Site Managers Guide to Analytics & Site Health

Level: Basic to Intermediate

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Grammatical Error Editing by Susan Wenograd

So if you’ve got a problem with the grammar in this doc, blame Susan.
Table of Contents

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................2

Overview .........................................................................................................................4

Guide Limitation Caveat .................................................................................................4

Primary Tools ..................................................................................................................4

Google Analytics (GA) .....................................................................................................5
  Date Range Considerations .........................................................................................5
  Custom Date Ranges ..................................................................................................5
  Google Analytics Left Side Navigation .....................................................................6
  Dashboards ..................................................................................................................6
  Customizing Dashboards ............................................................................................7
  Real-Time Data ...........................................................................................................7
  Visit Sources – All Traffic Sources ..........................................................................7
  Organic Search – Was This Site Penalized? ...............................................................9
  Additional Referrer Data ............................................................................................10
  Social Acquisition .......................................................................................................10
  Page Processing Speed ...............................................................................................11
    Worst Page Processing Times View .........................................................................12
  Conversions ..................................................................................................................14
    Conversion Overview ...............................................................................................14
    Goals ........................................................................................................................14
    Mobile Vs. Desktop ...................................................................................................15
  Landing Pages ................................................................................................................15

Google Webmaster Tools (GWT) ....................................................................................16

  Site Messages ..............................................................................................................16
  IMPORTANT NOTE: ......................................................................................................16
  Manual Actions ............................................................................................................17
  Crawl Errors ................................................................................................................17
  Search Queries .............................................................................................................17
  Sitemap Errors & Warnings .........................................................................................18
    Look for Errors and Warnings ..................................................................................18
    Yet More Potential Problems To Look For ..............................................................19
  Links To Your Site ........................................................................................................19
  Security Issues .............................................................................................................19
  Structured Data Errors ...............................................................................................20
  HTML Improvements .................................................................................................20

Additional Reporting Tools and Resources ....................................................................21

  Bing Webmaster Tools (BWT) ......................................................................................21
  Authority Labs ...............................................................................................................21
  Raven Tools ..................................................................................................................21
  Moz Pro & Moz Local ....................................................................................................21
  SEMRush .......................................................................................................................21

Advanced Testing Tools & Resources ............................................................................22

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Overview

Web site analytics for planning and monitoring will vary from site to site, business to business, and need to need. While there is no single set of data that works for every situation, a number of data points can be used to observe the most important trends taking place on a site, regardless of unique additional needs.

This document is designed to address those consistent, best practice data points across site types, primarily using Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools.

For each, I’ll provide a step-by-step how-to for gathering this data, along with an explanation as to why that particular metric is important.

Guide Limitation Caveat

Note that this guide is not an advanced training guide. I’ve designed it to focus only on those points the overwhelming majority of site owners, marketers and managers would need, or want, to see on a regular basis.

This guide does not provide anywhere near an exhaustive list of data types available. Many situations can very well entail an even deeper dive into your site’s health and the impact of your online marketing efforts.

For those “deeper dive” situations, I highly encourage you to explore the various tools and programs included here, and even encourage you to do more research for your unique situational needs.

Primary Tools

For the purpose of this guide, I am focusing exclusively on Google Analytics (GA) and Google Webmaster Tools (GWT).

While I do provide links at the end of this guide to other resources and tools, I’ve found, in more than a decade providing SEO solutions to clients around the world, that GA and GWT are truly all most site managers need for day-to-day monitoring of a site’s health.

Of course, every site is unique, and you may find other tools and resources vital to your situation. However, for basic to intermediate work on most sites, GA and GWT can absolutely suffice.
Google Analytics (GA)

http://www.google.com/analytics/

Combined with Google Webmaster Tools (GWT), GA gives the most accurate assessment of a site’s health.

Caveat: Google Analytics data is not necessarily 100% complete. Google has stated that they provide a “sampling” of data only, meaning that more information may be available within their private database than they reveal.

GA data can best be understood from a “trend” perspective. Observing or obsessing over data on a micro-scale can cause misunderstanding. Data changes from day to day for a host of reasons.

I highly recommend that reports only typically be generated on a once-per-month basis.

As needed, you may wish to check on certain data sub-sets more frequently, though it’s still recommended to do so no more than once per week for most situations.

Date Range Considerations

When first logging into Google Analytics you are presented data for the most recent 30-day cycle.

Custom Date Ranges

For any given report, you can leave this as-is, or change the date range to one you prefer to see the data on.

Compare Date Ranges

You can also click the “compare to” box to choose a previous cycle (such as “previous year” – which would show the same date range you have designated but then compare it to the same time period the previous year).

Year Over Year Comparison
Google Analytics Left Side Navigation

On the left side of the screen in GA, you can gain access to specific data types by choosing from one of the main navigation options.

Clicking on any individual main navigation link on that sidebar will open up that section’s navigation to give you sub-navigation specific to that section.

As you choose a particular sub-navigation item, data, charts, and related information will then appear off to the right of that sidebar.

The first main navigation option in GA is “dashboards.” This is where you can go to get a quick view of pre-configured “standard” data based on the most recent 30 days tracked.
If you want a quick way to get the pulse of the site, dashboards can provide a convenient place for that.

**Customizing Dashboards**

As is the case with most of the resources available within GA, you can set up customized dashboards for your particular needs. The options here are enormous.

**CAUTION:** At a certain point, most people end up becoming lost in the granularity. While customized and refined data review can be helpful, be careful to not end up crossing the line into shiny object distraction-land.

**Real-Time Data**

The “Real-Time” option allows you to monitor traffic data in as near as “real-time” as possible.

Real-time data is helpful when you wish to monitor the impact of a particular event or campaign as it unfolds.

**Visit Sources – All Traffic Sources**

One of the most common data points web site owners want to know about is how many people have been to the site in a given time range. While this used to be referred to as “hits” in the early days of the web (and is sadly, still referred to by that moniker by many people, what really matters is not how many hits a page has (an entirely different concept than people think it is).

Instead, what matters purely from a visibility perspective is the total number of visits, how many people actually come to the site, or a given page, and then from that data, what it was comprised of. (Unique vs. returning visitors, etc.)

From the left sidebar choose “Acquisition” then “All Traffic.”
On the right side, you will see a list of traffic source groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Default Channel Grouping</th>
<th>Visits</th>
<th>% New Visits</th>
<th>New Visits</th>
<th>Bounce Rate</th>
<th>Pages/Visit</th>
<th>Avg. Visit Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56,750</td>
<td>65.58%</td>
<td>37,219</td>
<td>61.33%</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>00:02:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Organic Search</td>
<td>21,282</td>
<td>72.39%</td>
<td>15,406</td>
<td>63.87%</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>00:02:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (not set)</td>
<td>21,241</td>
<td>62.28%</td>
<td>13,229</td>
<td>80.23%</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>00:02:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Direct</td>
<td>7,482</td>
<td>65.33%</td>
<td>4,688</td>
<td>60.20%</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>00:02:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Referral</td>
<td>4,784</td>
<td>62.23%</td>
<td>2,977</td>
<td>61.91%</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>00:01:52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Social</td>
<td>1,771</td>
<td>35.52%</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>47.26%</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>00:03:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. (Other)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>40.05%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65.85%</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>00:01:37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Display</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61.54%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>00:01:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Paid Search</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>00:02:11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** The default shows the top 8 to 10 referring sources. You can choose to show more rows by clicking on the bottom “Show Rows” dropdown menu.

(Paid search” and other data are not necessarily as accurate as that which is available from within the Google AdWords or other paid advertising dashboards and should not be relied upon for 100% accuracy. View this data for trends only.)

**Valuable data points from this screen**

- **Visits**: Total volume of visits to the site from a particular source
- **% New Visits**: How many of those visitors have not previously visited the site (generally in a 30 day period)
- **Pages/Visit**: How many pages the average visitor from that source went to upon arrival at the site
Other data points on this screen can be misleading and therefore are not necessarily helpful, except when evaluated by an expert within the context of other considerations.

Example:
Bounce rate (the percentage of people who come to a single page then directly abandon the site) is subject to individual site intent interpretation. If you provide exactly what visitors are looking for on a single page, the bounce rate may be high yet still not “bad.”

Organic Search – Was This Site Penalized?
One way to see whether a site was hit by a manual or algorithmic penalty from a search engine is to drill down into this visitor data section and review the timeline for visual cues.

In the “Acquisition / All Traffic” view, click on Google / organic – this will then show just the traffic from Google’s organic search engine.

Once you’ve drilled down into just the visitor data from Google Organics, you’ll see that data represented in a timeline chart.

If you expand the date range to cover a longer period, you can sometimes see where major traffic losses began.
You can sometimes line up specific drops with the handy “Google Algorithm Change History” charts provided by Moz [http://moz.com/google-algorithm-change](http://moz.com/google-algorithm-change) or alternately, the “Panguin” Tool from Barracuda Digital will show a visual overlay of known Google Updates. [http://www.barracuda-digital.co.uk/panguin-tool/](http://www.barracuda-digital.co.uk/panguin-tool/).

**WARNING:**
Unfortunately, SEO is much more complex than identifying a specific update that may or may not line up with a drop in your organic search visibility. Having this data can be helpful in beginning to address and correct problems that might arise, just don’t become fixated on one update being the only issue to address. If other issues existed prior to a drop, your site would have already been vulnerable and thus other, broader issues likely need to be corrected as well.

**Additional Referrer Data**
You can also see referral traffic from many other sources. However, unless you are checking for a large date range (such as a six month or one year long period), you’ll likely only want to gather data on other referrers if you are checking on the results of a specific individual campaign.

**Social Acquisition**
If you would like to dig even further into social acquisition data, you can do so via a different chart within GA.

On the left navigation bar, you can choose “Acquisition,” then “Social,” then “Overview.”

This will give you data on the vast range of social channels that brought your site traffic in the designated date range.
**Page Processing Speed**

This data is helpful to monitor because it can quickly show you that there is a consistent, or potentially intermittent problem on your site in regard to the total time it takes to process individual pages or the site overall.

To get access to this data, choose “Behavior” then “Site Speed” then “Page Timings” from the left navigation options.

**NOTE:** The default view is a bar-chart display that can be confusing. You will want to switch to the “spreadsheet” (data) view by clicking on the spreadsheet icon on the right side of the screen.

This then gives you specific information on individual pages and the actual page load speed for those pages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Avg. Page Load Time (sec)</th>
<th>Pageviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/catastrophe-models/</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/catwatch/</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/software/rge/</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>2.988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total, 100.00% (141,534)</td>
<td>141,534</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that “/” (row #1) is the site’s home page (or “root” of the site).

Data that matters on this report is the “Avg. Page Load Time (sec).”

This shows the average Google has assessed it takes (in seconds) for individual pages to be processed.

This is NOT the same as the time it takes visitors to see a page — it includes processing code not seen by visitors.

Also, this can be cross-referenced to “Pageviews”, the total number of times that particular page has been viewed in a given period of time.

**CAUTION:** If this chart reports any individual page has taken more than between one and three seconds to process for the given date range average you are checking, this is an indication that your site is having problems with processing — either at the code level, with style sheet image references, at the server level, or with third party processes.
**Site Managers Guide To Analytics & Site Health**

If this is the case, and if that particular page has any volume of pageviews for that date range, this is a potentially serious concern. If the average for some pages is over ten seconds, it’s almost assuredly harming your site.

**Worst Page Processing Times View**

The default view on this report sorts data based on the total number of page views each page has had during that date range.

A very helpful data check is to then click on the “Avg Page Load Time (sec)” heading. This sorts the data to show the WORST page timings for that date range.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Avg. Page Load Time (sec)</th>
<th>Pageviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>141,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>117.12</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>68.37</td>
<td>1,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>65.55</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53.74</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this screen shows, at the time this doc was created, some pages took as long as an average of over one minute to process (and one took almost two minutes to load).

**Why This View is Important**

*When pages are this severely slow, you can guarantee that at least some visitors suffered while waiting for page content, and people may have abandoned those pages out of frustration. Too much of this, and your SEO will most definitely suffer as well.*
Timeline Based Quick Assessment
When viewing page load processing time data, the top portion of the page in GA shows a visual chart representing average overall page timings spanning that date range.

![Graph showing average page load time (sec) for December 6 to December 27. The chart has a peak on December 13th with a value of 51.06 seconds.]

To get an understanding of a particular high point, you can **hold your mouse over a data point in this chart**. When you do so, a “pop-up” box will be displayed with more details about that date’s data.

![Graph showing average page load time (sec) for November 1 to December 27. The chart has a peak on November 3rd with a value of 211.84 seconds.]

As this example above shows, on December 13th the average page processing speed site-wide was over fifty-one seconds.

**Intermittent spikes of this nature are likely either due to server level problems or failed connections to 3rd party servers (ad networks, social sharing widgets, or services such as Disqus for blog comment functionality).**

Gaining Clarity Based On Date Range Variations

By expanding this report’s date range, you can also easily spot any potential “severe crisis” spikes.

![Graph showing average page load time (sec) for June 1 to December 27. The chart has a peak on November 3rd with a value of 211.84 seconds.]

As the above chart shows, the previously identified December spike wasn’t even the “worst case” spike.
Conversions

Data available in the “Conversions” section is quite often much more important than any other data you can monitor. This is the “meat” of your data from a sales success perspective.

**Warning:**
If you have not properly configured Google Analytics on your site (such as if you do not have Google Analytics tracking code in the secure check-out section of your site), or if you have not implemented goal tracking properly, this data will be useless or misleading.

Conversion Overview

This is a pre-set data point that allows you to see how all the work that goes into your marketing and sales channels is doing.

As the above chart shows, in this one “overview” screen, you can get a very quick take on the pulse of your marketing and sales efforts.

Goals

One of the best features of Google Analytics is the extent of customization. Specifically, you can set up particular goals you want to track, such as the number of people who fill out a specific form, complete a multi-step process, or any number of other actions.

If you wish to set up special “goal” checking on the site, you can do so through the placement of specialized code on various pages (such as the contact page, or form-filling process confirmation pages). This would allow you to get insights into how many people “convert,” or in other words start out as a regular site visitor but then become a more qualified lead.
Example data you can then obtain could include:

- Conversions from organic search
- Conversions from social traffic
- Membership sign-ups
- Newsletter requests
- Etc.

**Caution: Goal tracking requires professional implementation. If you do not know what you’re doing, attempting to set up goal tracking may very well cause usability or data tracking errors.**

**Mobile Vs. Desktop**

If you’re not paying attention to mobile considerations, you’re likely failing to provide the best opportunity to reach your entire market.

Under “Audience” choose “Mobile” / “Overview”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>% New Sessions</th>
<th>New Users</th>
<th>Bounce Rate</th>
<th>Pages / Session</th>
<th>Avg. Session Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>desktop</td>
<td>45,020,069</td>
<td>78.94%</td>
<td>35,495,007</td>
<td>67.91%</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>00:02:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mobile</td>
<td>27,088,119</td>
<td>71.25%</td>
<td>19,244,365</td>
<td>72.21%</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>00:01:08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tablet</td>
<td>12,510,367</td>
<td>60.29%</td>
<td>7,542,357</td>
<td>67.15%</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>00:01:42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When viewing this data, check the “bounce rate”, “Pages / Session”, and “Avg Session Duration” numbers. Based on how the site was designed for use on mobile devices, these numbers can often reveal a very poor mobile experience.

**Landing Pages**

To find out which pages visitors come to as the first page on your site, click “Behavior”, then “Behavior Flow,” then “Site Content,” and then finally “Landing Pages.”

This information can be very helpful in determining how well your efforts have been regarding a particular promotion, campaign or other initiative. It’s also a great way to look for opportunities to further promote already valuable content, or even build upon it to get more value.
Google Webmaster Tools (GWT)

https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/

Google Webmaster Tools is very helpful for monitoring the health of the site from a technical perspective, as well as from Google’s evaluation of the overall quality of the site’s topical focus.

Site Messages

Arguably the most important aspect of the entire Google Webmaster Tools system, the Site Messages section is where Google will notify you of most critical problems on the site.

Warnings can include (but may not be limited to):

- Manual Site-Wide Penalties
- Security Vulnerabilities
- Problems with Google Crawling your Site

Clicking on an individual message will show you more info about that finding, and provide suggested actions to take.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

While the Site Messages functionality is vital to staying aware of your site’s health, this is NOT the only place to check for important issues.

If Google has performed a specific manual action, it is just as likely to be found in the “Manual Actions” section of GWT’s reporting system, which is covered in the next section.
Manual Actions

Actions a manual reviewer might have taken against the site for unacceptable patterns they may have identified may not be listed in the “Site Messages” section.

Instead, it may be buried within the “Manual Actions” report page under “Search Traffic.”

Crawl Errors

The number of errors Google’s system has encountered while crawling the site, separated by type of error.

Below the timeline chart first shown in this report, each type will then list a sampling of URLs Google found to have that type of error, along with the date that error was discovered.

Important Note:
Errors listed can range from pages you intentionally removed using a “404” or “410” error method, or there could very well be serious problems on the site that need to be addressed, so check this report carefully.

Search Queries

The number of search queries performed for a given period of time, along with the number of clicks to your site people made upon performing that particular query.
This report allows you to see phrases people searched on to find your site. GWT shows the top 2,000 query results.

If you click on an individual phrase listed, you’ll see which pages on your site showed up in the search results for the given period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Impressions</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Clicks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/professional-seo-audits/</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>↑ 191%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>↑ 191%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On that same page (after you click on an individual phrase in the Search Queries report), below the pages data (shown above), you can then see what positions your site ranked for and how many people clicked on that result in that position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position in search results</th>
<th>Impressions</th>
<th>Clicks</th>
<th>CTR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Warning:
While this data is extremely helpful, it needs to be seen for trend understanding only. People performing individual searches use many other phrase variations.

**Sitemap Errors & Warnings**

The status of sitemap files associated with the site, and any errors or warnings that may have occurred upon Google’s most recent review of those files.

**Look for Errors and Warnings**

Since sitemap files are one of several methods available to help communicate which pages on your site you want indexed, it’s important to ensure your sitemap files contain no errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Warnings</td>
<td>URLs unreachable</td>
<td>When we tested a sample of the URLs from your Sitemap, we found that some of the URLs were unreachable. Please check your webserver for possible misconfiguration, as these errors may be caused by a server error (such as a 5xx error) or a network error between Googlebot and your server. All reachable URLs will still be submitted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even when there are no “errors” listed, “warnings” can be a sign of other problems that can ultimately be harmful to your SEO and User Experience.
Yet More Potential Problems To Look For

There are other times when this discrepancy is not due to an error or a server problem.

Google sometimes intentionally chooses to not index a large portion of your content because it has either been determined to be “extremely thin” content, or its content appears to their algorithms to be too similar to other content on the site.

![Image of sitemap](image.png)

In the above example, Google has chosen to not index twenty percent of the pages included in the sitemap file, and there are no errors or warnings associated with the sitemap file. That can have a huge negative impact on a site’s visibility.

**Links To Your Site**

With the seriousness that now comes with harmful links pointing to your site, we all need to monitor inbound links on a regular basis to keep an eye out for unusual activity, so we can be preemptive in disavowing potentially harmful links that show up.

![Image of inbound links](image.png)

By reviewing the “Links to Your Site” section in GWT on a monthly basis, it can sometimes be straightforward to observe when an unusual pattern emerges in those inbound links – either based on the names of the domains pointing links to your site, the number of links, or even the pages those links point to.

While you shouldn’t be expected to become an expert in evaluating inbound links, it is important to at least pay attention here. If you think there is something odd going on, then dig further or get an expert involved.

**Security Issues**

While not a problem for the overwhelming majority of site owners, there are times when an otherwise legitimate site might have security issues that Google can detect.

So checking the “Security Issues” status in GWT is a wise action to take on a monthly basis.

![Image of security issues](image.png)
Structured Data Errors
Yet one more “health” check you can perform in Google Webmaster Tools is to see how well your site is doing in regard to any structured markup you have encoded on the site.

This can apply to a very wide range of data types – from event listings, to location information, author markup, product details and more.

HTML Improvements
While issues specific to meta Descriptions, Page Titles and non-indexable content are typically not a problem once you’ve addressed them on a site-wide basis, it’s good to monitor this section of GWT from time to time to ensure things don’t slip out of control.

Clicking on an individual listed problem item will provide you with the specific URLs Google has found that need to be addressed.
Additional Reporting Tools and Resources

The data and site health resources I’ve included in this document are by no means all-inclusive. Many other data points can be monitored based on your unique situation.

If you have the time, patience and desire to dig even further, you are of course, free to do so. Quite often there is a wealth of value from taking it further.

If you would like to at least explore other resources, some that I can recommend (when used cautiously and with the “shiny object” warning in mind) include:

Bing Webmaster Tools (BWT)
While Microsoft’s Bing search engine has a much smaller market share than Google’s and is thus often overlooked in the SEO process, the BWT system offers a variety of additional data points that can sometimes help make the difference between doing well and hitting it out of the ballpark.  
http://www.bing.com/toolbox/webmaster

Authority Labs
Advanced ranking reports, track local results at the city or postal code level, or get global tracking across several different countries.  http://AuthorityLabs.com

Raven Tools
Analytics, site performance, keyword management, research tools, social data, PPC and much more...  http://RavenTools.com

Moz Pro & Moz Local
Site health monitoring, SEO / Social / Brand and Link data dashboards, location data management and much more...  http://Moz.com

SEMRush
Organic & Paid Analytics, Competitive Research, Keyword Research, and more...  http://www.SEMRush.com
Advanced Testing Tools & Resources

If you really want to dive into advanced testing, monitoring and reporting, I highly encourage you to consider making use of these, as long as doing so does not distract from the mission critical content expansion and off-site promotion vital to sustainable SEO.

Advanced Nature Caveat

While I offer these here for your use, these advanced tools and resources are only best suited for experts or specialists in a given niche related to web development, SEO, design, or a combination of those. If you’re not a true expert, using these may very well cause you more confusion than anything.

Screaming Frog

http://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider/

Screaming Frog is my go-to resource for performing sample crawls of a web site. There are so many data points and factors related to SEO and User Experience quality signals in this one tool that it’s invaluable to my work.

Google Page Speed Insights

https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/

Google Page Speed Insights is a very helpful tool for occasionally spot-checking your site’s health for both desktop visitors and mobile visitors. It’s especially helpful if you’ve previously seen page speeds being slow in Google Analytics.

The two primary data points GPSI offers are Mobile Grades & Desktop Grades. Based on a 100 point maximum score, you can rapidly see how well individual pages are perceived, and also read specific improvement recommendations for mobile and desktop coding.

Caution:
GPSI is not a comprehensive page speed guide- relying on just this one resource will not help most site owners resolve the entirety of page processing issues.

URIValet.com

http://URIValet.com

URIValet is a 3rd party page process testing tool that helps to further understand page processing bottlenecks and is a good backup check against Google’s own reported processing time data. URIValet also offers further help in identifying technical and crawl specific problems that may exist for a given page.
Page Server Status

In the “Server Header Details” section of the URIValet report, the first info you find is the status of the individual page in regard to whether that page returns a “200” “OK” server status, or if it’s redirecting or even results in a server error.

**SERVER RESPONSE: 404 Not Found**
Date: Mon, 21 Jul 2014 21:18:11 GMT

Page Processing Speed

Scroll halfway down the URIValet.com report page to see the page processing speed data for that page. The 1.5mbps speed result for whatever page(s) you’re checking is what we care about for this aspect of performance testing.

This test is most relevant because it best represents what Google’s own system generally experiences. URIValet also shows speeds for various other types of connections, however the 1.5mbps speed is best reflects what Google experiences.

Note: URIValet.com offers many other insights into a given page’s health. Feel free to explore one of that site’s reports. Just don’t become obsessed or overwhelmed by all that you see there.

**WebPageTest.org**

http://WebPageTest.org

WebPageTest.org is another 3rd-party page process testing tool that helps to further understand page processing bottlenecks and is a good backup check against Google’s own reported processing time data.

WPT also offers further help in identifying technical and crawl specific problems that may exist for a given page.

In WPT, you can test page-processing efficiency from several different server locations around the globe. I always recommend testing from at least two different server locations in the WPT network.

First View – Fully Loaded Page Speed

As is the case with URIValet, WPT offers various platform-testing parameters. We have found that when testing with this tool, it is best to set WPT to “Chrome” as the browser type, and “DSL 1.5mbps” as the connection type to best reflect how Google might see the page.
Processing Grades Chart

This simple “grades” chart shows various technical performance insights on a scale of A through F (A being a perfect passing grade, and F being a total failing grade).

As is the case with Google’s Page Speed Insights and URIValet.com, WPT offers much more data and additional insights into areas that may be causing bottlenecks.

W3C Testing Tools

Whenever I need to see whether a site’s markup or code might be harming crawl efficiency or making a site vulnerable to potential confusion within search algorithms, I always check the W3C Standard Testing Tools.

Mobile Friendliness Checker
http://validator.w3.org/mobile/

CSS Validation
http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/

HTML Markup Validation
http://validator.w3.org/

The Panguin Tool

A quick way to begin to identify whether a particular drop or increase in traffic is correlated to a Google Panda or Penguin update would be to jump over to the Barracuda Digital Panguin tool:
http://panguintool.barracuda-digital.co.uk/auth/login

Inbound Link Checking Tools

While Google Webmaster Tools offers important information regarding links pointing to your site, if you’ve got more than a few hundred domains pointing to you, GWT is only going to show you a sampling. In this situation, if you need to dig further, or want to get a better grasp on the totality of domains and links pointing to your site, you’ll need to tap other resources.

Two such resources I rely on for this include http://OpenSiteExplorer.org and http://AHrefs.com – each has their own value in the overall picture process. When combined with Google Webmaster Tools inbound link data, you get a much broader view.
Advanced Learning Resources

If you’ve got the time and the desire to learn how to take analytics reporting to a much higher level, the following resources are but a few of the many out there.

Annielytics YouTube Training Videos
Annie Cushing is, by far, one of the most skilled professionals in the search industry when it comes to understanding SEO. She also happens to be an amazing trainer and coach when it comes to getting more value from analytics.

At last count, she had more than two dozen analytics training videos on YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/user/Annielytics/videos

It doesn’t stop there, either. Annie has a great blog where she routinely posts educational content:
http://www.annielytics.com/blog/

Google Analytics Help Center
Of course, if you’re going to be exploring Google Analytics, it would be wise for you to explore Google’s own analytics help center – a great reference resource for what I consider the best analytics solution available.
https://support.google.com/analytics/#topic=3544906

And the Google Analytics Video Training Channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/googleanalytics

Google Webmaster Tools Help Center
The official help resource for Google Webmaster Tools:
https://support.google.com/webmasters/?hl=en#topic=3309469