HELLO!

I'm here to talk to you about something that took me a while to wrap my head around...

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But spending the last 18 months working on a 40M+ indexed page website forced me to finally get it...

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We are **IN CONTROL** of how Google crawls and indexes our website

We are **IN CONTROL** of how Google crawls and indexes our website

(but it can feel scary!)

Because if we don't do it properly, then we won't benefit from many* things we're doing right

*All the awesome content and off page work

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So if we're recommending SEO fixes (small or large), let's please
drop the 100-page audit

And focus on prioritising recommendations that will have an impact

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Setting the Scene

We work for a
car aggregator
website

▶ Our users can...

▸ Search for cars near their location

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Our users can...

- Search for cars near their location
- Filter the search results by make, model, year, type, transmission, engine size, colour, price range (and more!)

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Our users can...

- Search for cars near their location
- Filter the search results by make, model, year, type, transmission, engine size, colour, price range (and more!)

- View car listings and contact sellers

▶ Our users can...

▸ Search for cars near their location

▸ Filter the search results by make, model, year, type, transmission, engine size, colour, price range (and more!)

▸ View car listings and contact sellers

▸ View car history information

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Our users can...

- Search for cars near their location
- Filter the search results by make, model, year, type, transmission, engine size, colour, price range (and more!)
- View car listings and contact sellers
- View car history information
- # Read the latest car news

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Our users can...

And these are just *some* of the features...

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Most webmasters tend to set up websites in one of two ways...

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▶ **They either attempt to...**

1. **Index everything** to capture as much ranking opportunity as possible

► They either attempt to...

1. **Index everything** to capture as much ranking opportunity as possible

2. **No-index a huge chunk** to avoid suffering from index bloat

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Index bloat is when a site has an excessive number of low-value pages indexed

▶ If we attempt to index everything…

We might end up indexing:

- ▸ Every possible geo-location
- ▸ Every possible filter combination
- ▸ Every possible car listing page
- ▸ Every possible car history information page

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Why is this a problem?

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Will Google bother crawling...?

- Every possible geo-location
- Every possible filter combination
- Every possible car listing page
- Every possible car history information page

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Will Google bother indexing…?

- Every possible geo-location
- Every possible filter combination
- Every possible car listing page
- Every possible car history information page

Do you even want to rank for…?

- Every possible geo-location
- Every possible filter combination
- Every possible car listing page
- Every possible car history information page

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The answer to all three questions is most probably: No

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If we attempt to index everything…

1. Google might not crawl all our pages
2. Google might not index all our pages
3. Our valuable pages might not be crawled and/or indexed
4. Our valuable pages might not rank

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I'm being generous by using the word
"might"

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► They either attempt to...

1. ~~Index everything~~ ~~to capture as much ranking opportunity as possible~~

2. No-index a huge chunk to avoid suffering from index bloat

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If we no-index a huge chunk...

We'd miss out on ranking potential for:

- Every possible geo-location
- Every possible filter combination
- Every possible car listing page
- Every possible car history information page

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They either attempt to...

1. ~~Index everything~~ ~~to capture as much ranking opportunity as possible~~

2. ~~No index a huge chunk~~ ~~to avoid suffering from index bloat~~

So, how and where do we

DRAW the LINE

Before we make any decision on how to control our indexability, we need to know the answer to

one question

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What's the high level KPI that we're being measured against?

▶ It probably isn't...

1. Organic rank

It probably isn't...

1. Organic rank
2. Organic sessions

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It probably isn't...

1. Organic rank
2. Organic sessions
3. Some third party tool's visibility chart...

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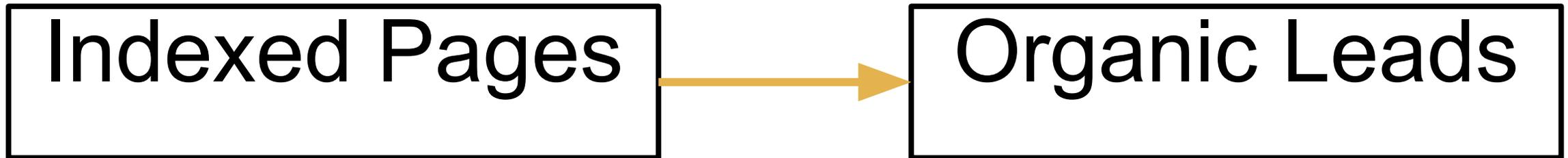# It probably isn't...

And if it is, then it probably shouldn't be…

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It's most likely
organic leads
or revenue

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An organic lead on our car aggregator site happens when a user contacts a seller for a potential car

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So, why don't we
tie these together?

| Indexed Pages | → | Organic Leads |

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▶ Let's go back to this list...

- ▸ Search for cars near their location
- ▸ Filter the search results by make, model, year, type, transmission, engine size, colour, price range (and more!)
- ▸ View car listings and contact sellers
- ▸ View car history information
- ▸ Read the latest car news

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I tend to understand things better when they're in table format, so...

Core Templates	Description
Car search pages (CSP)	Result pages when a user searches for cars by location (includes all search filters)
Car listing pages (CLP)	Listing pages when a user chooses a car to learn more about it
Car history pages (CHP)	Information pages that include car valuation and history
Other	All other pages (homepage, blog, about, etc...)

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We now need to figure out which templates provide the most value

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Let's analyse some data

▶ # What data do we need per template?

1. # of indexed pages (and % from total)
2. # of organic sessions (and % from total)
3. # of organic leads (and % from total)

Sessions & Leads date range —> past 12 months

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Template	Indexed Pages	Organic Sessions	Organic Leads
CSP	35%	55%	75%
Other	10%	20%	15%
CLP	10%	15%	9%
CHP	45%	10%	1%

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Template	Indexed Pages	Organic Sessions	Organic Leads
CSP	35%	55%	75%
Other	10%	20%	15%
CLP	10%	15%	9%
CHP	45%	10%	1%

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Wouldn't we be better off spreading our link equity across more valuable pages?

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Wouldn't we be better off having Google crawl our more valuable pages?

And most importantly:

Is it worth **doubling** up our number of indexed pages for only **1%** of organic leads?

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Websites do not
(and most probably should not)
need to have every single page indexed

Instead, focus on indexing pages that have the potential to provide
good search results

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Yes, this feels like a fairly straight forward example...but every aggregator site tends to have one of these

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There's also so much more that can be dissected on a template by template basis

Template	Indexed Pages	Organic Sessions	Organic Leads
CSP	35%	55%	75%

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Our indexed filters

- Make
- Model
- Year
- Type

- Transmission
- Engine size
- Colour
- Price range

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Our indexed filters

- Make (10)
- Model (4)
- Year (10)
- Type (4)

- Transmission (2)
- Engine size (5)
- Colour (10)
- Price range (5)

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That's 800,000 potential indexed pages purely based on our search result filters

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So it's fundamental that we break this down to the next level

Template	Indexed Pages	Organic Sessions	Organic Leads
CSP	35%	55%	75%

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Template	Indexed Pages	Organic Sessions	Organic Leads
CSP/Make			
CSP/Model			
CSP/Year			
CSP/Type			

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" The more we slice and dice our data, the more we'll be able to make informed decisions.

Intermission

A **typical meeting** in the life of an SEO...

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Let's say hello to a senior stakeholder named Mark

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▶ **Mark**

"Car history information pages are critical for our consumers. They can look up *any car registration number* *and get all the information they need."*

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SEO:

"Yes, but they are useless for Google. They're **thin pages** *that provide* **low organic value** *and* **double up our indexed pages**.*"*

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Mark:

"Nevermind Google, what does this mean for LEADS?"

SEO:

"Well, I'm glad you asked because I spent the past 2 weeks doing this piece of analysis where I used BigQuery to group our page templates, calculate our organic leads per template, and…."

Mark:

$$ `` \quad " $$

. . . .

SEO:

"1% *of our total organic leads. "*

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Mark:

Dream Life Scenario:

"Is that it? De-index these pages immediately!"

Mark:

"Work with Team A to build a strategy that can convince Team B to convince Team C to consider convincing Team D to potentially de-index the pages."

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SEO:

"

. . . .

"

Joking aside, I promise you there is a
purpose to this story

"

As SEOs, we need to speak the SAME language as senior stakeholders to get sign off on technical fixes.

Let's Recommend

Template	Indexed Pages	Organic Sessions	Organic Leads
CSP	35%	55%	75%
Other	10%	20%	15%
CLP	10%	15%	9%
CHP	45%	10%	1%

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Template	Indexed Pages	Organic Sessions	Organic Leads
CHP	45%	10%	1%

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I know what you're thinking:
10% of total organic sessions is
a scary thing to simply get rid of...

I'm very risk-averse but in this specific case:

What good is 10% traffic that doesn't convert?

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Every aggregator/classified type website tends to have something similar to a

car history page

As Mark told us:
These pages are useful for our users because they want to look up info via a car registration number

So to be on the safe side, let's do a few checks on our car history pages (CHPs)

▶ Do they take up lots of crawl budget?

Yes, we analysed our logs and in an average week, 50% of Googlebot's crawl requests are spent on CHPs.

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▶ Do they rank for important terms?

No, we analysed our ranking data and CHPs barely rank for any keywords we care about.

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▶ Do they have unique content?

Yes, but it's thin, only useful for users on a personalised basis and doesn't convert.

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▶ # Do they have high quality backlinks?

No, they barely have backlinks pointing at them and none that are high quality.

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▶ So, to summarise:

- ▸ 45% of total indexed pages
- ▸ 50% of weekly crawl requests
- ▸ 10% of total organic sessions
- ▸ Thin content
- ▸ Minimal ranking
- ▸ Minimal backlinks
- ▸ 1% of total organic leads

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Now, do we feel more comfortable de-indexing them?

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▶ Things to remember

Make sure your sitemaps are setup to automatically remove any noindex pages

This is an example of something that might seem easy in principle but can be more complex due to legacy code

▶ **Things to remember**

Our CHPs won't de-index overnight, it could take a few months (or more) for Google to flush them out of the index

Do they take up lots of crawl budget?

Yes, we analysed our logs and in an average week, 50% of Googlebot's crawl requests are spent on CHPs.
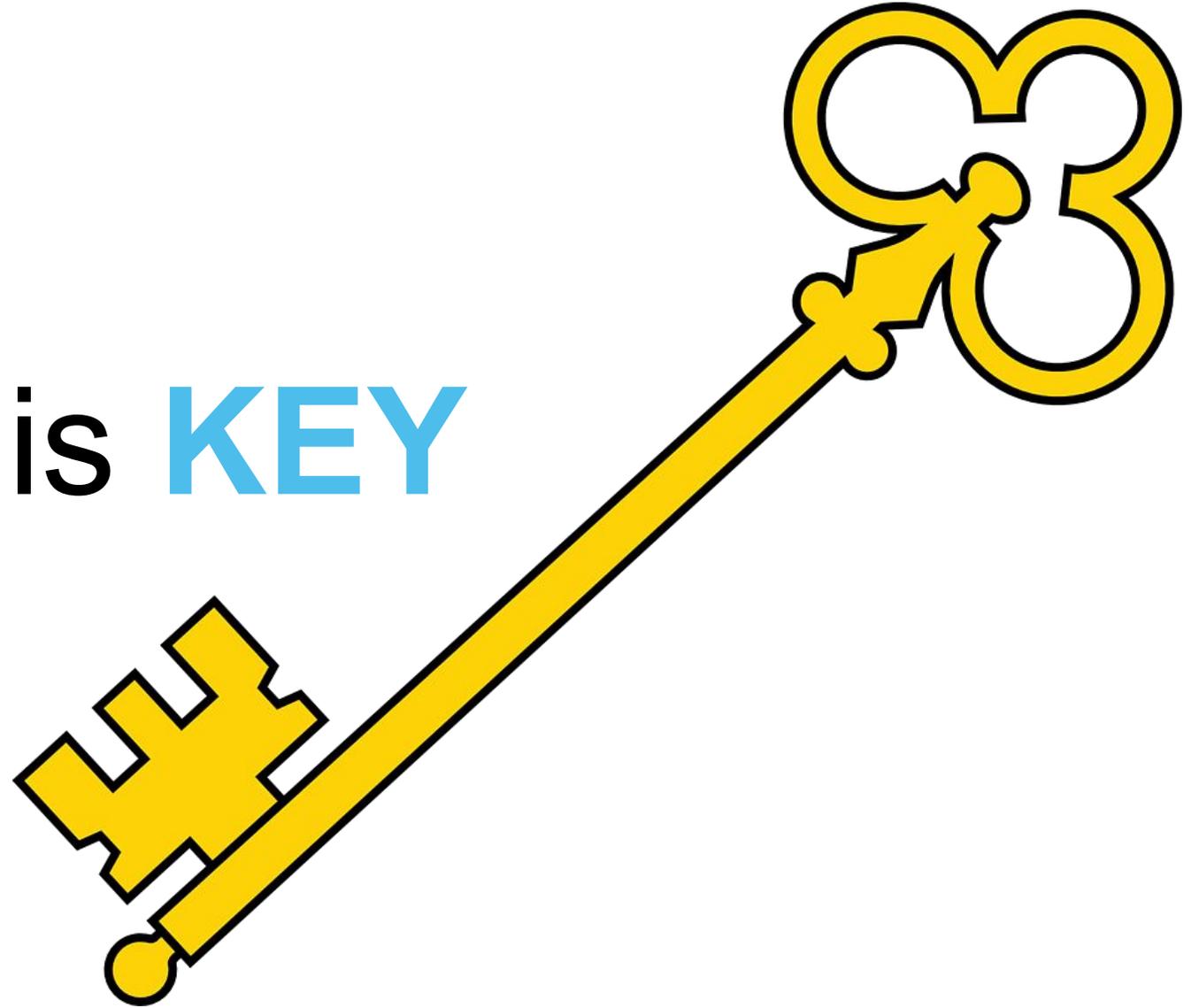
We know they're a crawlability waste...

▶ Things to remember

Blocking CHPs from **robots.txt** should be on the roadmap but give it 1-3 months to flush out of the index

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Let's Prioritise

As an industry, let's make a pact to drop the
100-page audit documents

Prioritisation is **KEY**

I like to use T-shirt Sizing because it's simple

▶ SEO Impact

How much of an SEO impact will this recommendation likely have on our overall organic leads?

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▶ Tech Effort

How much Technical Effort will this recommendation take to implement?

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▶ Tech Effort

How much technical effort will this recommendation take to implement?

Please don't answer this on behalf of engineers...

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▶ Prioritisation Matrix

For every identified issue:

SEO Impact ➕ **Dev Effort** ＝ **PRIORITY**

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PRIORITY RULE	PRIORITY
If SEO Impact = L & Tech Effort = S	High
If SEO Impact = L & Tech Effort = M	High
If SEO Impact = M & Tech Effort = S	High
If SEO Impact = L & Tech Effort = XL	Mid
If SEO Impact = L & Tech Effort = L	Mid
If SEO Impact = M & Tech Effort = M	Mid
If SEO Impact = S & Tech Effort = S	Mid
If SEO Impact = M & Tech Effort = XL	Low
If SEO Impact = M & Tech Effort = L	Low
If SEO Impact = S & Tech Effort = XL	Low
If SEO Impact = S & Tech Effort = L	Low
If SEO Impact = S & Tech Effort = M	Low

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If you want to learn more about my full framework:
bit.ly/areej-matrix

Getting Tech SEO Implemented

January 10, 2021

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Let's Communicate

So, what's the first thing that tends to happen once an SEO recommendation gets implemented?

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▶ **Senior Stakeholder*:**

Real Life Scenario:

"Are organic leads up yet?"

*Yup, still Mark!

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Yes, our senior stakeholder will be expecting results, and they'll be expecting it

fast

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▶ Manage expectations

- ▸ Communicate before
- ▸ Communicate during
- ▸ Communicate after

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Under-promise
&
Over-deliver

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De-indexing CHPs is simply a **stepping stone*** for fixing technical foundation

*It won't magically increase our share of voice

Communicating updates
is one thing...

Communicating updates that are backed up with data is a game changer

Let's go back here...

Indexed Pages → Organic Leads

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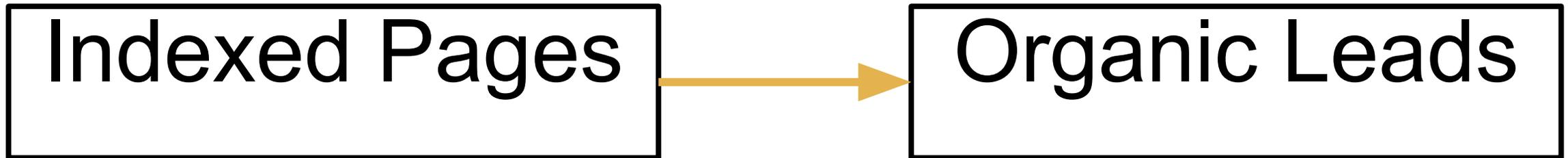
▶ Keep everyone informed

- ‣ Update these metrics on a weekly basis
- ‣ Show WoW, MoM and YoY change
- ‣ Make our dashboards accessible & open

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Stakeholders feel better knowing the information is there
(even if they don't bother checking it)

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And it'll serve as a benchmark and can be used as case studies for future sign off

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One Final Thought…

I've personally never worked on a car aggregator website (yet)
This was just an example

But this methodology can apply to all forms of aggregator sites:
fashion, **jobs**, **property**...

When I first pitched this talk, my aim was to go into detail about the **technical SEO requirements** for aggregator sites

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But the actual technical recommendation

is the easy part...

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It's the backing up our recommendation
with data, the stakeholder management,
the meetings for the sake of meetings…

(those are the hard parts)

The first time I worked on an aggregator-type site, I panicked
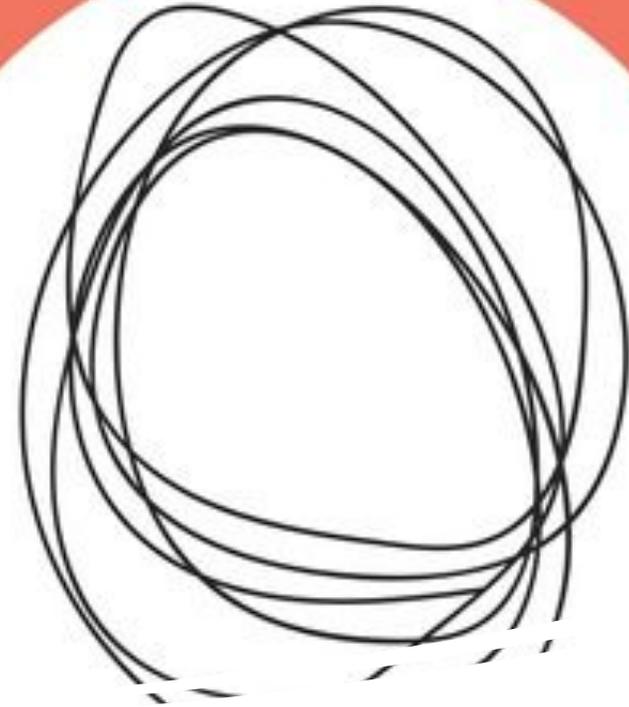
I felt completely out of my depth and I didn't know where or how to start

But they're now the type of websites that
I enjoy working on the most...

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Because over time, I've come to realise that they all have similar problems that require similar solutions

And once we fix the problems that actually matter, the impact feels very **rewarding**

Yes, rewarding in terms of SEO impact

But also in terms of achieving higher level of trust with stakeholders...

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Which makes the process
(and our life!)
easier the next time round

The past *132 slides* were based on an example that simply touched *one* metric

I tied number of indexed pages
(a technical SEO metric)

to organic leads
(the KPI that matters to the business)

This same concept can be translated across far more SEO metrics

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As SEOs, it's fundamental that we don't work in silos

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We can achieve far more if we [measure our wins](#) using metrics that our business cares about

And please remember...

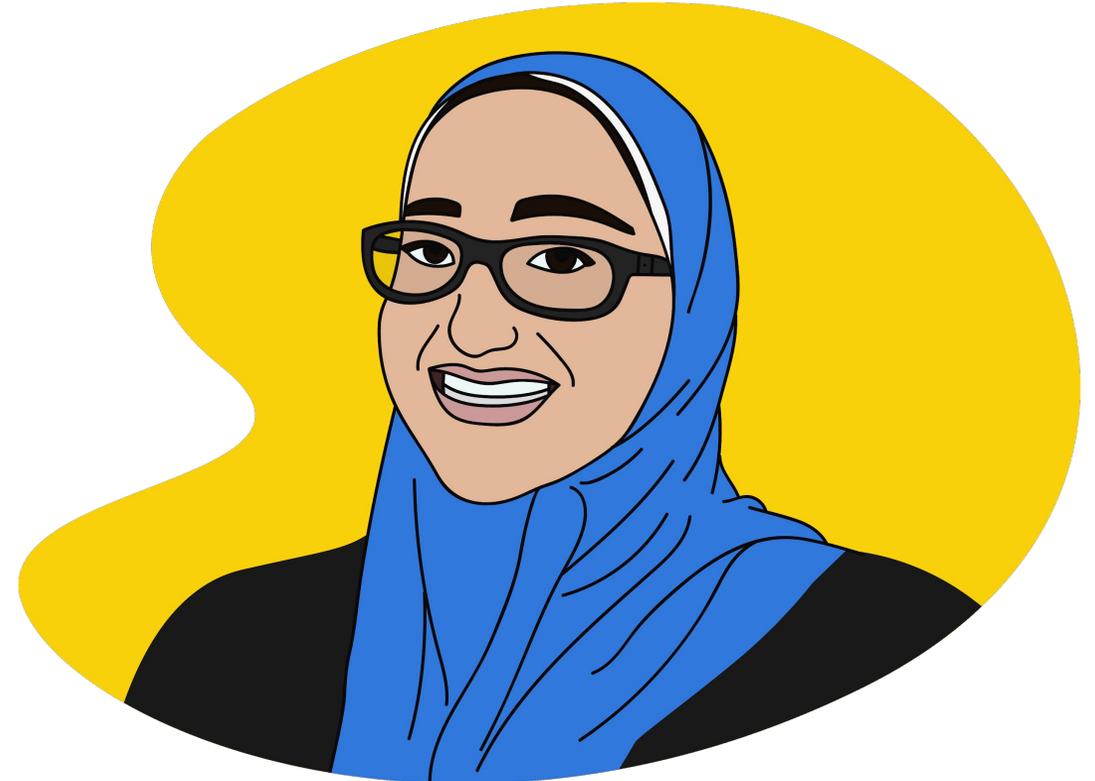> It's okay to feel overwhelmed working on something new =)

bit.ly/areej-mozcon

THANKS!

Questions?

You can find me on:

‣ areejabuali.com
‣ @areej_abuali