



May 2nd, 2024

Last week, our Director of Organic Growth, Natasha, and I travelled to Brighton, UK for [BrightonSEO](#), the world's largest search marketing conference, where Natasha was invited to speak.

Conferences are tricky. On the one hand, conference talks can be too fluffy and pitchy for my taste.

On the other hand, I find incredible value in seeing what's top of mind in the industry and chatting directly with peers at the top of their game.

So I'm going to switch the format up for this issue and share the **5 things I learned at BrightonSEO that made the cross-Atlantic plane ticket worth it:**

- Mike

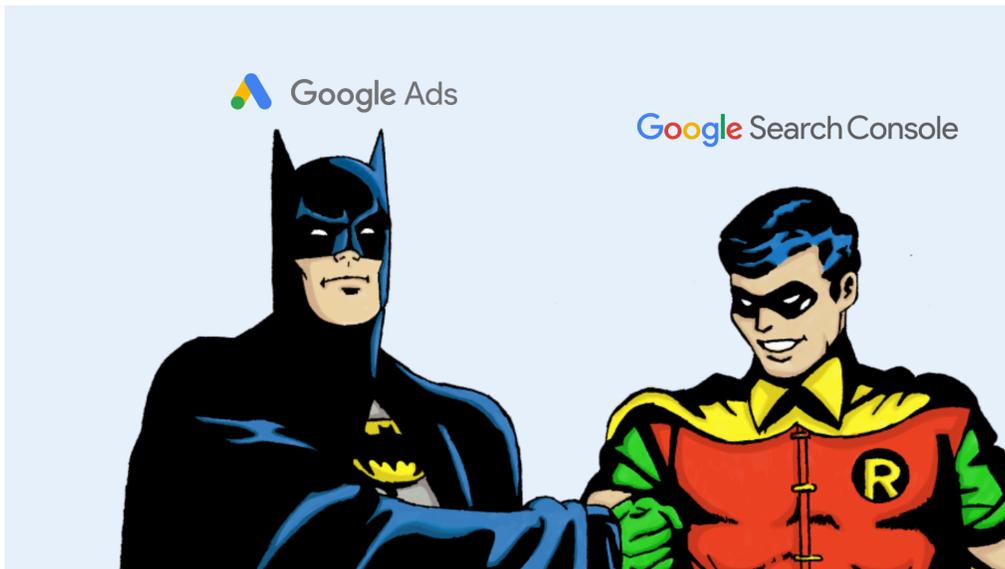


PS. Know a marketer looking to stay ahead of technical marketing trends? Help them out and forward them this email. [Use this link to subscribe.](#)

[Top of Mind]

The 5 threads I was most excited about from the conference.

The Era of Total Search is Here 🤝



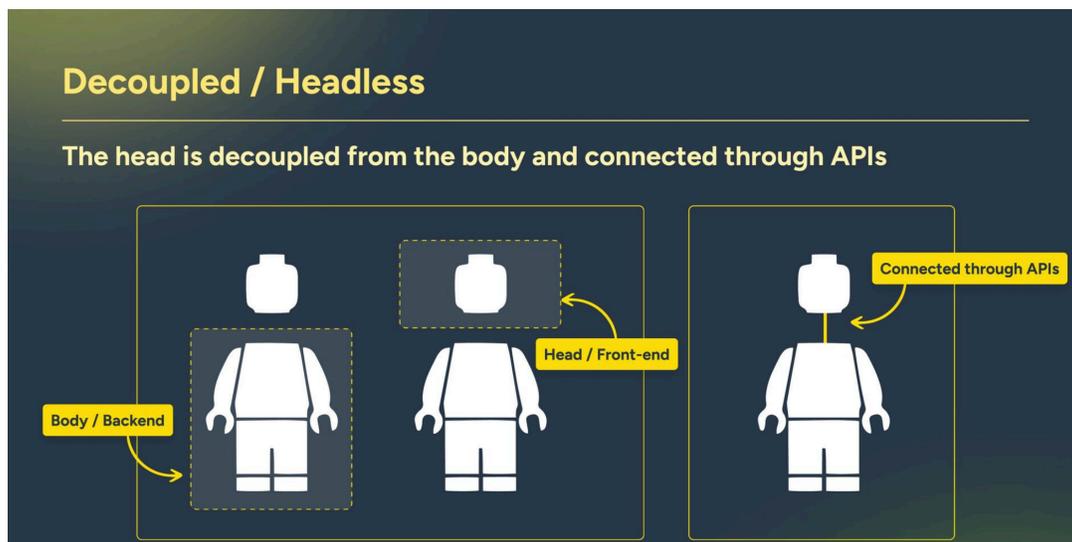
Paid Search and Organic Search are different levers for marketers, but part of the same (Total Search) experience for users. If you can reduce cannibalization between paid and organic, you can improve your overall CAC, even if it's not as clear in your channel CAC. Soft eyes.

What you can do:

This one is dead simple, free, and immediately valuable:

1. Link your Google Search Console to your Google Ads in Google Ads
2. Go to the Paid and Organic Report under Reports > Pre-defined Reports > Basic in Google Ads.
3. Look at where you have high organic rankings/clicks alongside your paid rankings/clicks. Test negative-exact-matching these terms and seeing how your total search traffic to these pages changes.
4. Look at where you have high paid conversions and no organic rankings. These are your absolute best SEO opportunities to optimize for.

Bullish on Headless 🐮



The future of website CMSs is headless. You may have heard that from a web developer before, and had your eyes gloss over at their explanation why. Here are 3 reasons why

from a marketer's perspective:

- **Load times.** Headless websites load faster, with a snappier experience between pages, since they don't load a whole back end each time they load a page. Google is finding other content signals harder to parse, so load time is getting more important.
- **Consistent experience across assets.** No more dealing with 5 subdomains—SEO and UX nightmare. Most businesses don't just have a website, they have digital products, a login portal, subscription management, etc. A headless system allows teams to have a single source of truth for styling, data, and content assets.
- **Marketer-friendliness.** "Headless" to marketers used to mean "Jira backlog for changes." That's changing: tools like [Builder.io](#) have visual page builders/Figma-to-code features, Contentful has an [app marketplace](#) for add-ons like bulk meta editing, and Shopify released their [Hydrogen app](#) to better manage custom storefronts within the Shopify CMS.

What you can do:

Marketers, technical leadership teams will be asking more and more about whether your experiences should be headless. Get informed, starting with [these slides](#) I gripped from the conference.

Explore/Exploit Framework



Bees: the new way of thinking about digital strategy.

In a bee colony, 80% of bees make honey, 20% are scout bees. They wander around, trying to find the colony's next nesting place in case their current one runs dry or becomes overcrowded. The scout bees explore while the rest *exploit*.

Exploiting is highly profitable. It maximizes honey-per-bee. Whereas, exploring is unprofitable 90% of the time. But when it finds a winner, it can save the colony or scale it to new heights.

This 80/20 framework is also helpful for digital strategy. You should dedicate most of your spend on proven channels, concepts, tactics. The rest goes towards exploring new opportunities for performance gains or diversifying to reduce platform risk.

The exact ratios for digital strategy vary—some accounts should have a 40% testing budget, some no more than 10%. But, as the humble bee teaches us, 20% tends to be a

good average.

What you can do:

From bee colony to paid ads:

- Add labels to your test platforms, campaigns, ad groups, and ads in your budget sheet or dashboard
- Create filtered reports based on those labels to show what % of your spend is tests vs not. How sustainable is your bee colony?

Scientists Hate This One Weird Trick to Improve PageSpeed

You know how putting your tags in Google Tag Manager (GTM) is better for speed than loading them right on the page? Did you know how you put those tags in GTM makes nearly as big a difference?

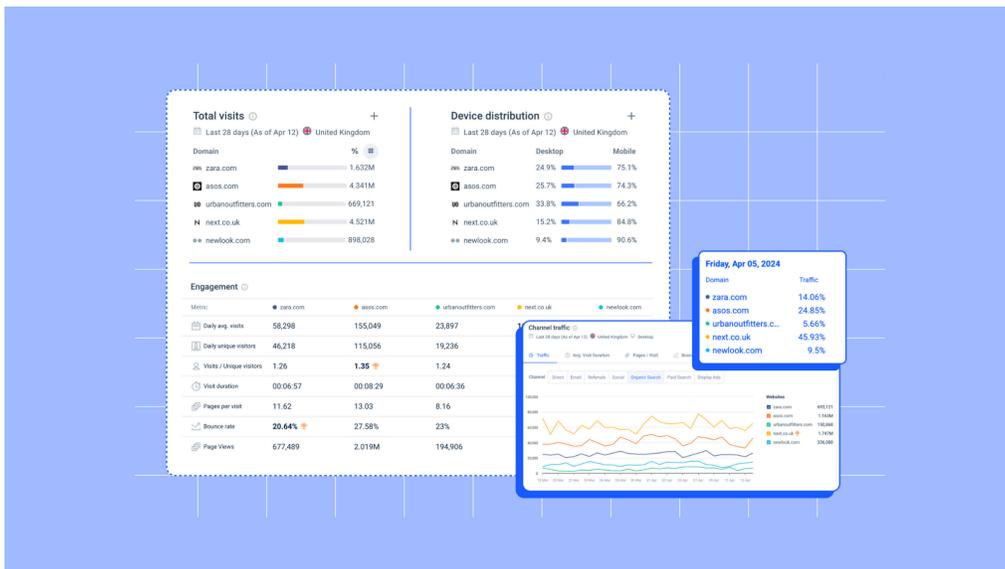
Every tag adds load time that has to run before the page runs. One site shaved over 2 seconds (an eternity in PageSpeed time) by optimizing their GTM container.

What you can do:

Here are three high-leverage action items:

- Load ad pixels through a community template instead of custom HTML. Community templates update with the latest, most performant version of the pixel, and are more configurable to your site's needs.
- Instead of one tag per event, use a Lookup table for event sets. For example, one lookup table tag for every type of form submission instead of one tag per submission.
- Get rid of UA tags! They're not firing anymore but they still load.

Similarweb: More Interesting Than Before



One of my conference traditions is walking the exhibit floors trying to avoid eye contact with vendors. But one tool had me doing a full staredown.

[Similarweb](#) used to be a basic snapshot tool showing how much traffic a site gets. But they've gone all-in on SEO. Here are three of their killer SEO features:

- Regionalized rank tracking. See how you rank for a term in Ontario without using the 'ontario' modifier.
- Scored roll-up view of the “Google funnel:” Availability -> Indexability -> Uniqueness -> Rankability (links) -> Experience. A neat paradigm for framing driving SEO growth.
- Cross-channel comparisons. Lining competitor organic search traffic up next to paid search, social, even email. This aligns well with our soft eyes approach.

I haven't been impressed with a tool like this in a long time. They have feature parity with Ahrefs—plus some juicy bonuses. And Ahrefs is showing signs of a dying market leader: price hikes, feature breadth over depth, meaningless UI changes, etc. Flywheel is an Ahrefs shop, but candidly, we're considering a move—soon.

What you can do:

- Start using their [free Chrome extension](#) so that you're comfortable with the tool when it inevitably replaces Ahrefs.

[What's the Latest at Flywheel?]

📷 Here's Natasha in action at BrightonSEO. Get a free look at her slides on reporting practices [here!](#)



👤 Our client Northern Sun's founder Jason [shared some reflections on a successful first season.](#)

👉 We're celebrating our client [Willful's latest partnership with Scotiabank!](#)

[Our agency](#) creates repeatable growth systems for digital-first brands. We are deeply technical marketers with a holistic, strategic approach to growth. If you're interested in learning more, just respond to this email—they go right to my personal inbox.

- Michael and the Flywheel team

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Not good



Fine



Good

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