Local business study finds 0% of site traffic coming from email, paid media

BrightLocal has just released a "Google Analytics for Local Businesses Study." It looked at "anonymous data of 11,016 local businesses in the USA, Canada, Australia, and the UK" in an effort to establish benchmarks across a number of categories such as traffic sources, monthly users, page views, session duration, bounce rates and others.

The data were collected between September 2017 and December 2018. The local businesses in the study were "BrightLocal users that opted in with active connections to Google Analytics." It's not clear if all of these are small businesses (SMB) or whether this dataset includes franchises and enterprises with multiple locations. It likely skews SMB.

Just under 500 monthly visitors. BrightLocal found that local businesses see an average (across verticals and regions) of 414 monthly website visitors each month. (This does not reflect searches that result in GMB profile impressions.) However, unique visitors can vary significantly by industry. Car dealers see the most monthly visits, followed by hotels and restaurants.

Beyond site visits, the research discovered that local businesses had an average of 506 "sessions" per month, while the median was 205 organic sessions. Sessions are interactions with a website and are defined here to include page views, transactions and other forms of engagement.

Zero traffic from email. A striking and perhaps very

surprising finding is that “the average local business receives no email, paid, or display sessions each month.” There’s no clear explanation for this other than most local businesses may not be doing paid ads or may be inept at doing them. But the absence of any email-driven traffic to websites is almost shocking.

Social media traffic is 4% of total traffic in the chart below. In addition, “referral” traffic could include visits from social media, although that’s not clear.

Half of all site traffic, according to the study, is coming from organic search; 37% is from direct navigation or branded queries. That’s also a bit of a surprise, given that there’s other data in the market that argues the majority of local search queries are unbranded.

Less mobile traffic than other studies. Another surprise is that 36% of local business website sessions (U.S.) are on mobile devices. This seems to fly in the face of other data and the current conventional wisdom that most local business lookups and search are happening on mobile. However, BrightLocal found different levels of mobile access by vertical.

Restaurants saw the highest proportion of traffic coming from mobile (58%), followed by car dealers (50%), entertainment (50%) and real estate (49%).

Source: BrightLocal Google Analytics Study (2019)

Why we should care. There are myriad other findings in the report not discussed above. However, there are several things that stand out, including the smaller-than-expected mobile

traffic numbers, the high level of direct traffic visits and, especially, the lack of email and paid traffic.

The report did not examine or include GMB insights. And there is a high percentage of “zero-click” searches in Google, where people get the information they need on a business without going to its website. Further, Google Analytics is not going to be 100% accurate. Still, there are some curious and nuanced findings here that are worth thinking carefully about and exploring further.

Why are these 11,000 businesses not getting any traffic from paid sources or email? Are they not doing email marketing? Are they not tagging their campaigns? Are the majority not doing any paid advertising or are they doing it very badly? The head-scratcher findings raise many questions about digital marketing activities among SMBs.

About The Author

Greg Sterling is a Contributing Editor at Search Engine Land. He writes about the connections between digital and offline commerce. He previously held leadership roles at LSA, The Kelsey Group and TechTV. Follow him Twitter or find him on LinkedIn.
http://feeds.searchengineland.com/~r/searchengineland/~3/OhquMHzTnGg/local-business-study-finds-0-of-site-traffic-coming-from-email-paid-media-325122