



Hotels

VOICE SEARCH

A deep dive into verticals

April 2018

ROAST[™]



Intro

ROAST are a full service digital agency passionate about driving performance for our clients. As an independent business, we are able to be nimble and continually evolve and grow. This agile nature allows us to explore latest trends and capitalise effectively on industry developments. At ROAST we are forward thinking and enjoy working with clients who share this mentality.

One way that we drive ROI for our clients is by exploring new ad types, devices and ways to connect with the user. Since the launch of smart speakers with built in assistants, such as the Amazon Echo (Nov 2014) and Google Home (Nov 2017), we've been interested in the mechanics of voice search, how people are using the devices and how our clients could engage with these interactions.

Our whitepapers aim to show a deep understanding of current industry topics and provide the tools to maximise performance as the digital landscape evolves.

In January 2018 we launched the industry's first Voice Search Ranking Report and released a whitepaper on the state of voice search. This whitepaper is the second part of our Voice Search study, which takes a deep dive into 22 different verticals.

This whitepaper focusses on the hotels vertical. Many individual hotels and chains in recent years have been asking how they can reduce their reliance on online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Expedia, Booking.com who have come to dominate organic rankings.

As more consumers have Alexa and Google Assistant power devices in their home and on mobile devices there could be a shift in the way individuals research hotels.

There is good news for individual hotels and chains as our findings show that the OTAs currently don't feature in the results of our study.

How this report works

- For this report we used a total of 500 key phrases
- The report was carried out on the 5th of March 2018
- For this report we used a Google Home Assistant device
- This document contains summary information, observations and top line strategy recommendations
- The attached spreadsheet contains the raw Voice Search Ranking Report, lists each key phrase, the response from the Google Home Assistant, the classification of the response. We have also gathered if Google was showing a featured snippet answer box result for the same key phrase on the same day. We list the type of answer box (Paragraph, List, Table) which domain and URL Google extracted the featured snippet answer box from.

Example key phrases

- where to stay near Glasgow
- Dublin where to stay
- Barcelona where to stay
- cheap hotels in my area
- b and b Edinburgh

See the attached spreadsheet for all key phrases



Findings

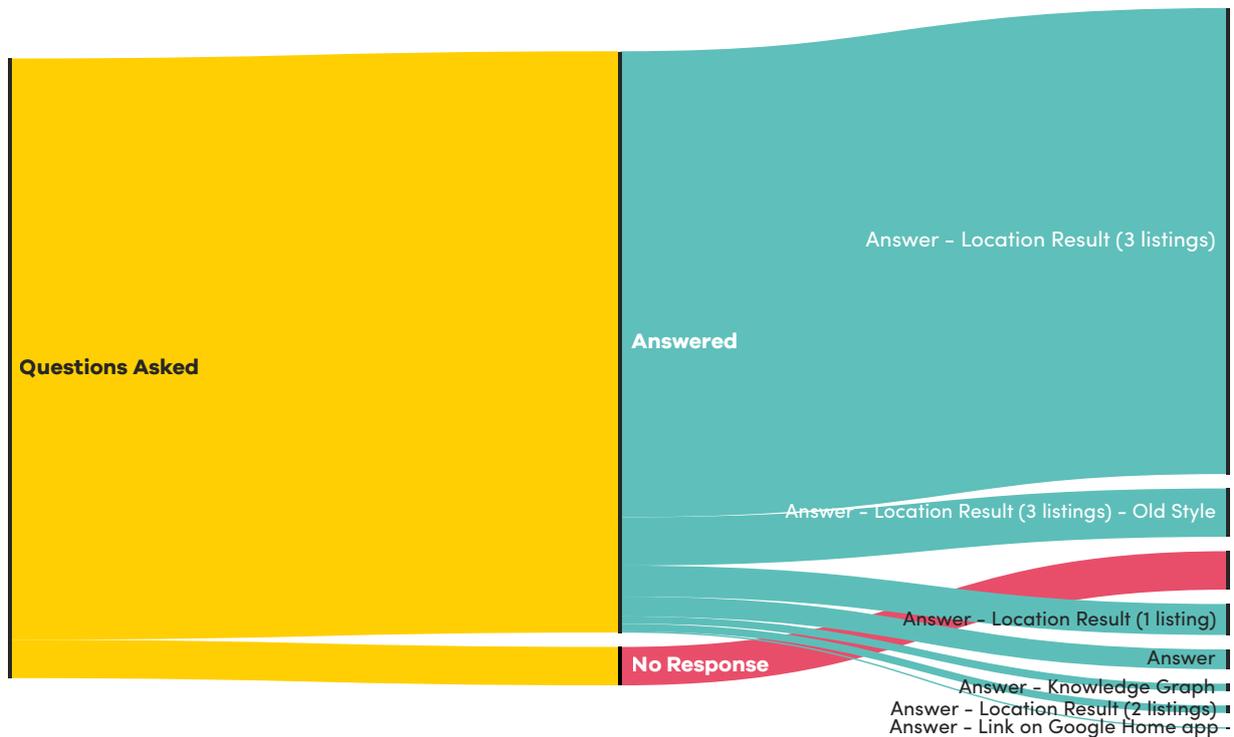
B

B

Flow graph

The diagram below shows the flow of results from the 500 key phrases asked.

- For 469 key phrases, the assistant gave an answer:
 - 446 were location results (more below on the types)
 - 16 were standard answers
 - 6 were knowledge graph answers
 - 1 was a link on Google Home app answer
- For 31 key phrases the assistant was unable to provide an answer



This flow of results shows us that the assistant gave location results for 89.2% of the key phrases. We saw four variants of local results.

Location results

Location results are where Google reads out an answer based on what location you included in your query, or if your location is not included in the query, based on your IP.

Type	Example Search	Example Result
Answer – Location Result (1 listing)	copthorn hotel birmingham	Copthorne Hotel Birmingham is on Paradise Circus, Paradise Place in Birmingham You can say directions or call

Type	Example Search	Example Result
Answer – Location Result (2 listings)	chester accommodation	There are at least 2 listings. The 1st one is: Clarendon Serviced Apartments – Chester House, on Chester House, 14 Eccleston Place in London. You can say directions , call or next
Answer – Location Result (3 listings)	hotels in dam square	There are at least 3 listings. The 1st one is: NH Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky, on Dam 9 in Amsterdam. You can say directions , call or next
Answer – Location Result (3 listings) – Old Style	where to stay near bath	I found a few places. The 1st one is No 15 Great Pulteney at 15 Great Pulteney St in Bath. The 2nd one is Abbey Hotel at N Parade in Bath. The 3rd one is Tasburgh House Hotel at Warminster Rd in Bath.

What's the difference in the results?

Running these tests at the start of 2018 we only observed Google giving out 3 listings, reading one after another (referenced as “3 listings – Old Style” above). Running the tests in March we now see Google stating how many results it's found, it then reads out the first result, pauses and gives the user three options; directions, call, or next.

The software we use to run our reports, moves onto the next key phrase rather than asking for the next result.

Where does Google get the data from?

The data for the locations comes from Google My Business listings. We've tested a subset of key phrases and the results can be very different to the web results.

User – “OK, Google, Hotels in Shoreditch”

Google Assistant – “The 1st one is Travelodge London Central City Road at 1-23 City Rd in London. The 2nd one is Qbic Hotel London City at 42 Adler St in London. The 3rd one is Travelodge London Central Kings Cross Royal Scot at 100 King's Cross Rd in London.”

A search from the same IP on an incognito chrome search yielded different results.

While running tests on key phrases, we found that sometimes the results and the combination of hotels were the same, however they appeared in a different order.

Google My Business listings are owned by the individual hotels, this means OTAs such as Expedia, Booking.com are not going to have any visibility on these types of results.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "hotels in shoreditch". The search results page includes a map of Shoreditch with price markers for various hotels, a date range selector for "Thu 29 Mar" to "Fri 30 Mar", a price range slider from £0 to £800+, and several filter options like "Sort by", "2" (likely for number of guests), "Rating", "Accommodation type", "Hotel class", and "Amenities".

Hotel Name	Price	Rating	Number of Reviews	Star Rating	Hotel Class	Key Features
Holiday Inn Express London - City	£87	3.9	714	3-star	3-star	Low-key pick with free Wi-Fi & breakfast, Free breakfast
The Hoxton, Shoreditch	£99	4.4	1,306	4-star	4-star	Hip rooms, plus hip dining & a bar, Free Wi-Fi
The Z Hotel Shoreditch	£75	4.2	312	3-star	3-star	Hip budget option with free Wi-Fi, Free Wi-Fi

At the bottom of the results, there is a link to "View 1,413 hotels" and a link for "About pricing".

Making calls to a hotel

One of the prompts on the results was to call the hotel.

User – “Ok Google, call the Copthorn hotel Birmingham”

Google Assistant – “Calling the Copthorn Hotel Birmingham”

Google recently released the ability to call mobile and landline numbers from Google Assistant powered speakers for free. The device lights up and a call is made as normal. Users can also call contacts in the phone. A setting on the Google Home app enables the call to appear as if it was coming from your mobile number, so any call back would go to your mobile. International calling is not free and inbound calls are not possible at the moment.

Google is pulling the number from Google My Business listings which means its key to have the correct number appearing in the listing.

How to appear in the top 3

Currently it's not 100% known if the ranking algorithm is different for voice search results vs. web results, or the difference is due to user related factors. However, the underlying platform for generating these results is the same—Google My Business.

Optimisation for Google My Business is based around keeping information up to date, consistent, and gaining good reviews.

Tracking software is readily available for web results; we are now looking to work on a similar platform for voice search with comparison with web.

Knowledge Graph results

The majority of key phrases in this set focused on hotels and accommodation. We included a small set of “what to see key” phrases, all returned knowledge graph results.

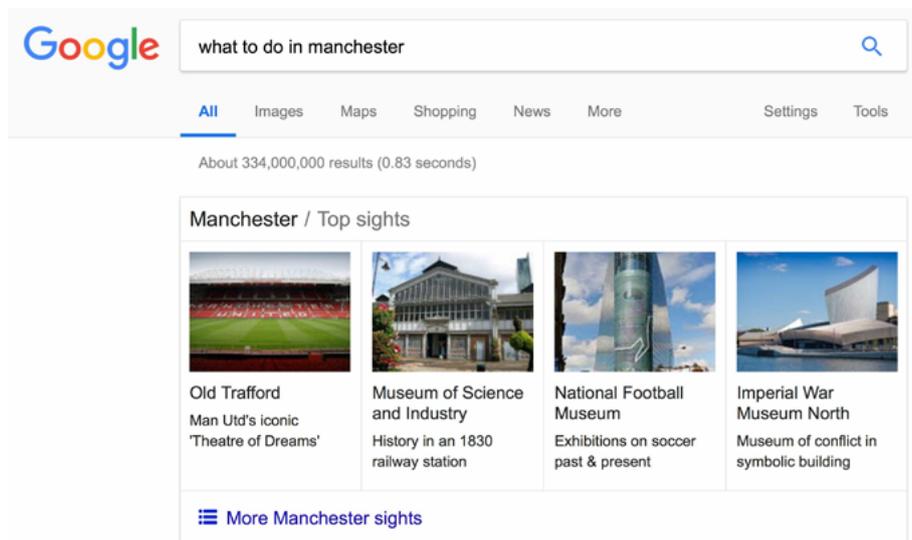
User – “Ok Google, what to do in Manchester”

Google Assistant – “Attractions in Manchester include Old Trafford, Museum of Science and Industry, National Football Museum and others.”

Here the results are from Google’s knowledge graph, so Google doesn’t use data from a featured snippet.

It would be very difficult to try to overcome this result with a featured snippet from your own website. However, it could be possible to optimise the knowledge graph result to add your attraction to the top results.

On the web the result for the same query:



Personalised results

With organic web searches, Google will tailor the results according to your location, past search history, and preferences. The same is true with voice search. Google will change the results according to your Google account.

For this reason, we run our tests on “blank” Google accounts. However, there are some interesting results with personalisation.

For example, I have an upcoming holiday booked in Barcelona in August. This caused a different result when I asked the Google Assistant on my own Google Home device:

User – “Ok Google, Barcelona hotels”

Google Assistant – “You have 2 hotel bookings, it’s for [hotel location] on the 6th of August.”

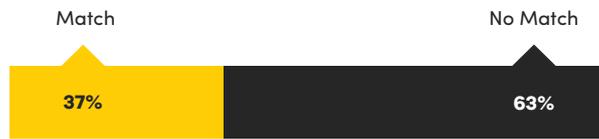
If I didn't already have a booking, Google would read out suggestions of hotels. How does this work?

In this example I've let the Google Assistant see my calendar (by default many users will). When I made the booking with Airbnb they sent a confirmation email to the same Google account. The email contained the dates of the stay and the location. Google extracted the dates and added them into my Google Calendar, which the assistant can see.

To make sure reservations are read out, hotels should ensure their confirmation emails contain Hotel Reservation Schema¹ in the email.

What percentage matched?

For this key phrase set on web results Google only shows featured snippet answer boxes for 27 key phrases. 10 times the voice search result was the same, 17 times the assistant provided an alternative answer.



This shows that even if you occupy the featured snippet answer box result the assistant might not read out the result. Answer boxes were low on this vertical as Google preferred to read out location listings.

Feature snippet vs location results?

One of the questions we had running this vertical was when Google has both a featured snippet answer box and location results for a key phrase, which would it read out?

We found a mix of both.

For example, for a web search for "hotel Gatwick with parking" the result has both a featured snippet answer box from [holidayextras.co.uk](https://www.holidayextras.co.uk) and locations results.

Gatwick Airport Hotels

Hotel	Room only price	Stars
Premier Inn A23 with parking at Summer Special, Longbridge Way, North terminal, Gatwick airport, Crawley RH6 0NX		★★★
Stanhill Court, Stanhill, Charlwood, Surrey RH6 0EP	£79.00*	★★★★

35 more rows

[Gatwick Airport Hotels | From just £37 - Holiday Extras](https://www.holidayextras.co.uk/gatwick-airport-hotels.html)

Map showing hotel locations near Gatwick with price tags: £47, £70, £45, £73, £73, £73.

Hotel	Price
BLOC 4.3 ★★★★★ (2,711) - 3-star hotel Compact rooms with high-tech features	£70
The Corner House Hotel 4.2 ★★★★★ (138) - 4-star hotel Casual rooms, a bar & a restaurant	£47
Sandman Signature London Gatwick Hotel 4.2 ★★★★★ (449) - 4-star hotel Modern rooms, dining & an indoor pool Free Wi-Fi	£73

[More hotels](#) About pricing

¹ <https://developers.google.com/gmail/markup/reference/hotel-reservation>

The result via the Google Assistant was to read out three locations with the “Location Result (3 listings)”.

But then on “Gatwick airport parking and hotel” again there is a featured snippet answer box from [travelsupermarket.com](https://www.travelsupermarket.com) and location results.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "gatwick airport parking and hotel". The search results include a featured snippet from [travelsupermarket.com](https://www.travelsupermarket.com/en-gb/extras/airport-hotels/gatwick/) and a list of hotel results.

Featured Snippet:

Gatwick Terminal hotels with parking. For the ultimate in convenience, there are three **Gatwick hotels** located opposite a terminal: The Hilton, The Sofitel and the Premier Inn North Terminal. ... If you need **parking** too, you'll find the cheapest deals by combining both in a single booking through TravelSupermarket.

[Gatwick Hotels with Parking | Airport hotel deals with TravelSupermarket](https://www.travelsupermarket.com/en-gb/extras/airport-hotels/gatwick/)
<https://www.travelsupermarket.com/en-gb/extras/airport-hotels/gatwick/>

Hotel Results:

Hotel Name	Price	Rating	Star Rating	Number of Reviews	Hotel Type	Amenities
Hampton by Hilton London Gatwick Airport	£144	4.1	3-star	2611	Functional airport hotel with free Wi-Fi	Free Wi-Fi, Free breakfast
Sofitel London Gatwick	£108	4.3	4-star	994	Upscale airport hotel with posh dining	Free Wi-Fi
Premier Inn London Gatwick Airport North Terminal	£78	4.3	3-star	678	Standard airport hotel with a restaurant	Free Wi-Fi

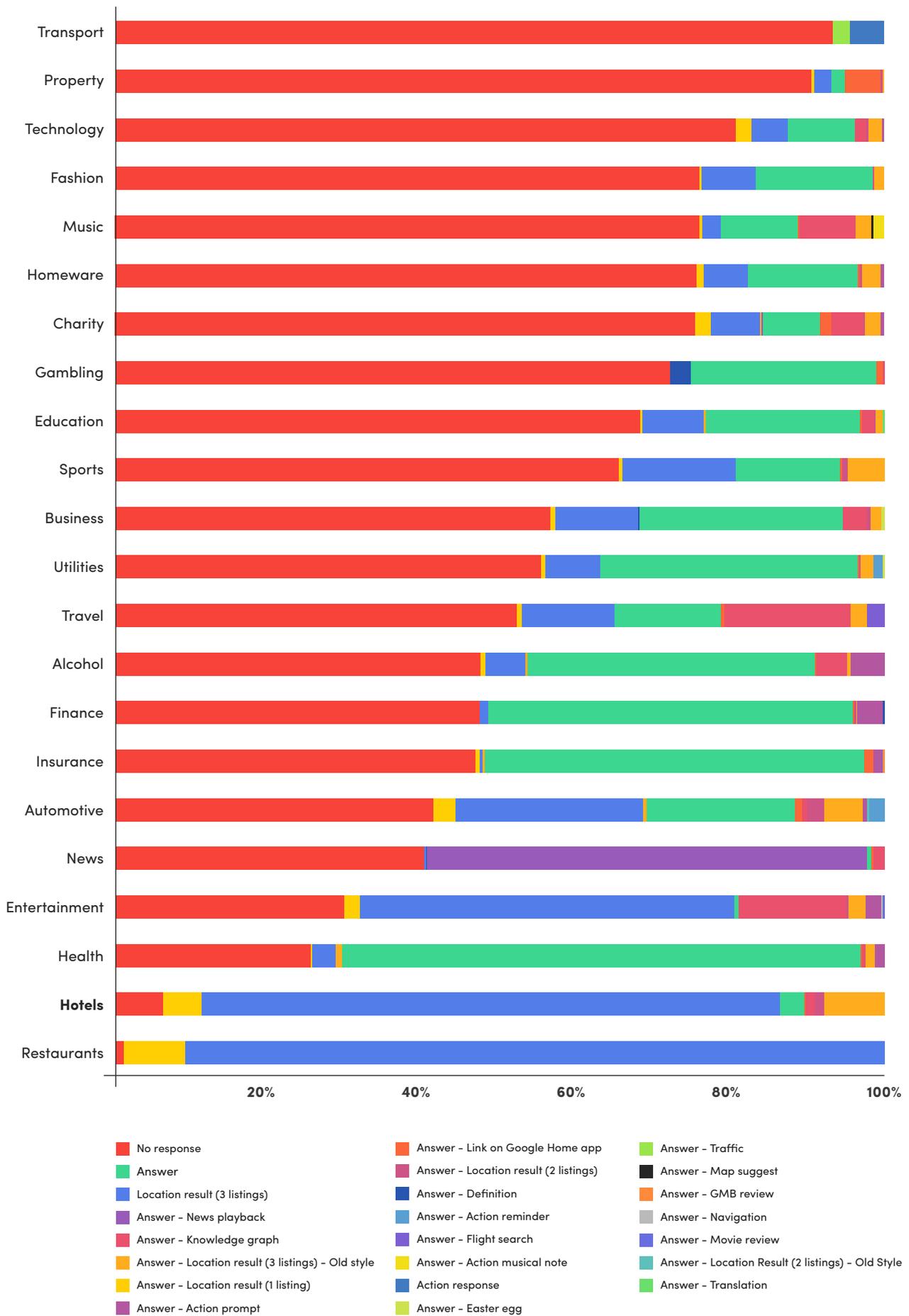
The assistant read out the featured snippet answer box:

Google Assistant – "Here is some information from the web that might possibly help. On the website [travelsupermarket.com](https://www.travelsupermarket.com), they say: Gatwick Terminal hotels with parking. For the ultimate in convenience, there are three Gatwick hotels located opposite a terminal: The Hilton, The Sofitel and the Premier Inn North Terminal. You can book these as a room-only deal or a money-saving hotel and parking deal."

There doesn't seem to be a set of rules to follow here, it is not simply a case of "Location results always trump an answer box".



Vertical Comparison



A network diagram consisting of several nodes (small circles) connected by thin lines, forming a complex web. The nodes are scattered across the upper and middle portions of the page. The background is a solid yellow color.

Next Steps



Suggested next steps

- Optimisation of Google My Business is key as the Google Assistant uses the location result the majority of the time
- “What to do” key phrase will generally be pulled from the knowledge graph – it will be hard for your content to rank in these types of voice searches
- For booked customers with a Google Home, ensure your confirmation email has schema so the Assistant can see the booking
- If you have a featured snippet answer box, you might not have the voice search result – track to see what result is given
- Consider creation of an Action for Google Assistants for a richer user experience, to make or alter a booking

Future reports

This report will be run quarterly, updated data will allow us to track if Google starts to increase or decrease the use of location results or starts to add new answer types.

One addition to this report we are currently looking into is extracting which hotel is listed in the location results and which position. For example hotel X is listed 80% of the time, with an average ranking position of 1.5.

Paid options

At the time of writing there are no paid options on the Google Assistant, e.g. similar to AdWords. One option for Google in the future would be integration of Google Hotel Ads² into the assistant results.

For example, a Hotel or OTA could pay for their listing to appear higher, or three options are read out and then a 4th which is paid.

Want to learn more?

If anything in this document has interested you, you can talk to ROAST about the following;

- Voice Search Strategy
- Ongoing Voice Search Ranking Reports – Bigger key phrases sets, increased frequency, customised tracking
- Website optimisation to gain more answer boxes and thus better voice search results
- Production of Actions for Google and Skills for Alexa devices

Just pop an email to voiceresearch@tipigroup.com or give us a call on 0208 102 8500.

² <https://www.google.com/intl/en/ads/hotels/>

Get your own Voice Search Ranking Report

If you are interested in voice search, we can create a one-off Voice Search Ranking Report for you.

You can complete the form on weareroast.com/white-papers/voice-search or email us at voiceresearch@tipigroup.com with your name, the domain you wish to track, and a sample set of key phrases (if you don't have a list, send generic key phrases and we'll create a list of related key phrases).

Please Note

Our voice search reports are not fully automated currently. You will be contacted by the ROAST team to confirm the creation of a report.



For any further questions,
you can email us at
sayhello@tipigroup.com

weareroast.com

ROAST™