

THE INVISIBLE SITE

How an online auto marketplace increased their Google crawl **by 19x** (and doubled organic traffic) in less than 3 months*

*An Anonymous Case Study



INDUSTRY
Classifieds

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#BotifySuccessStory



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AN INVISIBLE SITE

The true story of a website – millions of pages in size – that was not seeing the SEO benefit of their industry-leading data.

How is it possible for millions of pages to go unseen, unindexed, and unvisited by organic traffic?

It all comes down to site structure, content accessibility, and internal linking.

They soon recognized that issues were bubbling under the surface, and sought out the best technology in the marketplace to tackle their SEO improvements and drive performance for both customers and partners.

A NATIONWIDE AUTO MARKETPLACE

Based in the U.S., this online vehicle marketplace helps users find the right car or truck that fits their exact search criteria, down to specific amenities, in their own neighborhood.

A nationwide, yet local, service, the site uses industry-leading data aggregated through years in the auto industry to build patented technology for listing discovery.

With thousands of participating dealerships, this site is a recipe for success. The only thing stopping them?

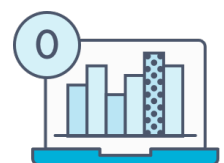
Getting their site found and indexed by Google.



Founded in
2015



Over 3.5 million
vehicle listings



0 in-house
SEO staff

Starting from scratch, you must define your baseline

When the project began, one priority was immediately clear: understand the site's structure. With millions of pages and complex systems in place for page publication, it was evident that issues were lurking beneath the surface of this otherwise clean-looking website.

The site is based on a huge amount of data, and they make it all available to their customers. However, this deep data was having unforeseen SEO consequences. It was just too much for Google to crawl.

With no in-house SEO team and a large, complex website on their hands, it was time to bring on an SEO manager – and a powerful tool – that could give their website the resources and attention it required to truly boost growth and improve performance.

Their chosen SEO Project Manager was already familiar with Botify and knew it was the perfect solution for their needs:

“When I started working with [the site] I knew there were problems with the site structure right off the bat.

I had used Botify in the past and so I knew I could use the tool to understand the structure first. I got Botify to identify the baseline immediately.”

With a lack of clarity into what the underlying structure of their website really looked like, and unsure of how many pages they were publishing, the goal first and foremost was to uncover the website structure.

It's crucial to know where you're starting from before you make changes to a site.

How will you know if your changes are effective if you don't have that baseline? On-page implementations might not help at all if search engines can't even see that your pages exist.

The first priority was to understand what was going on under the hood; to identify the site's structure and learn how Google and other search engine crawlers were already interacting with the site.

ENTER, BOTIFY.

It turns out, with all that data, there was just too much for Google to crawl and index.

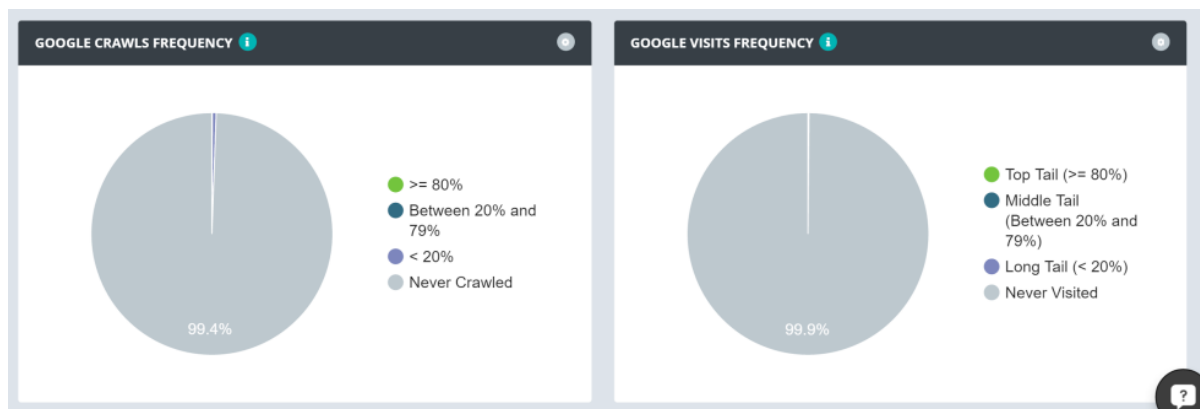
With millions of product pages going unseen by search engines, it was time to make changes that would show the true value of the site's data.

Defining the to-do list: The first analysis

In order for website content to drive traffic, it has to show up in search results. It can only show up in search results if Google's crawling robot – Googlebot – finds and explores it.

Sure enough, in the first Botify analysis, reports showed that they certainly had plenty of pages of content, but very few were being crawled and indexed. Like the proverbial tree falling in the forest, no one was arriving organically to see what those pages had to offer, no matter how valuable.

In fact, over 99% of the website had never been crawled by Googlebot. Ever.



Bad news for any site, but with 10,000,000 URLs crawled by Botify, that is an enormous number of pages (9,943,059, to be exact) that have never been explored by a search engine crawler.

That's 9.9 million pages out of 10 million crawled that cannot receive organic traffic from Google searches.

In fact, of the pages that Google had crawled, the overwhelming majority were Orphan URLs. Just 2% of the pages Google had seen were actually in the site structure.

This means the rest of the 2.66 million URLs Google had explored were wasting the entirety of Google's crawl budget on pages not even in the site identified by Botify. There was simply no possibility of driving organic traffic to the rest of the site.



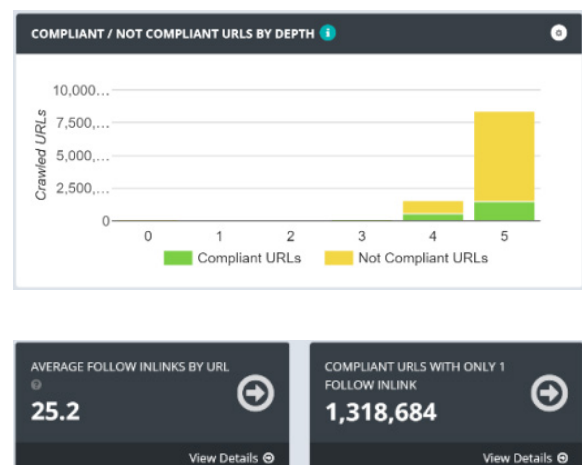
And the team was in for another unpleasant surprise:

A significant proportion of the website's pages – a whole 79.3% – were non-compliant. That is, not returning 200 OK HTTP status codes.

Nearly 80% of the URLs Google had found could not be crawled and indexed, due to noindex meta-tags or canonical tags – or both – meaning only a fraction of the site was loading properly and running smoothly, for crawlers or customers.

The first analysis also highlighted the lack of internal linking, resulting in extreme page depth and a lack of accessibility to crawlers.

With only a few internal links per page – more than 1.3 million compliant pages had only a single internal link – content accessibility to crawlers became an obvious concern.



After running their first crawl analysis with Botify, a few main challenges were immediately made clear, setting plans in motion for how to prioritize structural improvements to the site.

The bad news: very little of the site was compliant (returning 200 HTTP status codes, not broken links or redirects), making only a small amount of the site eligible for indexing in search results. Additionally, with few internal links to valuable pages that highlight their powerful data, much of the site was too deep to be crawled and unlikely to receive organic traffic.

The good news: with a few strategic updates, the team could dramatically improve their site structure to improve Google crawl, indexing, and ultimately, SEO traffic.

What are the next steps for improving SEO effectively and efficiently?

SOLUTION #1: STOP WASTED CRAWL

The first – and fastest – solution to implement was an update to the site's robots.txt file. This file allows a website to communicate with web crawlers like Googlebot and inform them of which pages should be excluded from a crawl due to irrelevant information or pages not worth the crawl budget.

Updating the robots.txt file to prevent crawlers from scanning unworthy pages is a relatively easy first step to improving SEO.

This quick-fix would get the site on the road to rehabilitation by preventing Googlebot from accessing non-compliant pages and improving the overall experience for Google's assessment of the site's quality.

Additionally, a small change was made to eliminate infinite refinements to disallow concatenation of all possible product features (like Bluetooth + cd player + ...) which previously was generating 10s of millions of URLs.

So what happened? 6 Weeks Later: Visible Results!

With these simple changes, visible improvements started to take shape in the second analysis. For instance, it was immediately clear that the number of site pages had reduced significantly, thanks to the refinement update.



Through the robots.txt file and concatenation update, they cut the number of known URLs in half making the site smaller and thereby focusing on more valuable content.

Plus, in just a few weeks between analyses, they already started to see some progress towards improving Google's crawl of the site.

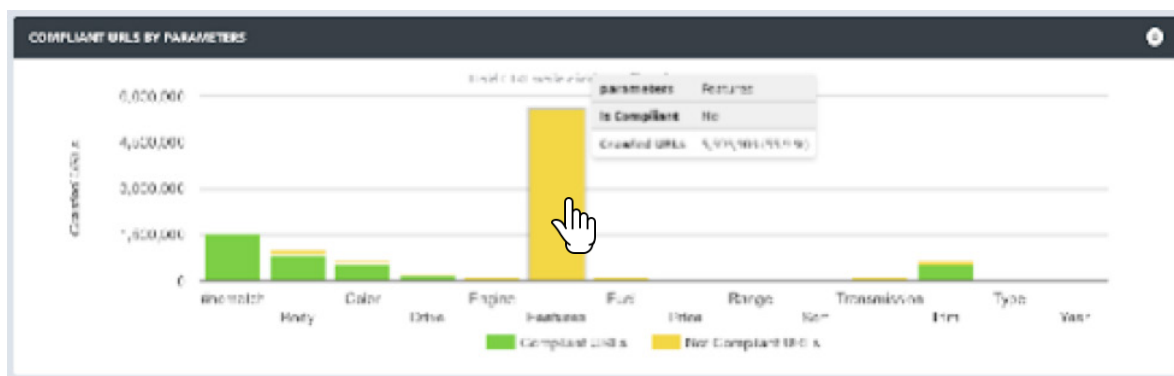
By halving the size of the site and stopping Google from crawling useless pages, the overlap between what Botify knows is part of the site and what Google sees is growing – up to 10.5% of crawled URLs (from just 2% before this first phase of changes).

New Issues Uncovered

Additionally, thanks to the initial changes made in just this first phase, new information came to light that would never have been caught without Botify's in-depth analytics, only exposed once other site issues were cleaned up.

While compliance was certainly an important metric in the first analysis, it was regarded more in general across the site. However, the second analysis revealed new challenges that were previously hidden.

Compliance distribution by pagetype segment now stood out unlike before:



The second analysis again crawled 10 million URLs. More than half of the crawl is taken up by URLs from just one section – 5,593,903 Features pages.

From just this one graph, it's clear that there is a major issue with this section of the site. The entirety of the Features segment is returning (non-200 OK) HTTP statuses. 55.9% of the crawled site is completely non-compliant, due to just this one segment, and is therefore wasting crawl budget, lowering incentive to crawl, and hurting Google's perception of more than half of the site.

But from big problems comes big opportunity for improvement
– and SEO traffic growth!

SOLUTION #2: IMPROVE INTERNAL LINKING

With such a large proportion of the site (99.4% of 10 million crawled URLs) never seen by search engines, improving internal linking structure was a priority.

Without a pathway connecting each page to the next, how is a search engine crawler supposed to find its way through your website?

Phase 2 began by building links between the home page and too-deep internal pages to improve the depth and accessibility of pages within the site:

- 1 **Add more links from the homepage** to Vehicle Makes and Models categories, to make those pages shallower and increase their perceived importance
- 2 **Overhaul breadcrumb structure** to emphasize the natural path that customers would take through the website, via Vehicle Make, Vehicle Make + Model, Vehicle Make + Model + City, etc.

Did it work? Accessible, shallower pages!

Ultimately, the goal was to improve the extreme page depth of pages of key importance to the core business, providing better access for crawlers to strategic pages and content through shallower depth (fewer clicks from the home page) and improved internal linking.

Success! Internal linking structure was improved to provide better access to previously too-deep pages. Average number of inlinks increased by 15% from the first analysis.

In fact, the site went from just 10% of pages have 2 or more internal links up to 22%!

First analysis:



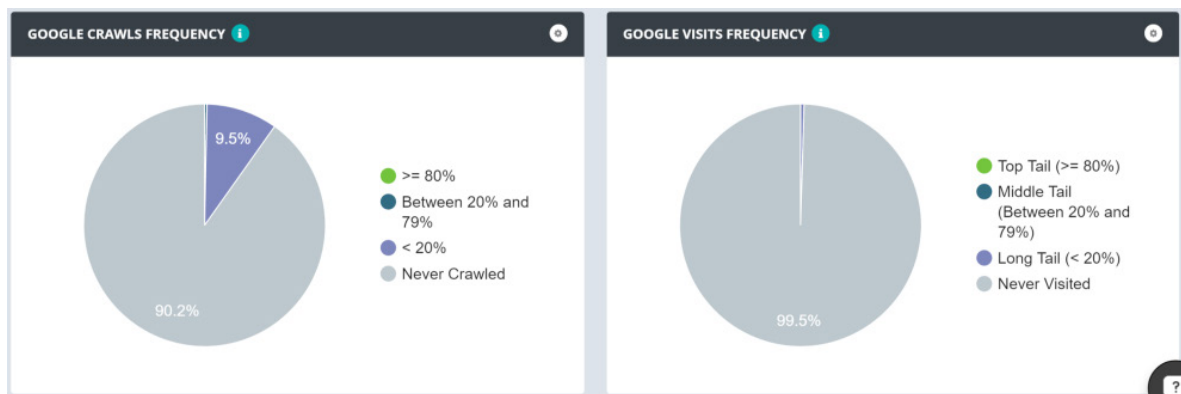
Second analysis:



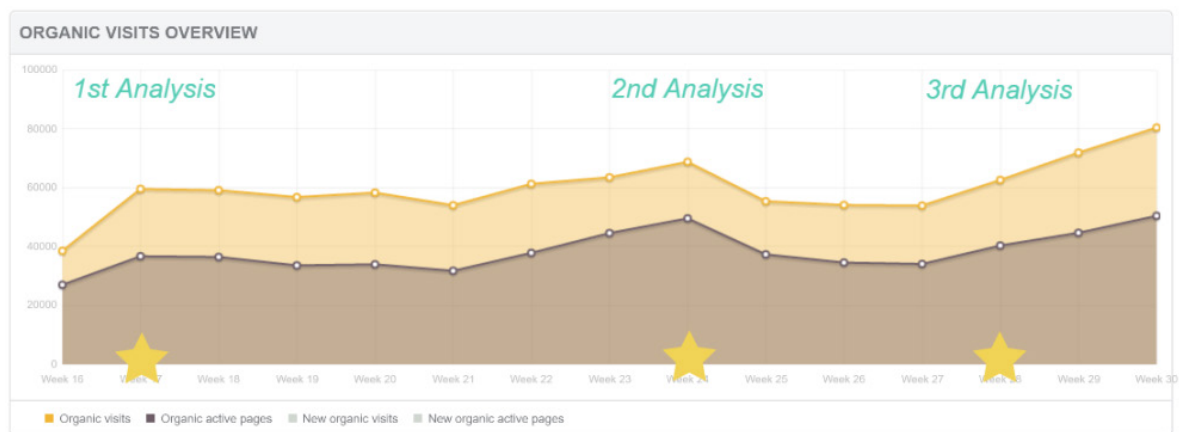
Though small, this increase put the site well on its way towards better connecting their internal pages, and making key content more accessible to both search engine bots and customers.

Increased Google Crawl and Organic Traffic!

After just 3 short months, the SEO team saw real improvements in how the site is seen and crawled by Googlebot. With impactful site structure updates executed, made possible by Botify-fueled, data-driven decisions, they were on their way to truly optimizing for Google crawl – and driving revenue-building organic traffic as a result..



Increased Google crawl by 19X to 9.5%, up from just .5% crawled before Botify



Doubled traffic from 40,000 to 80,000 weekly organic visits in less than 3 months!

In just a few short weeks, they improved Google crawl by 19X and doubled weekly organic traffic, thanks to the insights gained from Botify's crawler and log analyzer. With continued site changes based on unprecedented visibility into site structure and Google's behavior, imagine the progress they'll make in another 3, 6, or 12 months!

What's Next for the Auto Marketplace?

SOLUTION #3: OPTIMIZATION OF SITEMAP

As priorities were checked off of the to-do list, the team turned their eye to Performance Optimization. The critical next step for maximizing Googlebot's crawl and improving overall site performance was sitemap optimization.

With a large component of pages dedicated to single vehicles for sale, the site had developed a significant amount of expired pages once a car was sold and the page was no longer needed. These expired pages were indexed by Google but turned into redirects, which results in high customer abandonment and low percentages of compliant pages – a significant (negative) ranking factor.

Updating the sitemap would allow the SEO team to tell Googlebot and other search engine crawlers exactly which pages are the most important, focusing crawl budget where it can have the most impact.

With each small implementation, the site improves their visibility – both to Google and to their customers. This third phase of optimization should bring them even further towards their goals – and towards truly seeing the benefit of their powerful data.

With Botify, you can take your SEO efforts to another level, backed with real data and real-time views of how Google sees your website.

With a crawler and log analyzer rolled into one, even large, complex websites can take detailed insights and turn them into effective SEO initiatives and site structure optimizations that drive real results – in both organic traffic and revenue.

Quickly get an overview of site performance, or dig deeper into 100s of indicators for every part of your site, down to precise URL-level details.

This auto marketplace recognized they had an SEO issue and sought out the best tool in the industry to tackle it. How are you tackling SEO?

“Because Botify is a product built by people who know SEO, it understands what we as SEO practitioners want and need to see.

From day one it anticipates issues that you encounter with big websites.

I love how fast it is... From a UI ability to quickly get insight and also quickly go into as much detail as I need to either take a screenshot or export a CSV to have examples to support my recommendations.”

SEO Project Manager
Auto Marketplace



BOTIFY

Ready to try Botify for your website?

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