Holistic search analysis reveals Scottish universities need improvement

Tuesday 5 June, 2018

Storm ID conducted holistic search analysis of 15 universities across Scotland to evaluate their current practices and needs. The study focused on assessing each institutions' approach to paid and organic search, which highlighted that all have significant room for improvement. The results are designed to show areas of opportunity to increase their digital footprint and attract students from around the world.

Holistic search is the unified approach to paid media and search engine optimisation (SEO) that combines intelligence learned by both channels to own more real estate in search results and drive respective channel performance. To analyse SEO performance, each university was audited and awarded a score based on a 25 point rating. To assess paid media activity, each university was analysed to identify active keywords, trended click activity, and example ad copy.

The results of the SEO audit highlighted several areas for improvement with the average score across all Scottish universities just 8 of out a possible 25 points. Queen Margaret University scored the highest with 15 points, while Glasgow Caledonian University scored the least with only 4 points. All websites audited have significant issues with visibility, such as a lack canonical link elements, which is harming their indexation in search results. Each institution also has issues with content, as many SEO elements are missing, duplicate or simply not crawlable at all.

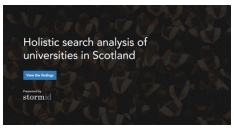
The majority of universities fail to meet the recommended mobile page speed of less than 5 seconds, with the average score across all being 8 seconds. Edinburgh Napier University scored the highest with a load speed of 15 seconds, while Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University, the University of Edinburgh, and the University of Glasgow scored the best with a page speed of 4 seconds. A mobile-first site is more critical than ever now that Google indexes mobile versions of pages first. Mobile page speed will also become a ranking factor come July 2018, so it is vital to have a site that loads quickly, as 53% of mobile users will leave a site if the load time is more than 3 seconds.

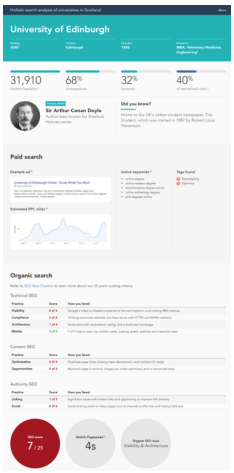
Our paid search analysis showed that almost all universities are using paid search as part of their digital strategy. However, research found minimal data Robert Gordon University is active in paid search and no evidence the University of St Andrews is undertaking any paid activity. While most universities have active keywords, the majority did not have Google Optimise or remarketing tags visible in their code, meaning there's no evidence they are engaging in remarketing ad targeting, A/B testing, or conversion optimisation. In such a competitive sector, it is crucial that paid best practice is followed to ensure budget is not wasted and targeting is used efficiently for higher return on investment.

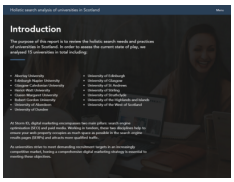
Higher education institutions face a challenging time ahead, as the sector is being disrupted by new technologies and an ever-changing political landscape. This presents a major opportunity for universities to discover new ways to engage with students, both current and prospective. Honing a comprehensive holistic search strategy is crucial to meeting demanding recruitment targets in an increasingly competitive market. Through this analysis, Storm ID aims to help Scottish universities improve their digital presence around the world and combat digital transformation head-on.

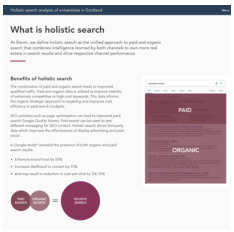
View the full results in this 30-page microsite dedicated to the analysis:
https://stormid.com/university-study

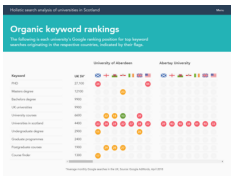
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