

CASE STUDY:

HOW BUSINESS-ORIENTED SEO INCREASES TRAFFIC AND CONVERSIONS

INDUSTRY: **CLASSIFIEDS** (NEW CAR DIRECTORY)

DATE: **JUNE 2020**

The logo for carwow, featuring the word 'carwow' in a lowercase, rounded font. The 'car' is in a dark blue color, and the 'wow' is in a light blue color.

OnCrawl

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ABOUT CARWOW

carwow

Based in London, carwow is a new car buying comparison site that helps consumers by allowing them to compare the best offers from local and national dealers. Buyers get the car they want, from the dealer they like best, at a price that's right for them.

James Hind (CEO) & Alexandra Margolis (Creative Director) launched carwow in 2010 as a car review aggregator with the purpose of making choosing a new car effortless. Since then, carwow have secured a total of £48M so far from leading VCs and have grown to 150+ employees.

- **£3,600 Average saving**
- **£5B+ Cars bought via carwow**
- **4.8/5 Trustpilot rating**
- **2.1M+ Monthly visitors**

Carwow's offer includes buyer guidance through impartial guides and video reviews, offer comparison based on price, location and dealer rating, confidence through lack of hidden costs, best dealer prices, and feeling 100% looked after through the process, and transparency thanks to direct purchase from the preferred dealer.



About Robert Dawson-Goodey: Head of SEO @carwow

Robert Dawson-Goodey is a competitive and diligent senior digital professional with more than 11 years of experience in SEO. He possesses extensive knowledge in both technical SEO and content marketing and leading a high class SEO and content team that delivers value.

Robert is a quick and proactive leader who can absorb and develop ideas, nurture team growth and communicate clearly and effectively to direct reports, stakeholders and c level management.

He has experience in: SEO, Product growth, Product Marketing, Leadership, Team development, Content Marketing, Organic Search, Digital Marketing, Attribution, Team Management, Keyword Research, Reports and Analytics, Wordpress SEO, BPPC, Display.

SEO IN A COMPETITIVE SECTOR: THE AUTOMOTIVE VERTICAL

The automotive vertical, like many other niches, is an extremely competitive sector. It has been dominated for over twenty years by a few leaders, such as Autotrader, who take a very old-school approach to advertising, marketing, and web presence. However, the weight of their history and their brand mean they have few challengers.

Sites like carwow find themselves up against big review sites in this UK-dominated vertical.

Automotive sites are notably susceptible to duplicate content and crawl issues, particularly as cars have lots of trims (looks) and derivatives. A single model might have, for example:

- 5 designs
- 4 engines
- 4 trims
- And various upgrades

Presenting all of these variants can pose a problem for the website's SEO if not managed correctly--and a problem for users if key terms are absent.

TAKING AN SEO PERSPECTIVE ON SITE STRUCTURE

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When Robert Dawson-Goodey came onboard, carwow's website was composed of different types of pages. Some examples include the following types:

PAGE TYPE	Example	Purpose
BLOG ARTICLES	News, SEO content, and other articles	Communication: attract visitors
MAKE	"Mercedes": an overview of the available models and pricing	Mid-funnel: inform and convince shoppers
MAKE-MODEL	"A-Class": specifications and information about the specific model	Business-oriented: inform and convince shoppers
TRIMS	"Sport": the "trim" or set of specifications for a particular look and motorization	Business-oriented: inform and convince shoppers
REVIEWS	Mercedes A-Class review: Descriptions, Q&As and other information about the car	Communication: inform visitors
NEW CAR DEALS	Listings of new car deals for Mercedes A-Class	End-of-funnel: convert users who want to purchase a used car
USED CARS	Listings of used cars for sale	End-of-funnel: convert users who want to purchase a new car
LEASING	Listing of cars for lease	End-of-funnel: convert users who want to purchase a used car

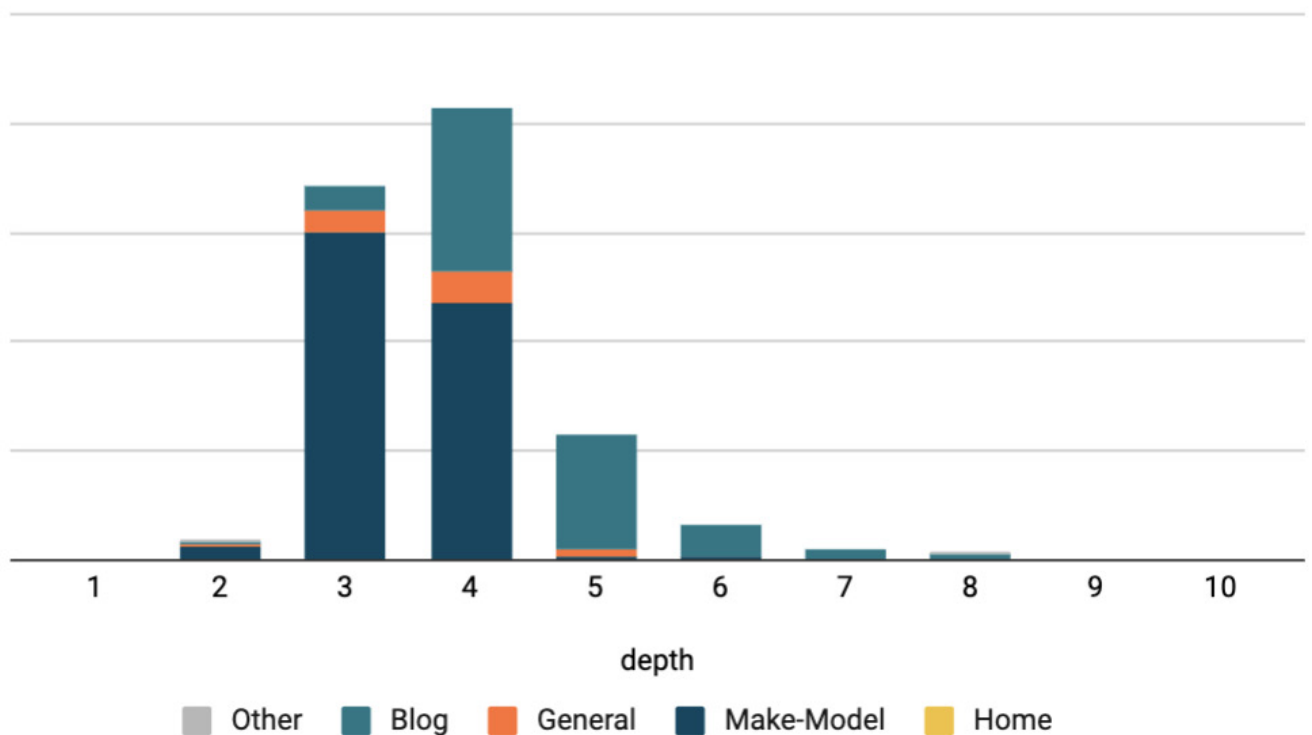
Because of the number and diversity of its pages, carwow's site structure is particularly necessary to make it clear to Google what should be indexed, and which pages are key in the customer journey.

TAKING AN SEO PERSPECTIVE ON SITE STRUCTURE

Robert began by segmenting the site into main sections based on their business purpose:

- Home: homepage
- General: general site and company information
- Make-Model pages: business pages with high conversion capabilities
- Blog: communication and traffic building

Page groups by depth



This segmentation would allow him to draw actionable conclusions and insights from the website audit data.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOBILE FOR BUSINESS-DRIVEN SEO

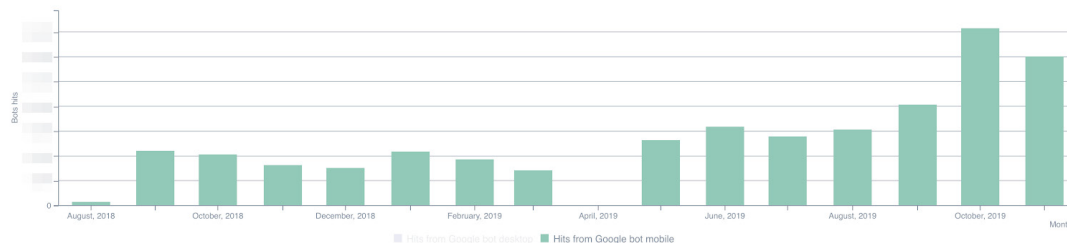
THE IMPORTANCE OF MOBILE FOR BUSINESS-DRIVEN SEO

One area Robert immediately identified as providing a serious step up on his competitors was site speed. The idea was developed from a market analysis of website visitors: over 70% of traffic in the automotive industry comes from mobile users. Robert soon also realized that few competitor sites were optimized for mobile, and they were particularly weak where page load speed was concerned.

Robert decided to make speed the number one metric, setting a goal of a Lighthouse speed score of above 75-80 as a benchmark for all new pages and page templates.

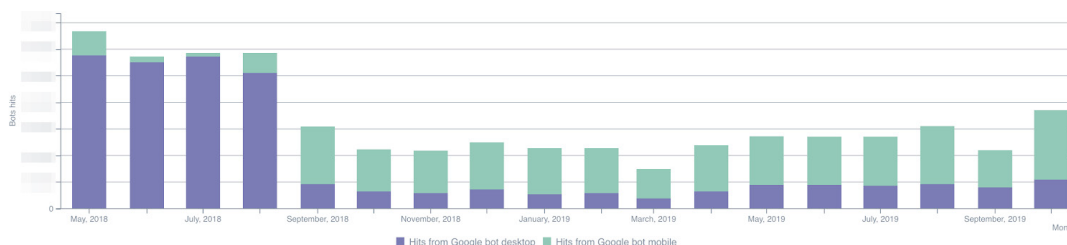
Using OnCrawl's log analysis, he was also able to see the decline of desktop in favor of mobile over time. This was true not only for organic visits to the site, but also for Googlebots. Based on this split, Robert was able to correctly predict when the site was transferred to mobile first indexing.

Web vs mobile bots hits



Ongoing increase in mobile bot hits across the period

Web vs mobile bots hits

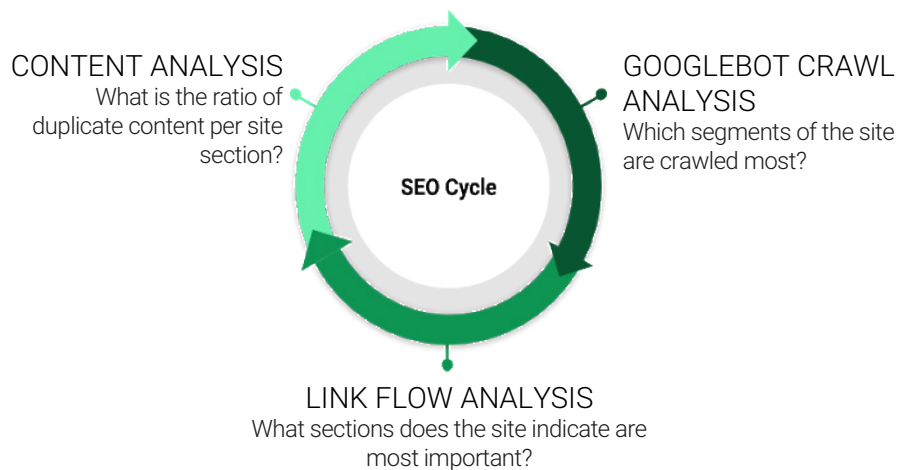


Strong and sudden decrease in desktop bot hits compared to mobile bots hits between August and September

IMPLEMENTING A DURABLE SEO PLAN

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Using OnCrawl, Robert put in place a continuous cycle of SEO analysis and improvement, with the objective of making it easier for Google to choose to rank pages that better match the user journey of searchers, ultimately improving conversions on carwow's website.



Googlebot analysis

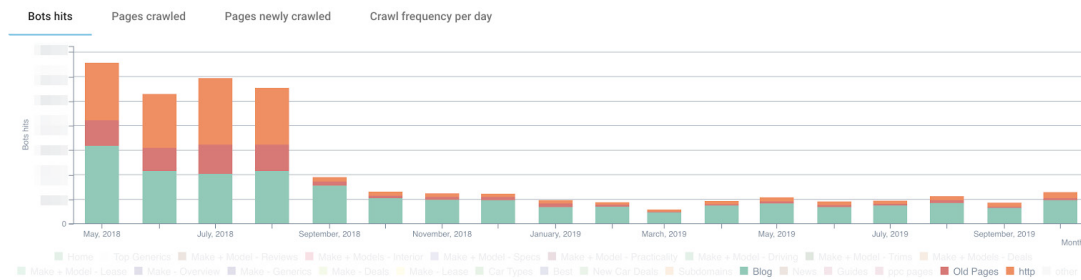
Robert examined Googlebot behavior on carwow's website to understand how Google prioritizes the website. To do so, he looked at server logs.

Robert's goal was to make it clear to Google what parts of the site serve which purpose, and what the overall objective of the site is. The attention Google pays to different parts of the site indicate the importance Google accords to the section. This can be measured in number and frequency of visits by Googlebots.

Initially, Robert found that Google accorded more attention to the blog than to any other part of the site. Many of the blog articles were written in the startup years, with backlinks obtained through outreach. This gained a lot of traffic--but the traffic it drew didn't convert. An example of an article with this profile would be: "Cars in StarWars".

IMPLEMENTING A DURABLE SEO PLAN

Crawl behavior breakdown ②

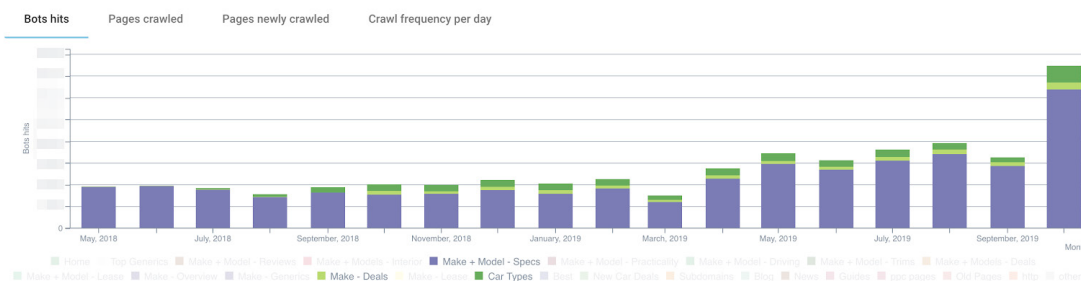


*Measuring the number of Googlebot hits on blog (in green)
and old pages (in orange and red)*

He also found that Google crawls JS without difficulty on carwow's site. In fact, Google even renders URLs of tags in source code that it breaks down as URLs.

After several cycles of SEO work, Robert was able to promote the pages that convert (specifically make-model pages and deals pages). These pages are now crawled more often than other types of pages on the site.

Crawl behavior breakdown ②



Increased crawl in number of hits on pages that convert

Link and Inrank analysis

In order to change how Google sees carwow's website, Robert used the website's link structure to indicate which pages were most important.

He used OnCrawl to look at:

- Internal linking policies: which pages linked to which other pages
- URL parameters: how parameters affected page importance
- Inrank: which pages retained the most popularity within the website

Priority was previously given to pages that promoted communication, rather than user engagement. This was clearly reflected in the Inrank of the different sections of the website.

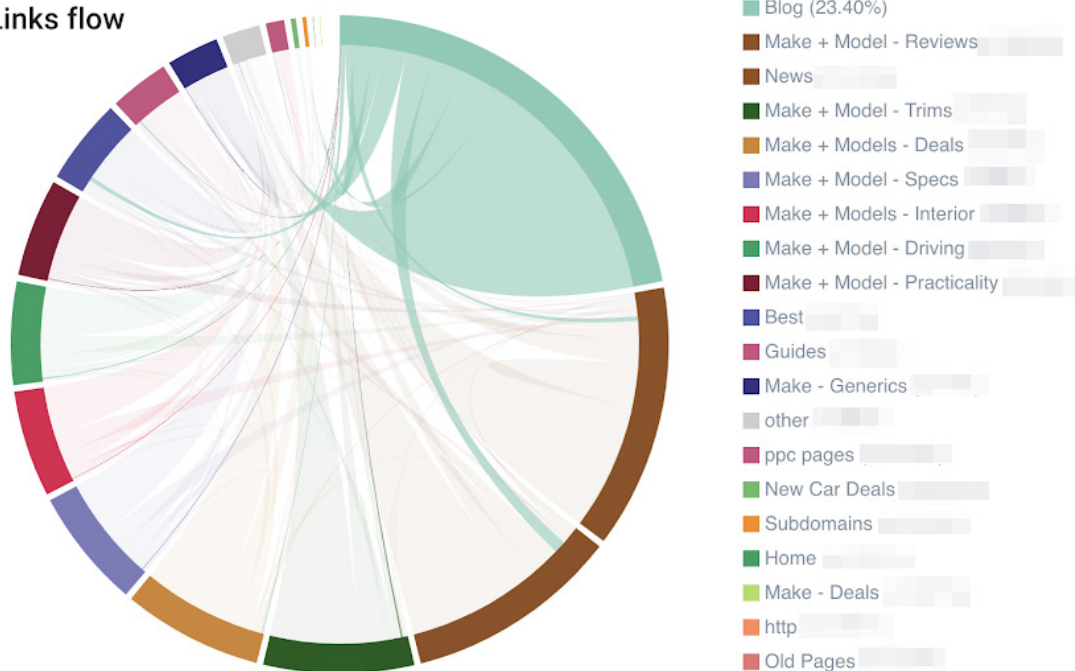
To modify how Google distributed its attention on the site, Robert carried out several SEO projects:

- Improved navigational links to modify link flow
- Made sure that internal links send flow to the top converting pages
- Made sure that most internal outlinks direct traffic to make-model pages, not to the blog

IMPLEMENTING A DURABLE SEO PLAN

Before on-site linking modifications:

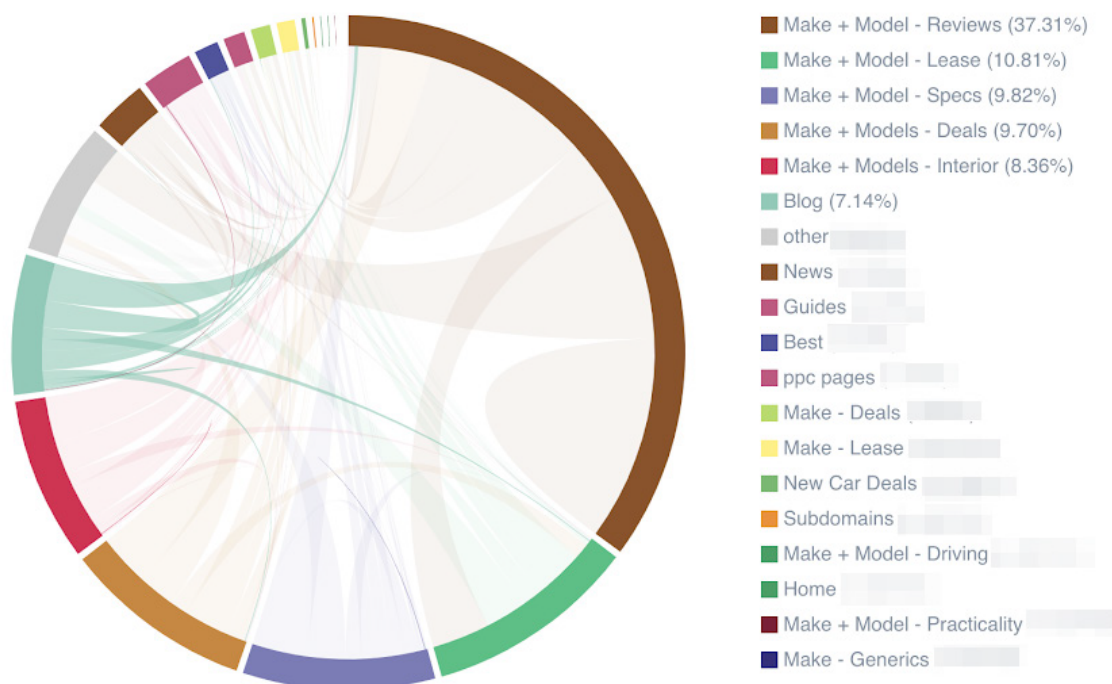
Links flow



Before - the blog dominates the site with 23.4% of links

After on-site linking modifications:

Links flow



After - business pages dominate the site, and the blog has been reduced to 7.1%

Duplicate Content analysis

Robert also examined the website’s content with an eye to improving both user experience on the website and the search queries that carwow ranked for.

He used OnCrawl to spot thin content, then examined the duplicate ratio for pages with thin content.

At each stage, he asked the question: should we keep this page or not?

1. Trims, specs, and reviews

A lot of duplicate content issues that Robert uncovered were caused by thin content on certain types of pages.

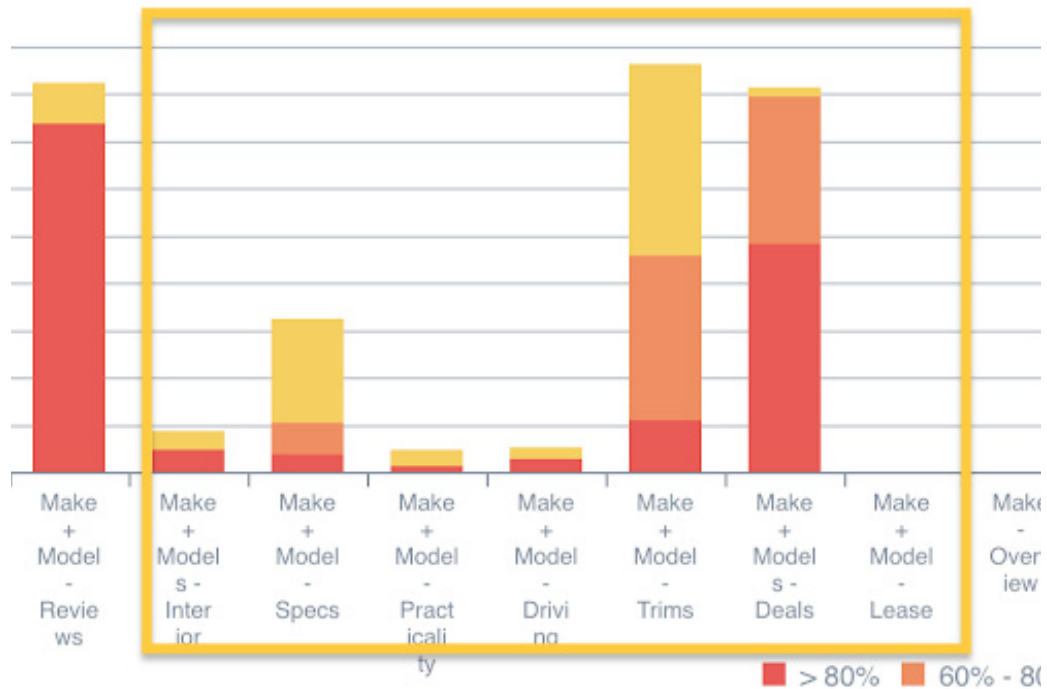
For example, trims pages differed only slightly from each other and from the make page:

Make page	Trims pages
Audi A1	Audi A1 S Line Audi A1 Sport Audi A1 SE

These were combined with specs pages and redirected there.

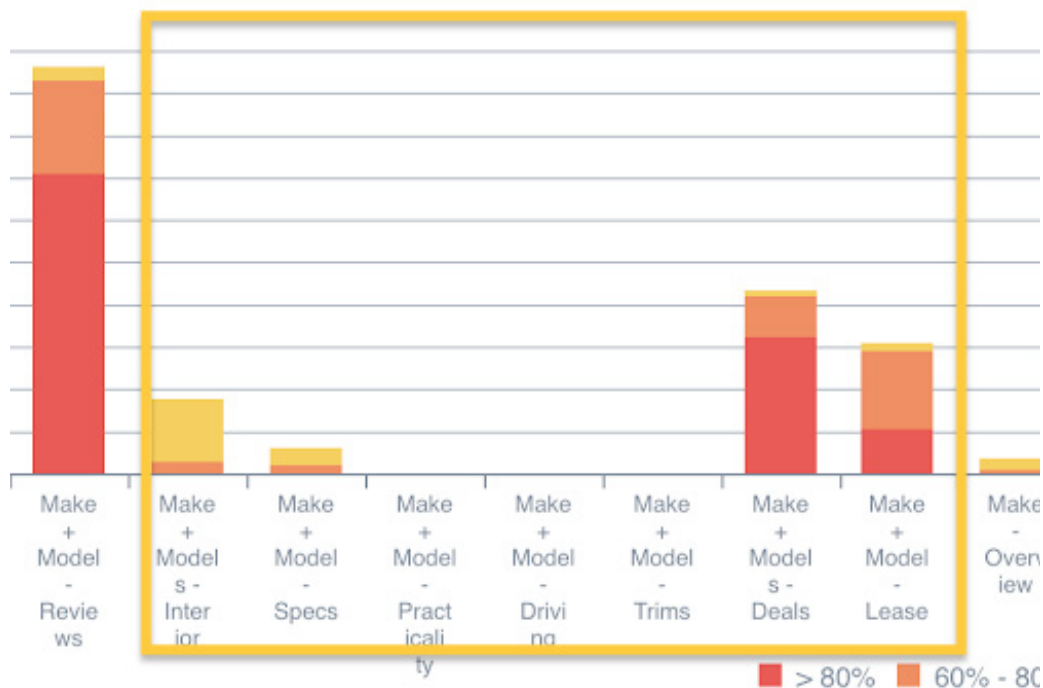
IMPLEMENTING A DURABLE SEO PLAN

Similarity of duplicate pages ⓘ



Before addressing duplicate content on Trims and Specs pages

Similarity of duplicate pages ⓘ



After addressing duplicate content on Trims and Specs pages

Duplicate content on review pages—another main source of duplication—was removed.

2. New vs Used vs Lease conversion pages

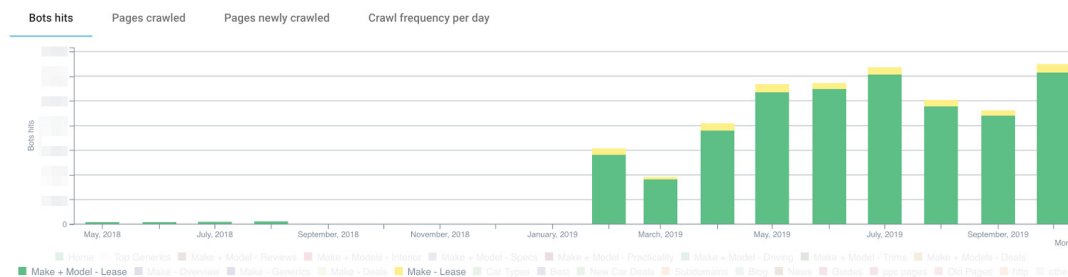
The OnCrawl Ranking Report helped Robert to study the keyword flow with regard to top converting pages in each category: new, used, and leasing.

Robert realized that the website had a number of end-of-funnel pages that had constantly struggled with duplicate content.

Robert used OnCrawl's text block analysis to examine what parts of thin pages were duplicated, and where on the pages original content came into play. In many cases, he realized he needed to add new content to new deals pages and used car pages.

To solve issues on leasing pages, Robert removed almost 99% of leasing pages with thin content. As a result, the leasing pages are now the most visible that they have ever been and have reached their highest conversion rates ever.

Crawl behavior breakdown



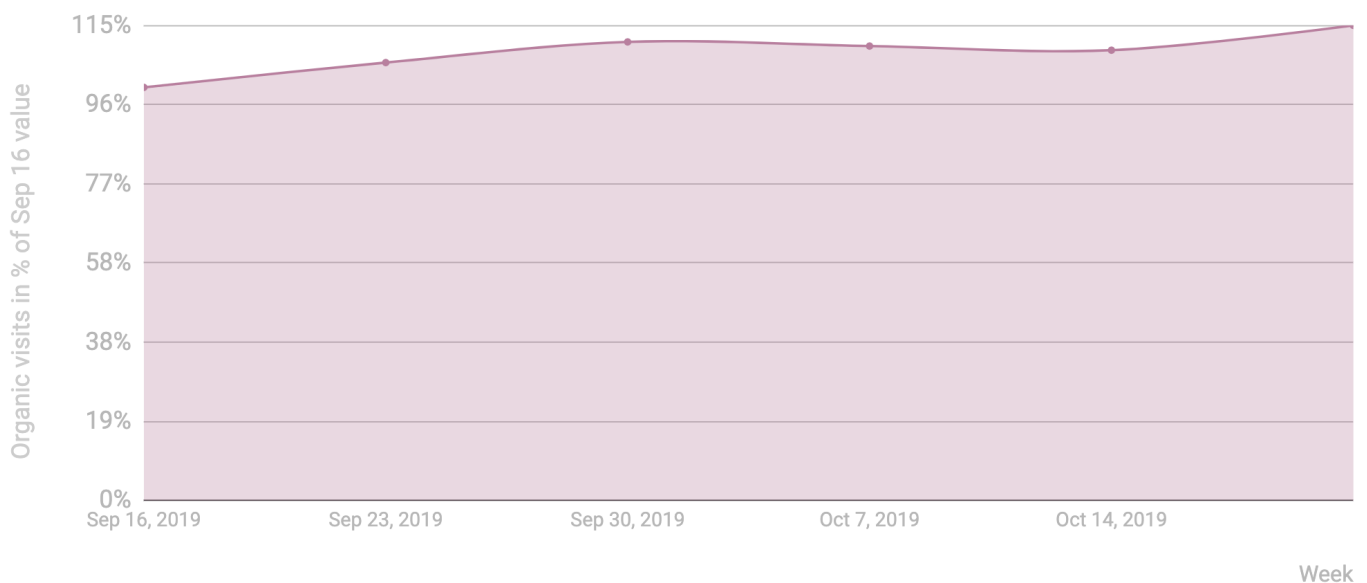
Resolution of duplicate content led to a sharp increase in the visibility of leasing pages, as shown here in the number of Googlebot hits on leasing pages.

**DRIVING
BUSINESS
GROWTH
THROUGH
TECHNICAL SEO**

Robert's results speak for themselves:

- Within the first year of SEO work, carwow saw an increase of approximately 70% in organic traffic.
- Pages that convert (make-model pages and deals pages) are now crawled the most often.
- Make-model pages and deal pages are now visited significantly more often than blog pages
- Make-model pages went from an average Inrank of 6 to an average of 2
- Activation (Enquiries for carwow's service) increased by 68% YoY
- carwow is better positioned to "win" during Google algorithm updates: +14-15% in traffic following the September 2019 update.

Organic visits



- Review pages from which duplicate content was removed now rank the highest for the site and have over 86% visibility in search.

WHAT ONCRAWL BRINGS TO TECHNICAL SEO

"The car market, like other verticals such as travel, is seeing falling CTRs in response to Google's behavior. We needed to attack major brands and evoke change. But change that isn't in the right areas has no value to business.

"We needed an SEO solution that was adaptable: in SEO there's no 'one strategy fits all'. And we found it in OnCrawl. We were able to define the structure of our site based on our end goals, and with the API, create the exact dashboards we needed. In a single year, we saw an increase of +70% in traffic to our site, and we've seen similar improvements in conversions.

"OnCrawl has been very, very good for us in opening up workstreams and opportunities. Beyond the analytical performances of the platform, the shareability of the results is priceless. We can provide URLs to the developers and show them exactly what is happening. OnCrawl gave me the ability to show and teach other areas of the business how important this stuff is. I can say, 'this is where you did X, and here's the result.' Having factual and convincing data improves decision-making across the board."

— Robert Dawson-Goodey

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