

Page Speed and SEO: Everything Google Has Said So Far

In May 2020, Google announced that [the Core Web Vitals](#) will be a ranking factor.

Naturally, the news got the SEO community interested in site speed (again).

And like other UX-focused algorithm updates, this one also caused lots of confusion.

That's why it's useful to go over the previous speed-related updates and try to predict where this one might lead us.

So, in this article, you'll learn about:

- Google's ranking algorithm updates that affect page speed and SEO - [2010](#), [2018](#) and [2021](#);
- [What Google has said on the topic so far](#);
- [What we still don't know about page speed and SEO](#);
- [Why speed should be a priority, regardless of Google's stance on the issue](#);

Let's get started.

[**2010 - Using Site Speed as a Ranking Factor on Desktop**](#)

The first time Google announced it was using site speed as a ranking factor for **desktop searches** was in 2010.

Using site speed in web search ranking

[Send feedback](#)

Friday, April 09, 2010

Webmaster Level: All

You may have heard that here at Google we're obsessed with speed, in [our products](#) and [on the web](#). As part of that effort, today we're including a new signal in our search ranking algorithms: site speed. Site speed reflects how quickly a website responds to web requests.

Speeding up websites is important — not just to site owners, but to all Internet users. Faster sites create happy users and we've seen in our [internal studies](#) that when a site responds slowly, visitors spend less time there. But faster sites don't just improve user experience; recent data shows that improving site speed also [reduces operating costs](#). Like us, our users place a lot of value in speed — that's why we've decided to take site speed into account in our search rankings. We use a variety of sources to determine the speed of a site relative to other sites.

They had been building up to this with a series of tools, articles and case studies on site speed in 2009 and 2010.

For example, in 2009 they open-sourced [Page Speed](#) and launched [Site Performance](#) as part of their Webmaster Tools.

As far as the announcement itself, there's a very important statement towards the end:

Site performance

This page shows you performance statistics of your site. You can use this information to improve the speed of your site and create a faster experience for your users. [Learn more](#)

Performance overview

On average, pages in your site take **1.4 seconds to load** (updated on Apr 7, 2010). This is **faster than 87% of sites**. These estimates are of high accuracy (more than 1000 data points). The chart below shows how your site's average page load time has changed over the last few months. For your reference, it also shows the 20th percentile value across all sites, separating slow and fast load times.



- Many other tools on code.google.com/speed.

While site speed is a new signal, it doesn't carry as much weight as the [relevance of a page](#). Currently, fewer than 1% of search queries are affected by the site speed signal in our implementation and the signal for site speed only applies for visitors searching in English on Google.com at this point. We launched this change a few weeks back after rigorous testing. If you haven't seen much change to your site rankings, then this site speed change possibly did not impact your site.

We encourage you to start looking at your site's speed (the tools above provide a great starting point) – not only to improve your ranking in search engines, but also to improve everyone's experience on the Internet.

This is still true today. Google has always said that content quality and relevance beats everything else.

Again, this update only affected **desktop searches**. Mobile searches aren't mentioned anywhere in the article.

Beyond SEO, Google's posts from 2009 to 2011 show how long ago they laid the foundations for today's Lighthouse/PageSpeed Insights, Chrome's DevTools, CrUX and other similar projects.

[2018 - Speed is now a landing page factor for mobile searches](#)

After 2010, Google continued to publish [case studies](#) and research on the importance of site speed.

Around 2016, pages built with their [AMP framework](#) also started appearing in search results.

And soon, it was time for another update forced on speed.

Eight years after making speed a ranking signal for desktop, Google did the same for mobile searches.

Speed is now used as a ranking factor for mobile searches

Users want to find answers to their questions quickly and [data](#) shows that people really care about how quickly their pages load. The Search team announced speed would be a [ranking signal](#) for desktop searches in 2010 and as of this month (July 2018), page [speed will be a ranking factor for mobile searches](#) too.

If you're a developer working on a site, now is a good time to evaluate your performance using our [speed tools](#). Think about how [performance](#) affects the user experience of your pages and consider measuring a variety of real-world [user-centric performance metrics](#).

Are you shipping [too much JavaScript](#)? [Too many images](#)? Images and JavaScript are the [most significant contributors](#) to the page weight that affect page load time based on data from [HTTP Archive](#) and the [Chrome User Experience Report](#) - our public dataset for key UX metrics as experienced by Chrome users under real-world conditions.

To evaluate performance, check:

- [PageSpeed Insights](#), an online tool that shows speed [field data](#) for your site, alongside suggestions for common optimizations to improve it.
- [Lighthouse](#), a [lab tool](#) providing personalized advice on how to improve your website across performance, accessibility, PWA, SEO, and other best practices.

They even called it the “Speed Update”.

This wasn't the most surprising thing in the world. By 2018 mobile had taken over most of the world but websites' mobile versions were too slow.

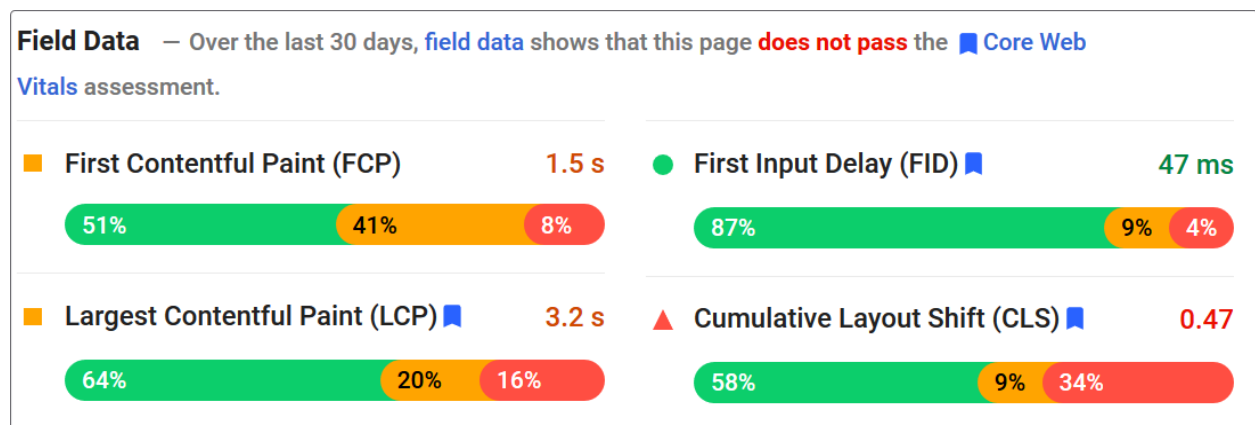
Before this update, Google had released AMP (and Facebook - their Instant Articles) with the goal of improving performance, especially on mobile.

[2021 - Page Experience Signals \(Core Web Vitals\)](#)

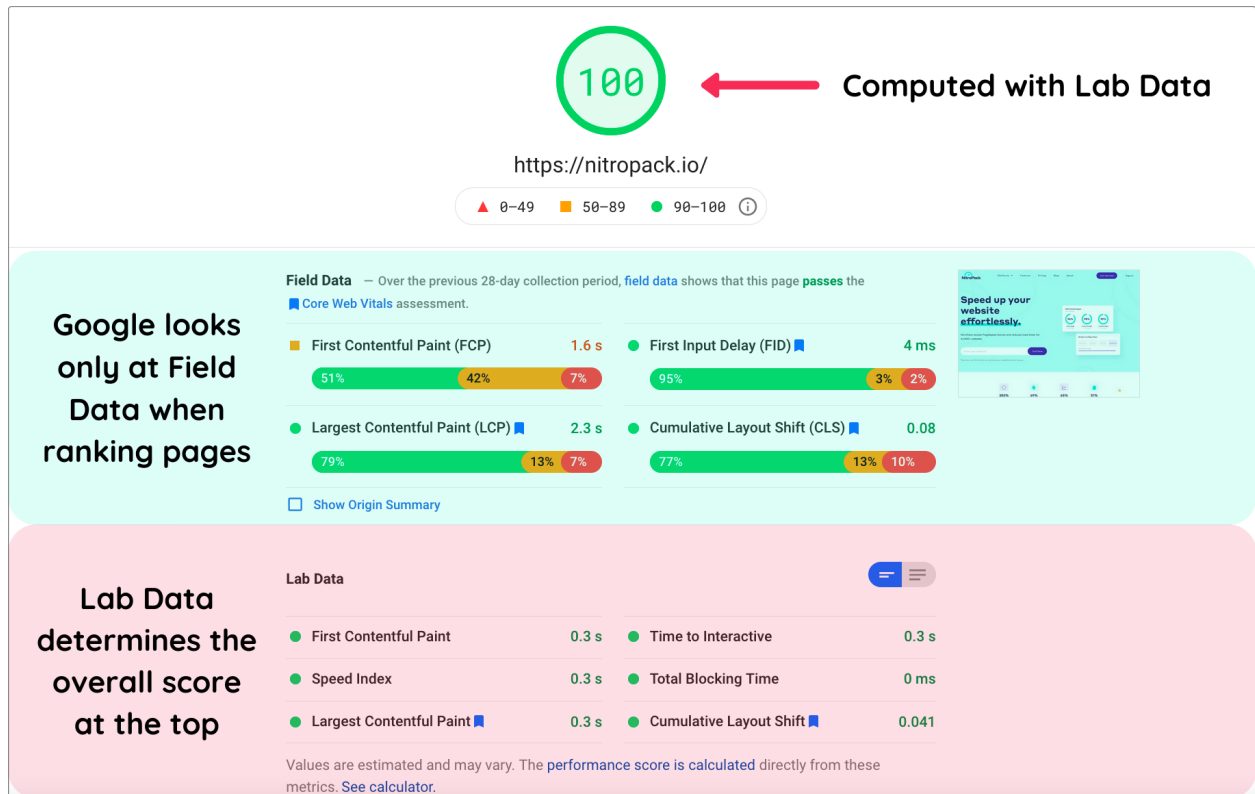
The latest update on site speed as a ranking factor came in May 2020 when Google announced the Core Web Vitals.

[The Core Web Vitals](#) are three metrics (FCP, FID and CLS) that measure the **load time**, **interactivity** and **visual stability** of a page. More importantly, these metrics would play a role in organic ranking as part of [Google's page experience signals](#).

PageSpeed Insights was also updated with a new report that shows if websites pass the Core Web Vitals assessment.

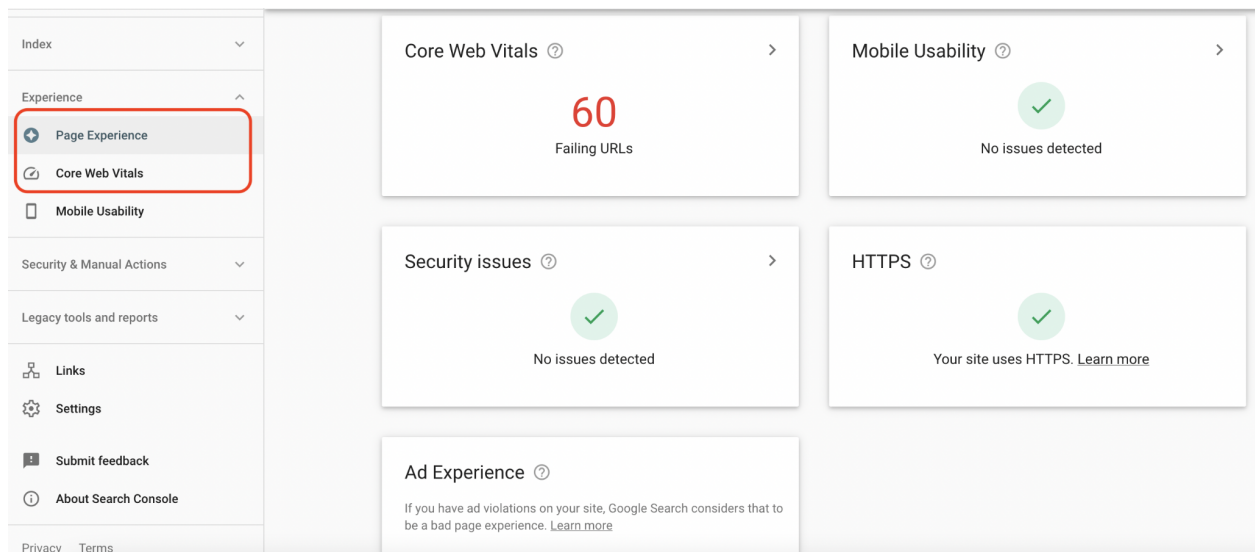


As a quick side note, Google only uses Field Data (data from real users) for this assessment. The overall optimization score is derived from Lab Data, which only shows how well a page **might** perform based on predetermined conditions.



Put simply, **you should monitor your website's Field Data** for an accurate view on its performance.

Google also added new Core Web Vitals and Page Experience reports in Search Console.



Again, this algorithm update stirred a lot of interest in the SEO community. However, it's still too early to tell how big of an impact the Core Web Vitals will have on organic rankings.

Google's Videos on Page Speed and SEO

After the Core Web Vitals announcement, Google released two important videos to clear misconceptions about speed's role as a ranking factor.

First, check out this video on page speed and SEO.

/*Embed video -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUOD6pcvnso&t=517s*/

Most importantly, this quote sums up the video perfectly:

- “If you’re the fastest website out there, but the content isn’t great, that (page speed) is not helping you.”
- - Martin Splitt - Developer Advocate at Google

And here’s another video on the Core Web Vitals and SEO that says pretty much the same:

/*Embed video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggpZA5U2rZk*/

And the obligatory quote:

- “In general, we (Google) prioritize pages with the best information overall even if some aspects of page experience are sub-par. A good page experience doesn’t override having great, relevant content”.
- John Mueller - Search Advocate at Google

As you can see, Google has been very clear on this:

Great, relevant content trumps everything else, including speed and user experience.

Or in other words, content is still king.

Google also said the same thing in the announcements for the 2010 and 2018 algorithm updates.

What We Still Don't Know

Even 10+ years after Google first made speed a ranking factor, there's a surprising lack of research on the topic.

Mainly, there are almost no case studies (at least public ones) on just how much speed affects organic rankings.

In 2020, Brian Dean did a rare experiment comparing a fast and slow version of the same page.

You can check it out below.

/*Embed video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpV0_jdo0og*/

While interesting, it isn't enough for a definitive answer to our question since it's limited to a single page.

In fact, most studies on the topic focus on a single page or website. That's why it's hard to say just how much speed affects SEO.

To make a somewhat accurate assessment, we'd need a study that compares millions of pages with similar content.

And here's something else that hasn't been researched in detail:

Does page speed affect the organic ranking and user experience of **different types of websites** equally?

For example, visitors might be more patient when browsing blogs as opposed to eCommerce checkout pages. If that's the case, is page speed an equally important ranking factor for both types of pages?

Again, this is pure speculation. I'm just trying to illustrate how much we still don't know about page speed and SEO.

In sum:

We know that page speed is a ranking factor. However, it's far from the most important one, as great, relevant content trumps everything else. Beyond that, it's hard to say how much weight speed has in Google's ranking algorithm.

The Real Reason for Improving Your Website's Speed

We can speculate about speed and SEO all day, but the truth is there are much more important reasons to speed up your website.

Simply put:

Faster Website = Deeper User Engagement = More Conversions

It's that simple.

Users like fast websites, just like they prefer faster checkouts at the grocery store and faster service at a restaurant. That's why every second of load time adds friction to the customer's journey.

And unlike SEO, here speed's effect can be directly measured in \$. I recently compiled [18 case studies from companies like Google, Netflix and Walmart](#) on this topic.

Some of the results were staggering:

- Mobify (case study #9) shared that reducing load times on key pages by 0.5s resulted in **six-figure annual revenue increases** for their clients.
- Zitmaxx Wonen (case study #10) **increased their mobile revenue by 98.7%** by reducing their load time to 3s.
- Google (case study #17) found that websites that met the thresholds for all three Core Web Vitals see up to **24% less abandonment rate**.

Again, [check out the full article for more details](#).

The important thing to take away is this:

Site speed directly affects your business results. That's why you should care about it, even if we don't know how much it affects SEO.