WASTE AND ONLINE SEARCH: A NEW INDUSTRY VENTURE

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Nearly a decade after the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the waste industry heads into 2017 ready to embrace new technology, while at the same time opening itself for new investment, and preparing for growth.

The Government currently estimates that the waste industry is worth around £9 billion to the UK economy, employing over 70,000 people across 3,000 companies.

That said, despite significant growth in important areas, such as packaging recycling, 2016 was blighted by uncertainty due to the UK's European Union membership referendum.

In the days following the vote, industry leaders moved to soothe concern and anxiety, as many worried that the waste industry would sink to the bottom of the Government's priority list.

Before the end of the year, just four days prior to Christmas, it published *The Future of the Natural Environment* after the EU Referendum, which focused on the impacts of the vote on wildlife, land and farming.

The online paper was welcomed by Resources and Waste UK (R&WUK), the Chartered Institute of Wastes Management (CIWM), and the Environmental Services Association (ESA).

The paper offered the industry assurance that important issues are being considered throughout the forthcoming negotiations between the Government and the EU.

THE ONLINE PAPER WAS WELCOMED BY RESOURCES AND WASTE UK, THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF WASTES MANAGEMENT, AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES ASSOCIATION.

Despite this, the fallout still leaves questions on the lips of many within the industry, especially in regards to financing, and the legal and political technicalities that could slow future growth.

As mentioned in the above, the waste and recycling industry is now looking to new technology to help it get ahead of the times.

From the implementation of drones to monitor landfill sites, to the increase of online bookings and ecommerce, how can 3,000 waste and recycling companies get ahead of competitors in an unpredictable climate?

Like waste, ecommerce in the UK has taken its time to stabilise since the recession, but by the end of last year it was set to make £150 billion, up by 11 per cent from 2015.

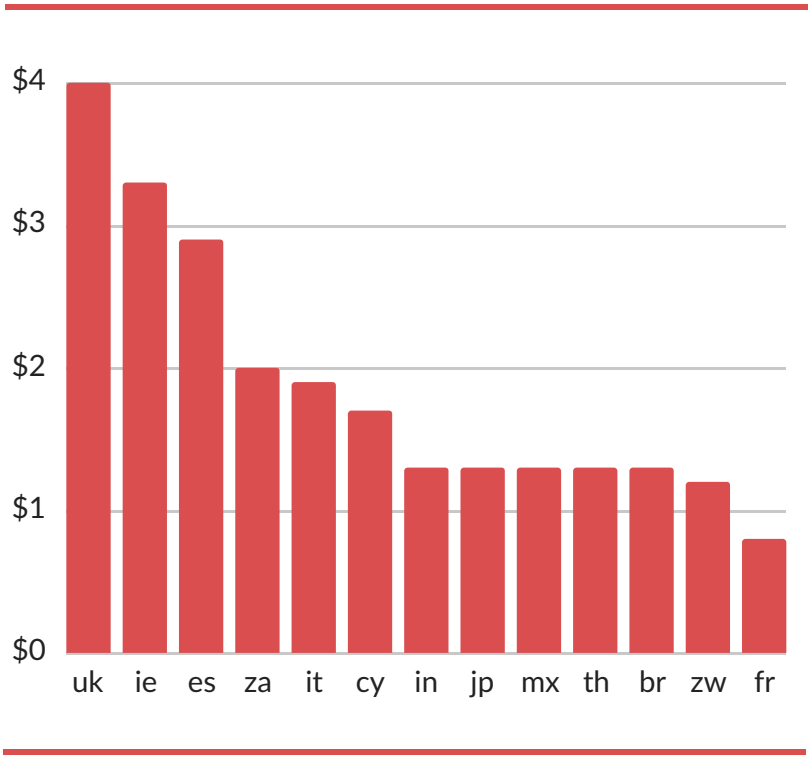
With these statistics in mind, is the waste and recycling industry making the most out of online commerce? Are companies really making the most of Google and the most popular and in-demand search terms?

WASTE MANAGEMENT SEARCH ACTIVITY

Throughout this paper we shall be investigating three of the largest search areas in the waste and recycling industry, beginning with the term “waste management.”

With over 108 million results within the UK, the term “waste management” is one of the most competitive and toughest search terms for the industry.

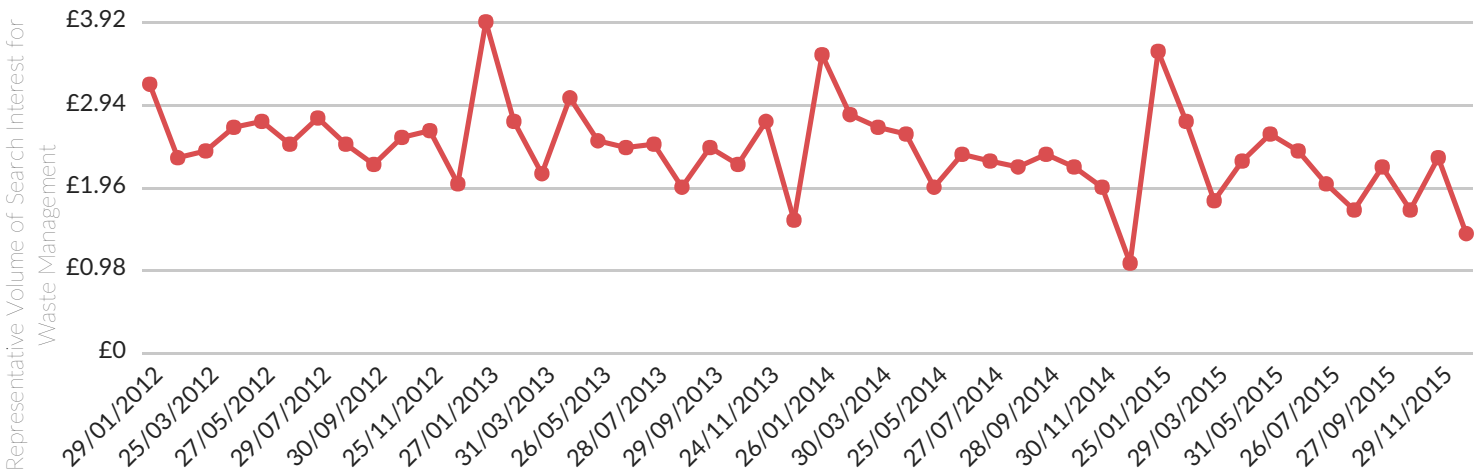
What’s more, the Cost Per Click (CPC) distribution across the world shows that this search term is the most expensive in the UK, at USD $4.07.



It’s important to note however that CPC distributions aren’t static figures, and can change for better or for worse depending on demand.

Subject to trends or seasonal conditions of the term, this could rise and fall multiple times during a year.

Looking at the data from a four year period, it is possible to predict market conditions and when a waste company should expect to take advantage of increased demand:



We can see distinct and consistent troughs and peaks throughout each year.

What is interesting are the high peaks of January, which form major demand for waste management firms, likely due to the large amounts of seasonal waste accumulated both in homes and businesses.

This demand is also heightened throughout at least half of the year, before dropping off in around May or June each time.

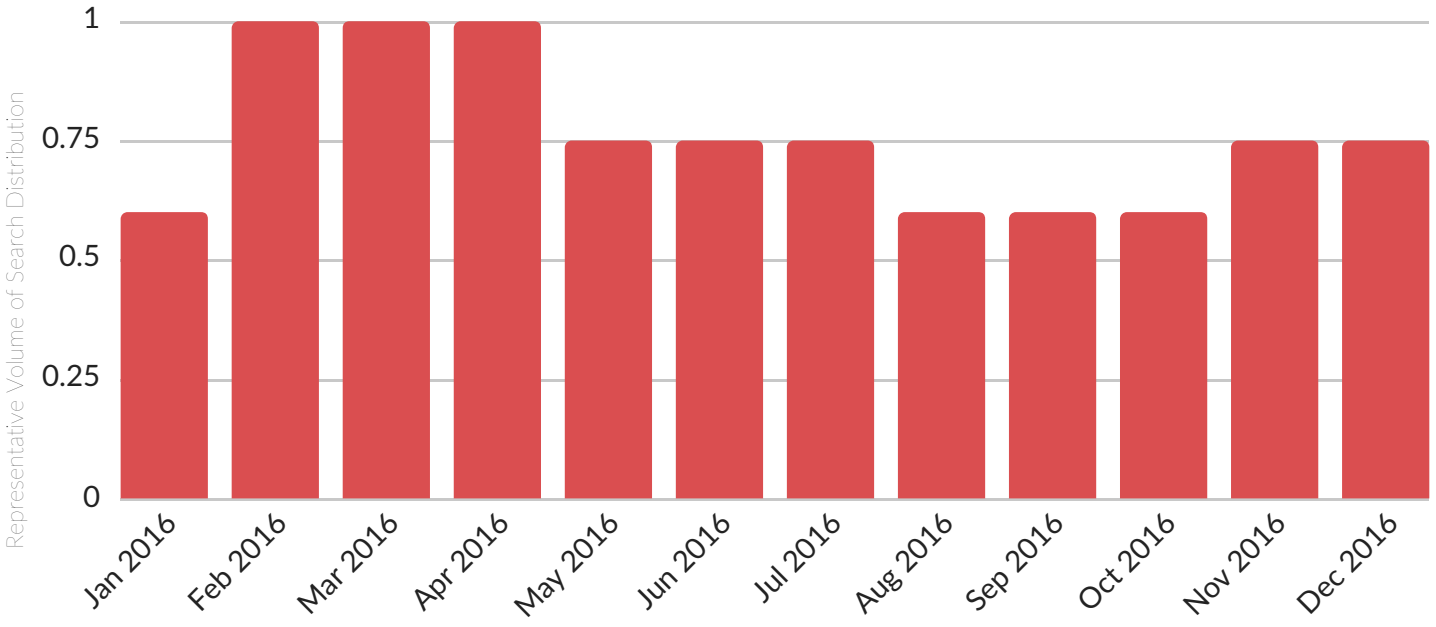
Pay Per Click (PPC) offers businesses a fair opportunity to reach out to potential customers in a targeted and efficient way — being prepared for the first weeks in a year is therefore crucial for a waste business to gain advantage over its competitors.

That said however, PPC does have numerous shortfalls, as although paid advertising offers companies quick ways to gain revenue, it is expensive and its true power can only be harnessed using a varied strategy that is coupled with organic, technical, and local search.

After all, there might only be a minority of people clicking on advertisements within Google's SERPs, in fact, a survey carried out in 2014 found that less than ten per cent of users clicked on PPC advertisements, with the rest choosing to use the organic search results that the search engine provides.

Using a different data source, we can see the same seasonal trend in regards to Google's UK search engine.

Again, we see a peak throughout the beginning months of the year before a slight dip as the year pushes into the summer.



SO, WHO IS MAKING THE MOST OF THE ORGANIC SEARCH ENGINE RESULTS PAGES FOR THE TERM, “WASTE MANAGEMENT”?

As we can see from the top twenty results in Google, the SERP provides a mixed offering in regards to the websites that it produces.

There are actually numerous reasons for this, the first being that the engine does not solely produce commercial results, just because the query is itself commercial – Google must also cater to other needs and interests, which might be academic, legal, scientific, or purely out of personal interest (hence why the likes of Wikipedia is brought up on more than one occasion in our example).

Another reason for the range of results will be that despite being a search term that is in high demand, it is also one that is quite broad in its definition, leading Google to supply a variety of commercial sites within waste management itself.

Perhaps the sole exception to the rule could be the very first result, which is the website for Waste Management, a monolith of the

Google.co.uk Top 20 "Waste Management"

#1 wm.com
#2 twitter.com
#3 wikipedia.org
#4 wikipedia.org
#5 grundon.com
#6 www.gov.uk
#7 veolia.com
#8 letsrecycle.com
#9 ciwm.co.uk
#10 devonwaste.co.uk
#11 winwaste.com
#12 waste-management-world.com
#13 cumbriawaster.co.uk
#14 wrap.org.uk
#15 dunmowaste.com
#16 youtube.com
#17 swrjustbins.co.uk
#18 fdtodd.co.uk
#19 rtswaste.co.uk
#20 biffa.co.uk

Google

Focusing directly on waste and recycling companies from the UK, we can see a nice collection of results offering waste companies of varying sizes. This means that although competition is of course tough, it does mean that there is room for new business amongst companies, both large and small.

Waste companies that keep their content fresh, offer users a navigable and structurally sound website, alongside an organic and search friendly backlink history, will benefit from heightened positions within key organic listings.

There's no doubt that for some search terms, the biggest and most established waste businesses will always benefit solely from their size and reputations, but despite this we can conclude that this search term is open for companies of smaller stature given that we see one of the UK's largest waste businesses (Biffa) in a relatively low position.

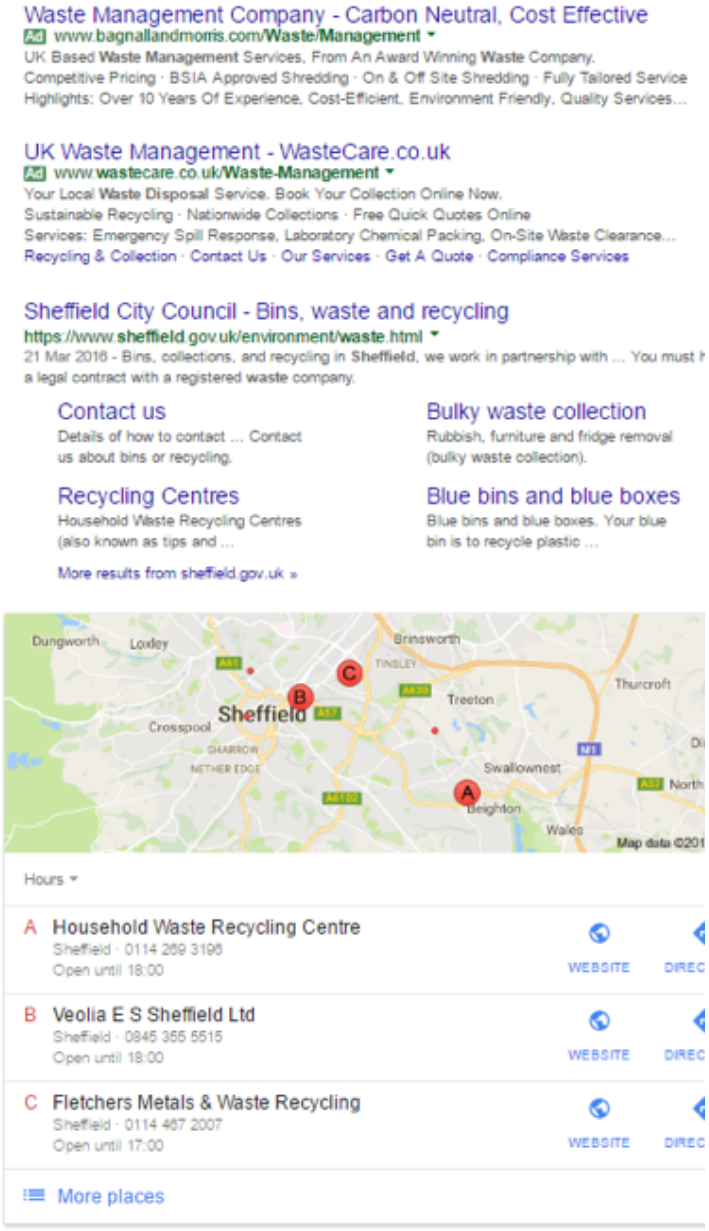
It is worth noting that much of the time waste management searches are conducted with the intention of finding local results that are relative to the geographic location of the user.

Looking at the term's popularity across the country, we can see that it is more popular in Sheffield, where it is searched for more than any other city in the UK.

It appears that in Manchester and Birmingham it is around 20 per cent less popular than in Sheffield, with London coming in far behind all three. This does not mean however, that there are more searches in Sheffield than London, it is merely an indication of the term's popularity per person or search within those cities.

Google Trends Data Demonstrating Search Volume Density

As there is a great deal of interest in this search term within the city of Sheffield, it's worth taking a look at the resulting SERP to see how it is arranged by searching for "Waste Management Sheffield".



OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS GOOGLE HAS BEEN CHANGING HOW LOCAL BUSINESSES ARE REPRESENTED WITHIN ITS SERPS.

These changes have included altering the number of businesses that appear, from five or more down to three.

This influences how people click through to various websites within the SERPs, and the area of coverage that is shown based on the search query and or its intent.

As well as this, the predominance of a local stack within a SERP is extremely powerful and is in collusion with what is known as the Google Venice algorithm.

This takes larger keywords and interprets their meaning, giving the results a more accurate local offering so that the correct businesses are displayed.

A local stack in particular is a very tough and potent place for many search queries in the waste sector.

As we can see from the SERP, the top two results are comprised of PPC advertising, followed by Sheffield City Council, and then the local stack.

This means that although the end results are more accurate and offer far more relevant businesses, it is crucial for local companies to be set up for local search, as falling foul of this could cost thousands in revenue.

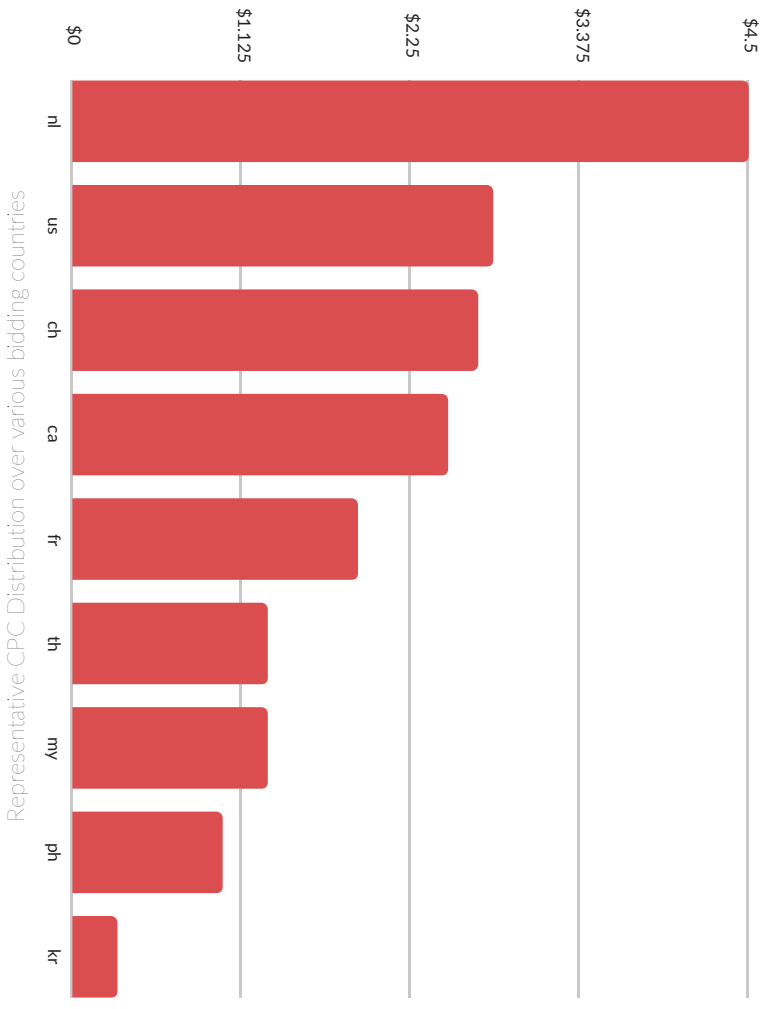
An interesting result within this stack is Veolia, an international French water management and waste company. The fact that such an established waste business is appearing within a local stack for waste management suggests that the company is actively targeting local search and will likely look to appear in results for many major UK towns and cities.

Although local search is often touted as the opportunity for SMEs and small businesses to appear for online audiences, this shows that larger companies can still muscle in on the smaller scenes, making it imperative for local businesses to refine their organic and paid marketing strategies — something that Fletchers Metals & Waste Recycling seems to be doing very well.

As already mentioned, “Waste Management” is a huge term that is generic to the waste and recycling industry. With that in mind, how does a more focused term hold up in the search market, and which companies are making the most of it?

One sector of waste and recycling that has flourished over the past decade is “food waste.”

FOOD WASTE SEARCH ACTIVITY



A term and interest that for many hits close to home, the food waste and recycling sector is becoming an increasingly large part of the waste industry as the Government pushes people towards a more sustainable future.

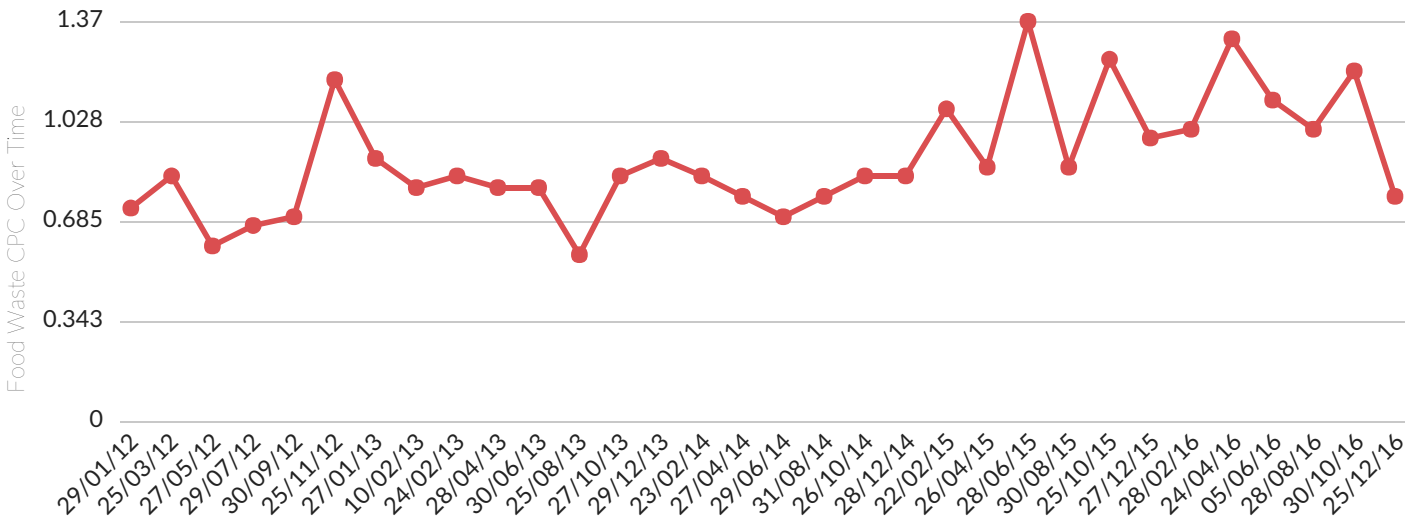
Offering 20 million organic results in UK SERPs, it is clear that this term is less popular than “waste management”, yet being only a sector within the industry, this is to be expected.

Taking a look at the CPC distribution across countries it is certain that there is a lack of current competition amongst paid advertising.

This does not however mean that there is no competition for it, as many European countries and others across the world have far tighter laws and regulations in regards to food waste and recycling — and in the UK things are only set to toughen.

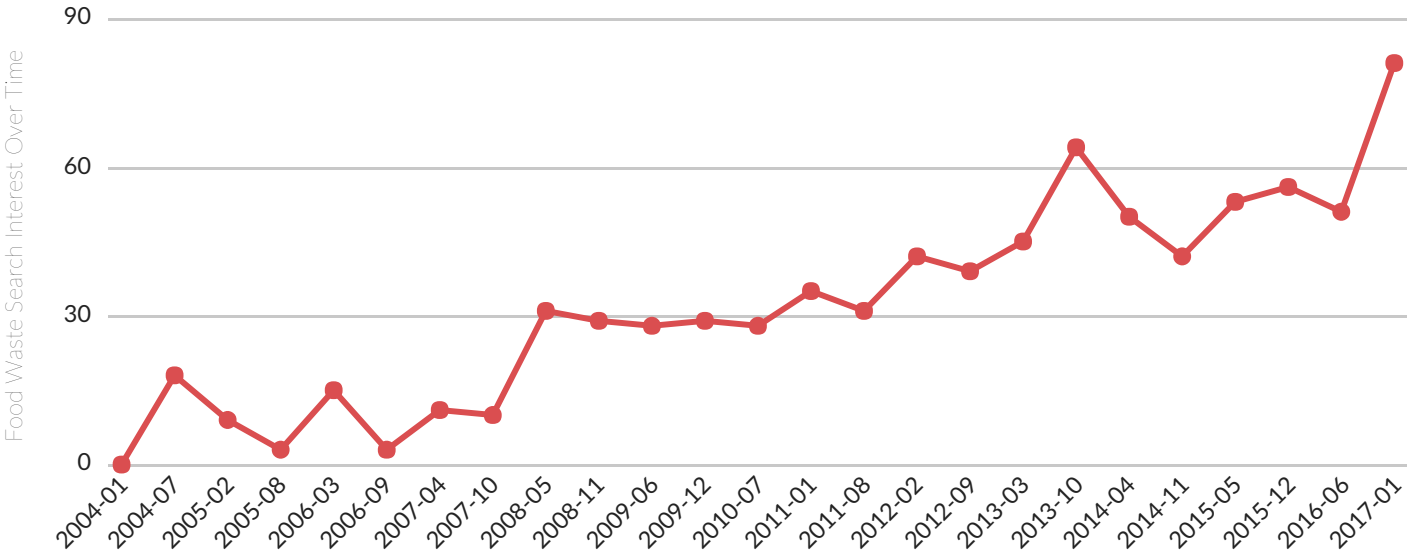
As we can see from the below table, the cost per click has risen at a slow but comfortable rate from 2012 through to the end of 2016. Although there is a slight dip for December of last year, we can take this as an anomaly, and predict an increase in price throughout 2017.

As stated with waste management however, paid advertising is but one way of generating revenue and should not be used as a single means of attracting users.

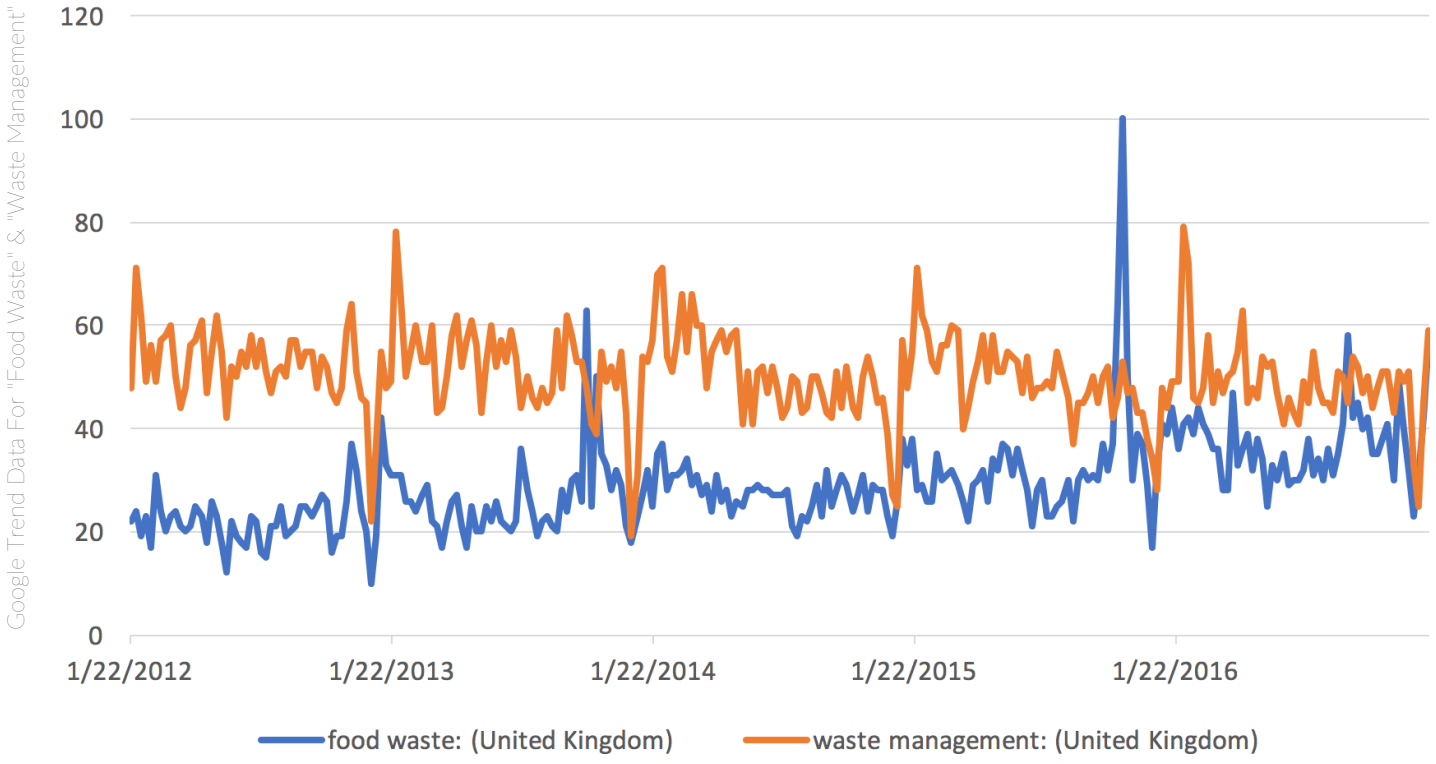


As we can see from the graph, there are significant peaks and troughs throughout a typical year, much like the industry itself.

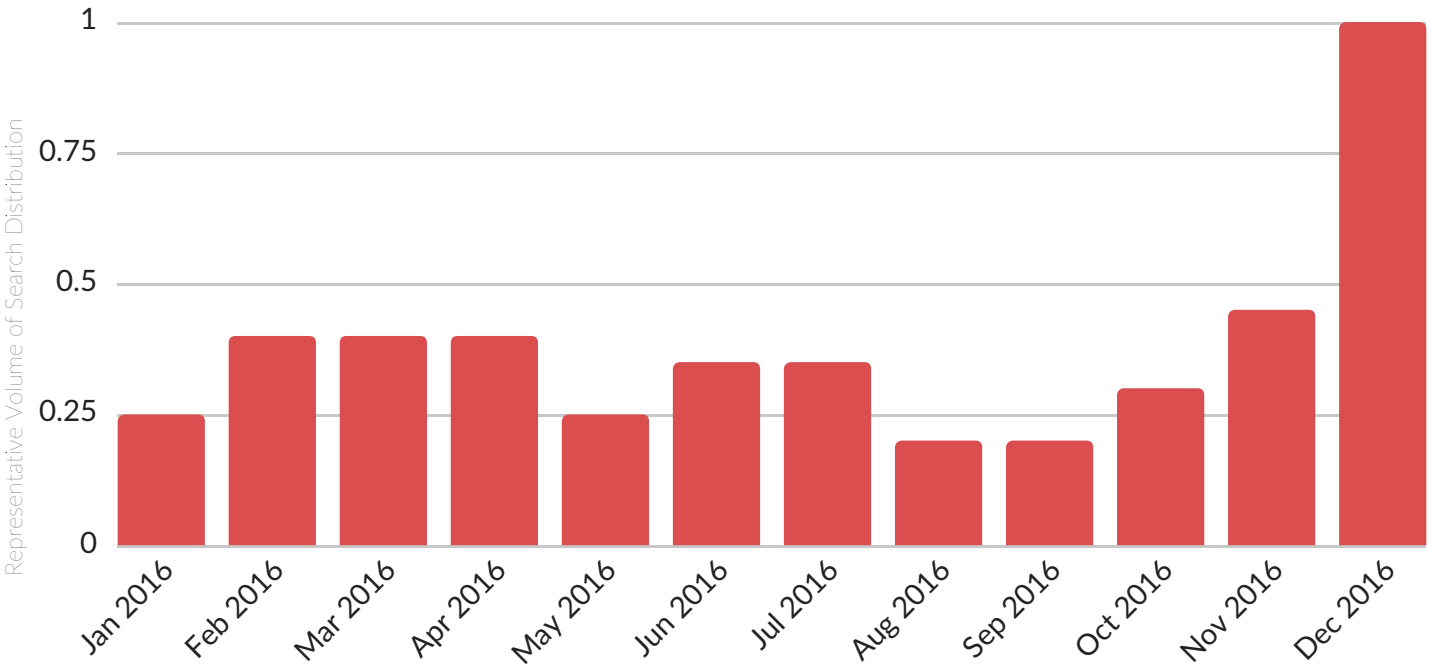
Taking a look at organic interest since records began on Google, it is possible to see that the interest in food waste has risen dramatically over time.



In fact, the interest in the sector has risen so much that it is now in line and almost even with the industry itself, as can be seen in the search demand comparison table below.



Being that there is so much demand for food waste as a term, it is important that waste companies dealing with commercial food waste and recycling have organic search strategies implemented on their websites to benefit from the high search demand — failure to be set up, even from a technical point of view, could be disastrous for a business that specialises in food waste and recycling.



Looking at the demand during 2016, like Waste Management, the subject of food waste appears to peak around Christmas, this time to a major degree, more than double the demand of November.

Taking a look at the organic search results for “food waste” in the UK, we can see that Google might not consider it to be a commercial term — yet.

Within the SERP we can find a large range of Government websites and local authorities; websites that offer help and legal guidance to individuals and companies concerning waste.

Often these sites are packed with content and information that offers help and provides solutions to individuals looking to cut down or dispose of their waste.

One of the great many ways that a company can gain exposure in such SERPs is to provide high quality information and content to satisfy both search engine guidelines and user queries.

It is not until we surpass the first twenty results however, that we begin to see commercial waste companies and other businesses associated with food waste (such as tech solution companies) appearing in the SERP.

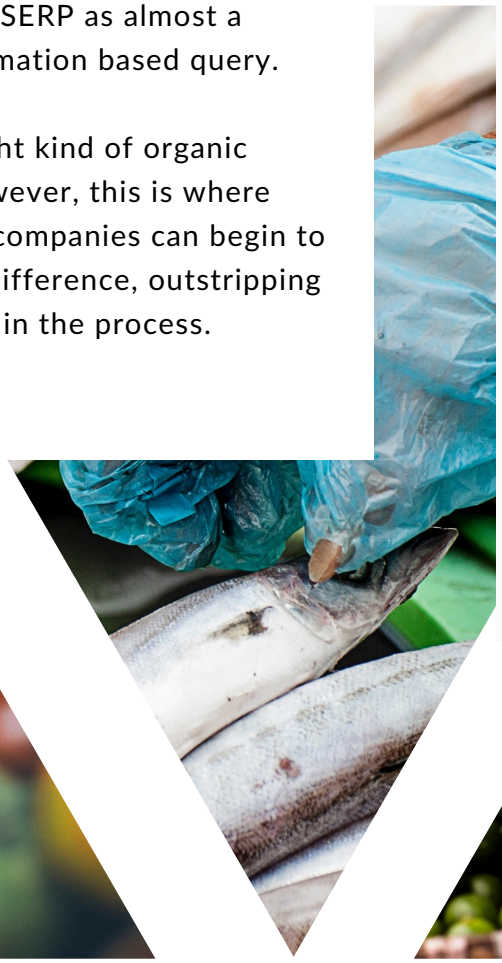
In fact, it is largely .gov heavy, which means that Google is treating the SERP as almost a purely information based query.

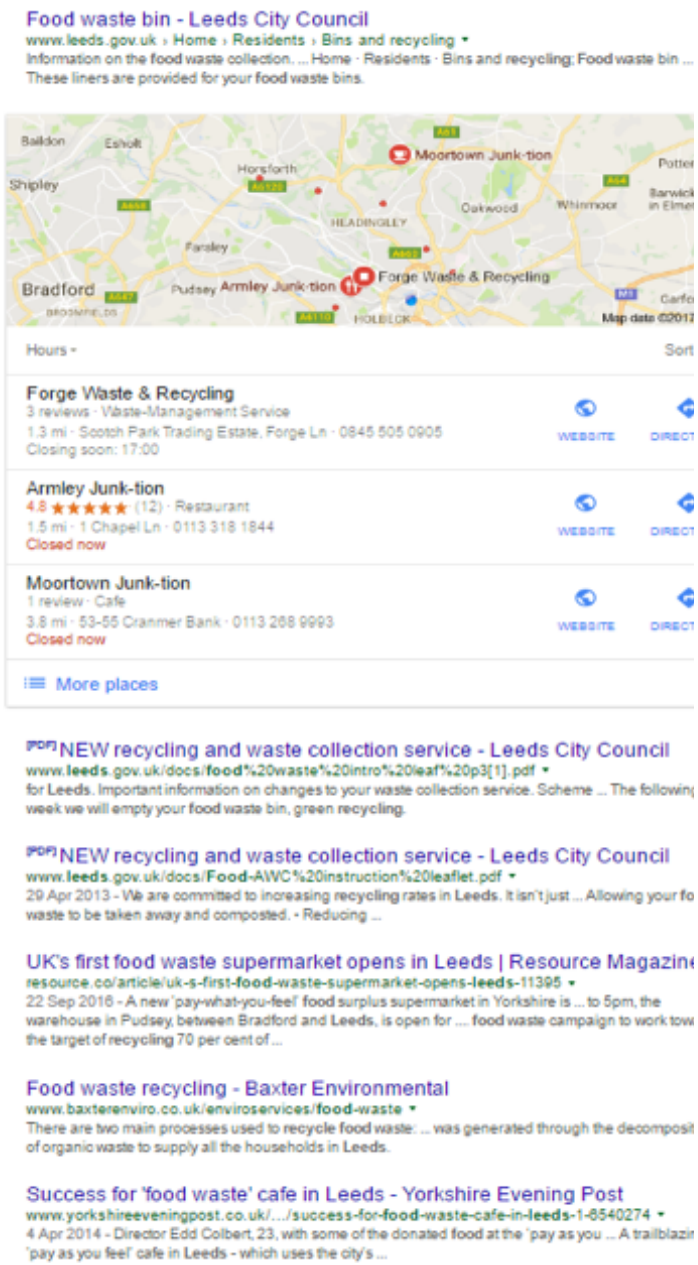
With the right kind of organic strategy however, this is where food waste companies can begin to make a big difference, outstripping competitors in the process.

Google.co.uk Top 20 "Food Waste"

#1 theguardian.co
#2 wrap.org.uk
#3 lovefoodhatewaste.com
#4 wikipedia.org
#5 foodwastenetwork.org.uk
#6 somersetwaste.gov.uk
#7 www.parliament.uk
#8 theguardian.com
#9 thegrocer.co.uk
#10 standard.co.uk
#11 food.gov.uk
#12 cheltenham.gov.uk
#13 rctcbc.gov.ul
#14 wiseuptowaste.org.uk
#15 dorsetforyou.gov.uk
#16 oxford.gov.uk
#17 valeofglamorgan.gov.uk
#18 pembrokeshie.gov.uk
#19 bathnews.gov.uk
#20 recycleforsurrey.org.uk

Google





By expanding the search term a little, to “food recycling Leeds” we can see just how one of the local search results will look for food waste.

Presented with the familiar local search stack, which includes geographic business locations and organic search results, we are able to make assertions about the local search market for this location.

Of course, the first thing to notice is the lack of paid advertising on this SERP. It is quite likely in this instance that a paid tactic is not required for this particular sector.

That said, there are a range of waste companies and organisations taking advantage of the organic and natural search positions.

Unlike before however, it is clear to see that this SERP is dominated by local waste businesses and organisations, with industry paper Resource, being the only national organisation to feature.

This does however reveal that there is good and healthy competition within the city of Leeds for food waste and recycling, which also indicates that there is a larger waste management culture within the city outside of food waste.

With such a ripe SERP for local businesses, it is important that local waste companies implement a multitude of organic search strategies in order to gain priority within this and associated SERPs and related keywords.

Although food waste is but one key area for growth, there is another that over the past decade, has surpassed even this — electronic waste.

ELECTRONIC WASTE SEARCH ACTIVITY

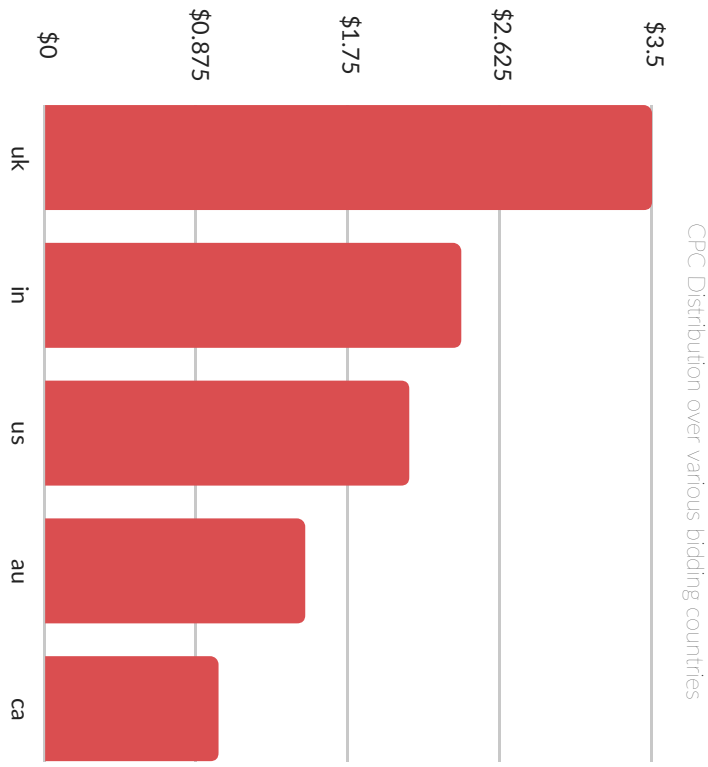
Due to the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive (WEEE) Regulations (2013), businesses that place electronic equipment on the market are now required to:

• Minimise waste arising from electrical and electronic equipment and promote their reuse.

• Ensure waste products are treated correctly and meet both recovery and recycling targets.

• Design products by reducing material use and enhancing reusability and recyclability.

In addition to this, it is now the responsibility of retailers (who sell more than 32kg of batteries per year) to provide collection points for battery recycling.



Due to the fact that retailers also need a waste carrier certificate to move and transfer hazardous waste, many large retailers must now rely on certified waste companies to transport batteries for recycling.

This means that due to a variety of laws and regulations passed throughout the past ten years, electronic waste is becoming an increasingly dominant sector for waste companies and will continue to do so for years to come.

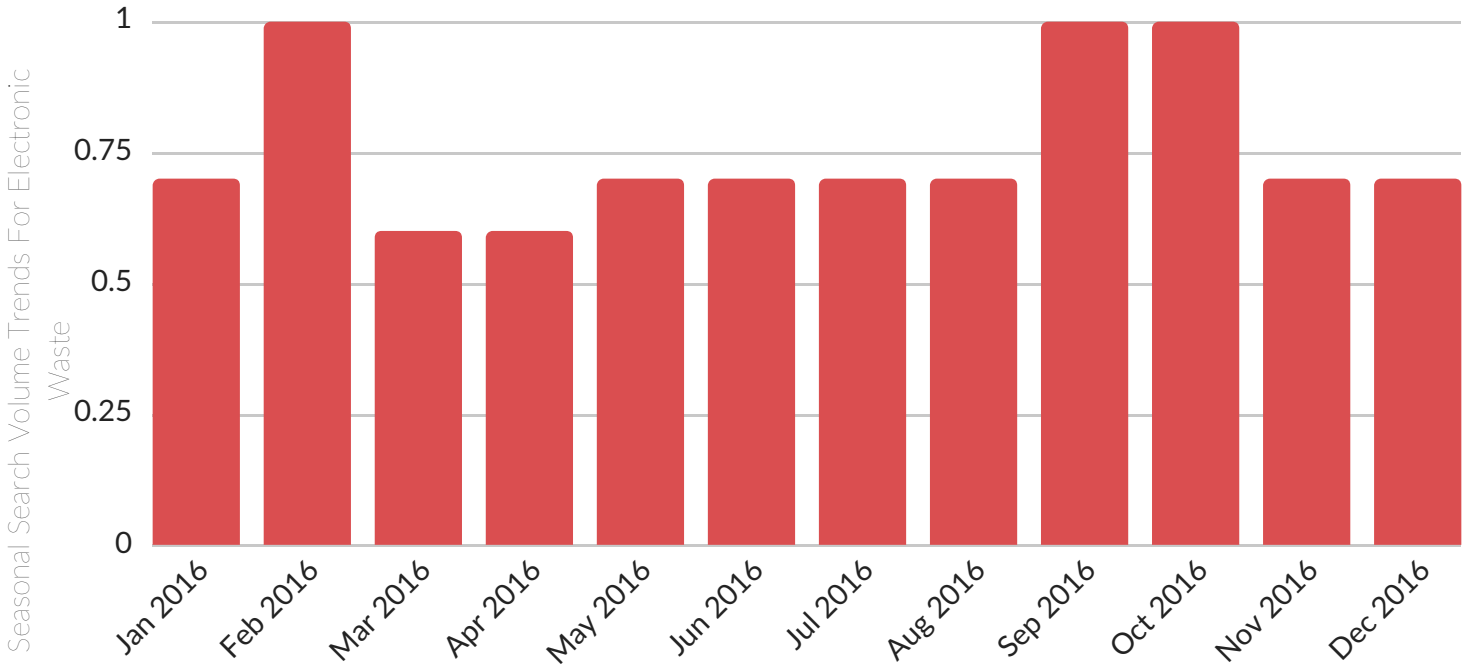
Taking the search term “recycle electronics” there are over 15.7 million results in the UK and a cost per click price of around $3.50 at the time of writing. It is clear therefore, that there is healthy competition among paid advertising for this sector.

In fact, like the term “waste management” itself, the UK is one of the most competitive countries for this phrase in the world.

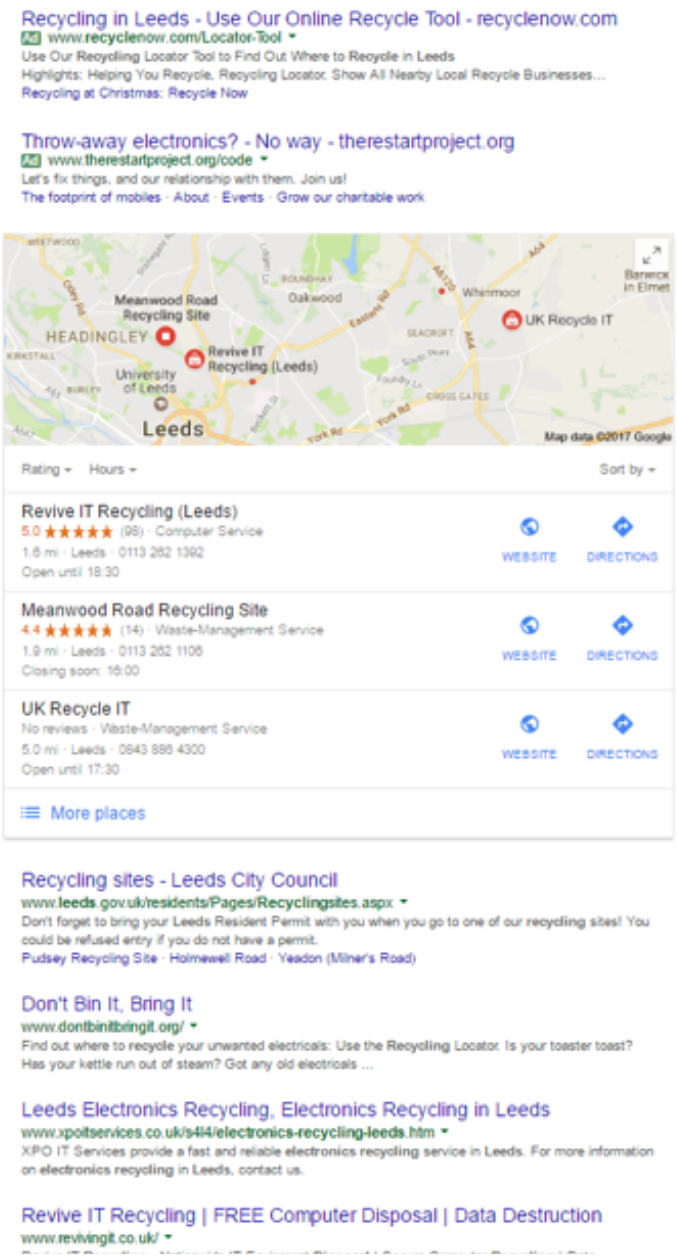
It is worth remembering however, as with “food waste” that a multi tooled and all-encompassing campaign is integral for search success.

As we can see by looking at the below graph, there doesn’t seem to be much of a seasonal rush around this search term.

Although there is a spike during the second month of the year, and as it pushes on towards autumn, it doesn’t offer any great significance in terms of seasonability.



Like much of the waste industry however, there's no doubt that many waste companies will gain much of their online income from local search results.



Taking a look at the local results for "recycle electronics", again in Leeds, we see an interesting SERP offering a multitude of businesses and consumer information for users in that geographic location.

Like many recycling sectors, it seems that there are also a number of charities and organisations associated with electronic waste.

Including the Government supported campaign, *Recycle Now*, which seems to be using paid advertising to appear at the top of the page.

Although it is not a commercial website, it is the campaign's priority to help guide and educate businesses and individuals about the many advantages of recycling.

Aside from waste management companies, there also seems to be IT businesses making the most of recycling possibilities.

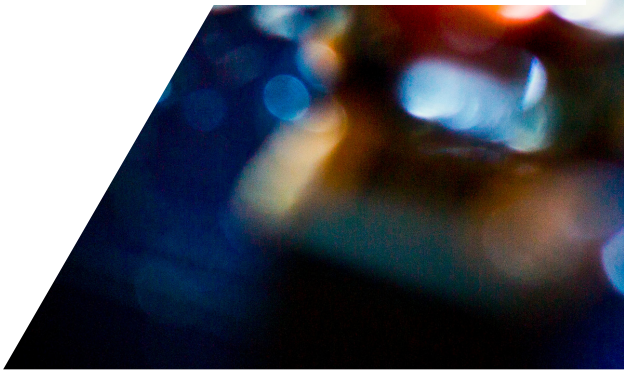
Such a diluted grouping of businesses for such a specific term tends to indicate that there is a large amount of search volume around the recycling of electronic equipment in the Leeds area.

BUT IS THERE OBVIOUS COMPETITION AMONG A NATIONAL SERP FOR THE SAME QUERY?

As might be predicted, the SERP has served a multitude of different websites, ranging from popular scientific magazines, government websites – both UK and US – , alongside other stateside waste companies, such as Swalco.

This tends to indicate that Google does not as yet see the term as a commercial term within the UK, but this is highly likely to change.

It would therefore be unwise for waste companies specialising in electronic waste to dismiss the power of this search term, as it can bring great results with the correct campaign – utilising a range of strategic, technical, and creative tactics to achieve ranking, which will undoubtedly have positive effects across several other SERPs too.



Google.co.uk Top 20 "Recycle Electronics"

#1 dontbinitbringit.org
#2 epa.gov
#3 recycleyourelectronics.ca
#4 telegraph.co.uk
#5 electronicstakeback.com
#6 camden.gov.uk
#7 return-it.ca
#8 cvwma.com
#9 bestbuy.com
#10 wiseuptowaste.org.uk
#11 wired.com
#12 popsci.com
#13 theverge.com
#14 swancc.org
#15 champaignil.gov
#16 mass.gov
#17 recyclekent.org
#18 wakegov.com
#19 earth911.com
#20 swalco.org

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THE FUTURE OF ONLINE GROWTH WITHIN WASTE

The UK waste industry stands in a strong position, but as stated in the introduction, there are several hurdles that it must surpass in the very close future.

There's no doubt that the next 18 months will present some of the most challenging times that the industry has ever faced.

But with that in mind, we believe that they could also be the most rewarding.

In accordance with the information we have presented, and its careful implementation, there is no reason why waste and recycling companies across the country, large and small, should not enjoy online growth.

Now more than ever individuals and companies are taking to the internet to search for every day services and problem resolutions, and the waste industry offers both in abundance.

As discussed, a PPC campaign can offer waste companies quick access to users and income – but not without great cost.

Organic search offers long-term revenue to companies offering technically brilliant websites that adhere to strict search engine regulations, but this often overlooks local demand.

Local search directs search engine users to companies that pinpoint certain towns and cities as their base of operations, providing an ultra-specific audience within a specified geographical area — but foregoing important national industry keywords.

It is only with the implementation of all three strategies therefore, that businesses can make the most of the toughest and most competitive search areas.

With a bespoke and thorough audit, it is possible to identify underperforming and overlooked technical specifications — the crucial first step of any campaign.

A business that hasn't had an audit within the past six months should be asking itself not only whether its site is prepared for growth, but whether it is enough to compete with competitors in the first place.

SALT.agency provides free technical health checks to businesses throughout the world. For more information, contact hello@salt.agency.

RESEARCH & CREDITS

RESEARCH SOURCES

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