there isn't a filter removing the parameter before your data is processed.

All the best,
Benjamin

Sajari - A year ago · 0 Likes

Great post. @sajari we get asked about this all the time. Will point people here.

Benjamin Mangold A year ago · 0 Likes

Awesome. Thanks Sajari!

Arne Cosyns A year ago · 0 Likes

Hello,

I've set up the site search using a Query Parameter, s, and following your steps. But it doesn't show up in my Google Analytics when I try it out. Does it take time to work?

Benjamin Mangold A year ago · 0 Likes

Hi Arne, once configured and someone performs a search you should see data in the reports within a few hours. This can vary, so you might need to wait up to 12 hours. I also suggest checking the date range and confirming things are configured correctly too.

Christopher Phillips A year ago · 0 Likes

Thank you, this is very helpful! I am having a hard time identifying my search query parameter and had a quick question. The search query in the URL appears as:
earch_advanced.php?

cur_cat_oid=12&search_database=Search&search_db=Search&cpage=1&ecpage=1&ppage=1&spage=1&tpage=1&location=33&filter%5Bkeyword%5D=test

and I thought that "%5Bkeyword%5D" might be the correct parameter, but that doesn't seem to be working. Now I am thinking that I may need to use a filter as you have described above, does that sound right?

Thank you!

Benjamin Mangold A year ago · 0 Likes

Hey Christopher,

The URL is a little strange. If you searched for 'test', then I'd start by trying the following as your query parameter:

filter%5Bkeyword%5D

If that doesn't work due to the special characters, then you could use a filter to search and replace this string.

Let me know how you go!

Morten A year ago · 0 Likes

Great blog it often helps me, when my skills is not sufficient

Mike H. 2 years ago · 0 Likes

Thank you, Ben!

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