

CARS.COM

With STAT, the SEO team at Cars.com gets the local search data they need, fresh every day. Plus they have the freedom to experiment and explore on a much larger scale than ever before.

If you've bought or sold a car in the USA, you probably know about Cars.com. Visited by around 12 million people each month, Cars.com is more than an automobile marketplace: it's a favourite online destination for car shoppers.

It's not just because of their large selection of new and used cars at dealerships across the US. The company's philosophy is all about putting car buyers in control with plenty of unbiased information, vehicle and dealer reviews, comparison tools, and editorial content.

This approach has created a wealth of opportunities to capture visitors from organic search. And that's exactly what the Cars.com SEO team works hard to do every day from their head office in downtown Chicago.

LEAN TEAM WITH HUGE AMBITIONS

As SEO Manager Bonnie Gibbons and analyst Jake Marcet explain, the team is lean and highly focused on pure SEO, coordinating closely with larger teams in SEM, user experience, sales analytics, and social media.

Their job is a massive one. Organic traffic for the site comes from a huge range of search queries — from people researching specific year/make/model/trim/option/condition combinations, to shoppers ready to buy from local dealers, to owners looking for info on vehicle service.

To manage it all, they were using an enterprise-level rank tracking solution with nice reporting and some handy proprietary metrics. But new data was slow to come in – just once per week – and the rigid enterprise pricing forced them to choose between big ambitions and manageable budgets.

Their biggest limitation, though, was the lack of location-based tracking. Car sales are inherently local, and they saw major challenges in correctly structuring location-specific inventory and dealership info to gain organic search exposure.



EMPLOYEES

1500

REGIONS

USA

INDUSTRY

Automobile marketplace and media

VISITORS

12 million monthly (average unique)

NEEDS MET BY STAT

Unlimited keywords

Geo-segmentation by city and ZIP code

Daily data for responsiveness and experimentation

Flexible, per-keyword pricing for large-scale research

Expert partnership with the STAT data team

"We're infatuated with the product. I love this product."

Bonnie Gibbons, Cars.com SEO Manager

"We knew that there were weird trends going on, like salespeople out in the field wondering why we were missing from a city," says Marcet. "But we couldn't see that. So we went looking for a ranking tool that could get down to localized results."

That's how they found STAT, which has unlimited geo-segmented tracking across the world, in any market where Google supports it.

SPEEDY DISCOVERIES

Using STAT, the team immediately discovered an emerging problem with Google location mismatches, which led to new recommendations to the UX team to account for Google's limitations.

"It definitely exposed a vulnerability earlier," says Marcet. "We started using STAT, and already that has led us to being more on the ball as changes in the algorithms come out."

But it's the combination of location-based tracking with daily data that he says has had the most noteworthy influence on his work.

"To put in keywords today and have data tomorrow has also meant that we've been really flexible when we just get an idea," says Marcet. "It's fun to run up against the limits of Google – that's something that I wouldn't have been able to do without STAT."

Gibbons says that STAT's agility and pricing has encouraged her to take risks, explore, and experiment on a much bigger scale than any SEO analytics software she's used in the past.

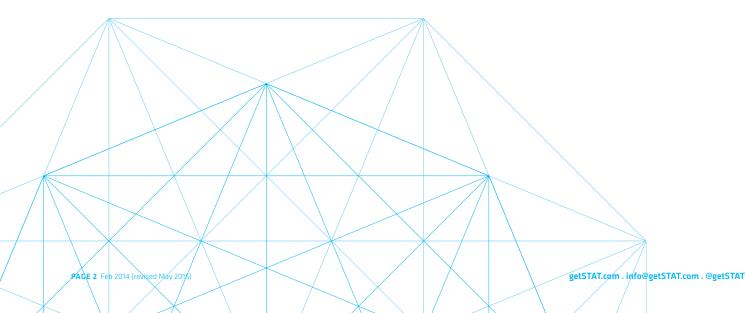
"We could see right away how it was going to work for our main goal, which was the geo-ranking," she says. "But then after we played with it just a little, every time something comes up we started asking: could we use STAT for that?"

At the same time, the team has noticed that STAT seems tailored to the needs of SEO managers and analysts, who are looking for a big-data tracking solution that instantly clicks with how they work.

"We haven't had to change our day-to-day to integrate STAT into our workflow. It's there; it's easy to use, to get the data out," says Marcet.

Gibbons agrees, putting it even more succinctly.

"We're infatuated with the product. I love this product," she says. <



CARS.COM LOVES STAT. HERE ARE A FEW REASONS WHY.



CHALLENGE

The car business is highly local.

SOLUTION

Unlimited location-based tracking.

With geo-located rankings, Cars.com is in an ideal position to measure their performance in local search.

"You've helped us get a handle on how our keywords are doing all over the country," says Marcet, adding that they found Google location mismatches as soon as they started using STAT. It has already changed their thinking on how locations are targeted and how site visitors are cued to think about locations.

"Our boss ... refers to us as the canaries in the coal mine," says Gibbons. "[With STAT] our advice to the product teams and to the design UX leadership is much stronger and more nuanced."



CHALLENGE

Exploring whole new lines of business.

SOLUTION

Fresh SERP data every single day.

Cars.com is expanding into other stages of the ownership cycle, like connecting people with local repair shops. That means deep experimentation to get a handle on a new competitive field – which is where STAT's scale and speed comes into play.

"Overnight, we were able to see how much the volume just isn't there ... and where we think that our content build aligns with the likely searcher intent." says Gibbons.

"You guys provide a lot of data very quickly," says Marcet. "I could get an idea to do something, create an Excel spreadsheet, and when I come into the office tomorrow, I'll have the data."



CHALLENGE

Targeting a huge number of keywords.

SOLUTION

Unlimited keywords, unlimited exporting.

Even if you only look at year/make/model/trim/option/ condition combinations, Cars.com has a massive potential keyword list

Unlimited keywords is important, but it's the flexibility and ease of exporting that makes it possible to wrangle with so much SERP data. From big things like the STAT API, to little things, like a simple right-click on any table to export instantly to Excel

"It's such a small, brilliant thing, but it makes everything easier," says Marcet. "You spoke to the way I do my work."

"It's the easiest way to get as much data as you need," he says.

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"It's the easiest way to get as much data as you need."

Jake Marcet, Cars.com SEO Analyst

WE DO BIG DATA FOR ENTERPRISE SEO.

Since 2009, we've equipped SEO professionals with fresh, location-based search data at massive scale – all backed up by one-on-one expert service. That's how we've built a client base that includes some of the world's largest online brands and nimblest SEO agencies.

Suite 426 . 119 West Pender Street Vancouver . British Columbia . V6B 1S5

US & Canada (toll-free): 1.888.973.0301
UK (freephone): 0800.051.1282
Global: +1.604.568.3422

 ${\tt getSTAT.com.info@getSTAT.com.@getSTAT}$

