

# The “Dirty” Secret of Being Number 1 on Google



*This is a guest post from Andrew Waber. He is a PR analyst at Chitika Advertising Network.*

Back in late July, Bryan O’Neil [published a post on this blog](#) detailing his opinions as to the value of organic traffic.

In Bryan’s own words “in reality organic traffic is *far less valuable and more risky* than its paid counterpart,” using several examples including volatility, effort, and competition as key pillars to his argument. Of course, a post like this generated a wide range of opinions in the comments section, but regardless as to how you feel on the topic, it’s admittedly a very broad subject.

At [Chitika Insights](#), we tapped into data from our publisher network of over 300,000+ sites to answer another related question: **is all organic search traffic created equal when it comes to potential ad revenue?**

Back in June, Chitika Insights published a study examining the [value of each Google result position](#). Analysis of the data revealed that the first position on an average Google search engine result page (SERP) garnered about 33% of Google search traffic, with largely a classic exponential drop off in traffic at each subsequent position.

Obviously, a Web page’s traffic is just one possible key performance indicator (KPI), with ad conversion rate, commonly known as CTR, being another.

## The Study from Chitika Insights

To study how CTR varies depending on the Google result clicked, Chitika Insights examined tens of millions of online ad impressions in which the user was referred to the page via a Google search. From the referring Google URL, Chitika is able to extract the position that the webpage was on within the prior search results page.

From this, Chitika can measure what percentage of Google traffic comes from each position of the search results page. The data set was drawn from a date range of August 1 to August 7, 2013 and is representative of U.S. and Canadian Web traffic only.

An index was created to graphically represent the data. “100%” refers to the Google rank at which corresponding visitor CTR is maximized. If a point is “70%”, for instance, that means that the observed CTR from that rank’s corresponding visitors is 70% of the CTR at the peak.



**Note: all percentages mentioned in the above graph are indexed CTR and not actual CTR.**

The results show that, on average, of the first 100 positions on a given Google SERP, the highest CTR was from users who visited via clicking on the 10<sup>th</sup> link, rather than the first result. In fact, visitors who were referred from the first position had the lowest CTR among those in the top 100 search results.

Surprising, right? Let’s take a step back to the decision-making process that likely contributes to this behavior.

### A Searcher’s Decision-making Process

Generally speaking, the chance of any user clicking on an ad increases when that user finds something that they are looking for in the form of an ad. For example, a person that searched for “headphones” is probably more likely to click on an ad relating to headphones or music as compared to an ad on an unrelated topic.

So what’s different when someone goes to the first result on a page?

It’s reasonable to assume that most users who click on a link in first position are keenly focused on what they are looking for and/or have already found what they need. A person searching for “Whirlpool refrigerator” who saw the top result as addressing what they were looking for, will likely be “all business” – buying or researching based on that result since they found so much value in it.

Along the same lines, when a user scrolls down and clicks on a link at position 10, it is more likely that they have not found exactly what they were looking for, increasing the probability of that person clicking on an ad related to their search query.

However, leaving aside these possible behavioral causes, what is clear from the data set is that although the first position of a Google search result drives the most search traffic, an average visitor coming from that link is the least likely to convert into an ad click.

## Conclusion

Now, this doesn't necessarily mean you should tailor all your site's SEO efforts to focus on attaining the 10<sup>th</sup> ranking for a given term. If your daily traffic is already high, say hundreds of thousands to millions of visitors per day, looking to maximize CTR by way of your Google placement may be a worthwhile idea.

If, however, your daily traffic is low, the first priority should be to increase site visitors before going after that smaller number of higher-value users.

With these caveats and [the traffic breakdown by Google SERP ranking](#) in mind, what these statistics point to is that **for high volume search terms or phrases in particular**, the 10<sup>th</sup> position is a great place to be.

On a popular search term, 2.4% of potential visitors still represents a sizable audience, and by being the number 10 result, it's likely a site will see higher ad revenues. However, for lower volume or specialized search terms, it's much more useful to rank as high as possible in order to attract the largest audience, since the proverbial "pie" of users on those terms is already fairly small, along with the potential revenue impact of higher visitor CTRs.

Knowing how a site ranks on key terms in Google can also help point to the best ad revenue option – cost-per-mille (CPM) for sites ranking generally higher and cost-per-click (CPC)-based ad revenue for those which generally rank closer to the bottom of the page.

Thoughts or questions? Let me know in the comments!

**About the Author:** Andrew Waber is a PR analyst at Chitika Advertising Network. You can follow him at [@ChitikaInsights](#).

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