Google Search Console to consolidate Search Performance reports to canonical URL

Google announced on the webmaster blog that starting at the end of March 2018, Google will change how the Google Search Console Performance reports count metrics. Instead of using the exact URL, it will transition to using the canonical URL for reporting.

Google said “to help unify your data, Search Console will soon begin assigning search metrics to the (Google-selected) canonical URL, rather than the URL referred to by Google Search.”

When Google launches this change, it will give you a few weeks to view both the old and new methodology so that you can see the differences. Google will also backdate the data starting as far back as January 2018 when the change happens.

The benefits. Google said this change provides three benefits including (1) the ability to see a “full picture about a specific piece of content in one property, (2) your mobile or AMP pages will also show as one property and (3) it will also improve the AMP and Mobile-Friendly reports by showing more data.

Coming March. The change is happening by the end of March. Google will “pre-populate your unified data beginning from January 2018.” The APIs will also change in March 2019 as well.

The impact. Here is how Google said this will affect your data in Google Search Console:

- At an individual URL level, you will see traffic shift from any non-canonical (duplicate) URLs to the canonical URL.
- At the property level, you will see data from your alternate property (for example, your mobile site) shifted to your “canonical property”. Your alternate property traffic probably won’t drop to zero in Search Console because canonicalization is at the page, not the property level, and your mobile property might have some canonical pages. However, for most users, most property-level data will shift to one property. AMP property traffic will drop to zero in most cases (except for self-canonical pages).
- You will still be able to filter data by device, search appearance (such as AMP), country, and other dimensions without losing important information about your traffic.

What it looks like. Google provided a few examples of the before and after examples both on the total traffic, individual page traffic and mobile traffic overview. Here is a look at how a sample site will change based on the total traffic view:

To prepare. Google said you may want to review user access rights to make sure the right people have the right access to the right reports. Google also said you may want to adjust any custom traffic reports you created based on these consolidation changes. To know what Google considers a URL's canonical URL, use the Google URL inspection tool – that tool will show you the canonical URL. If you want to save the old legacy data, you can export it from the interface or use the API before the March change over.

What about property sets? Google said it is doing away with property sets, a feature to let you consolidate these metrics on your own. Google did experiment with domain properties in the new Search Console but that seemed to have gone away. I

guess going forward, Google will do consolidation for all properties by default.

Why it matters. SEOs deeply rely on the data within Search Console. These traffic changes will likely be significant changes to most of those who have properties verified in Search Console. Understanding what changed and why is important when reviewing your goals, benchmarks and communicating to your clients.

In addition, you will be able to use various report filters to see your mobile or AMP traffic, so even though Google is consolidating a lot of this data for you, you should be able to get into the weeds through some of the report filters.

More about the Google Search Console

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