

THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON SEARCH BEHAVIOUR

March 2020

ROAST[™]

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Intro



In these abnormal times we have become more reliant than ever before on digital media.

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic search has once again compounded its position as a key channel for people to turn to in a crisis, answering a clear consumer need for information that is both accurate and up-to-date.

The ROAST SEO team have analysed UK Google Trends data in order to reveal key insights into what people have been searching for as the COVID-19 pandemic has taken centre-stage in the public consciousness.

The following analysis interrogates search behaviours across some of the most affected verticals, provides concrete steps for brands to help handle the crisis and considers some of the positives we hope to see as a result.



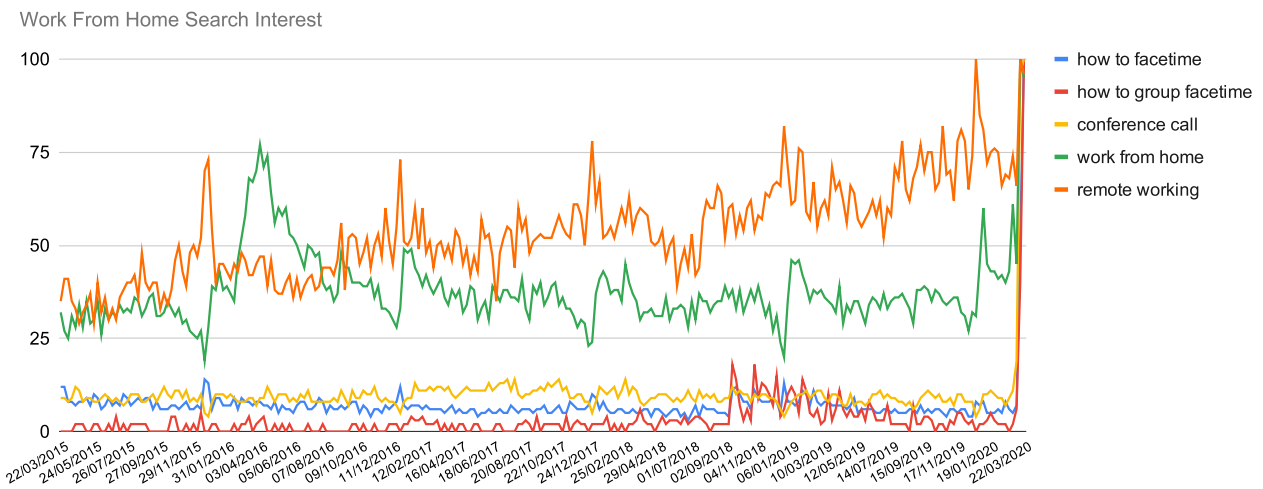


Silver Linings

BB

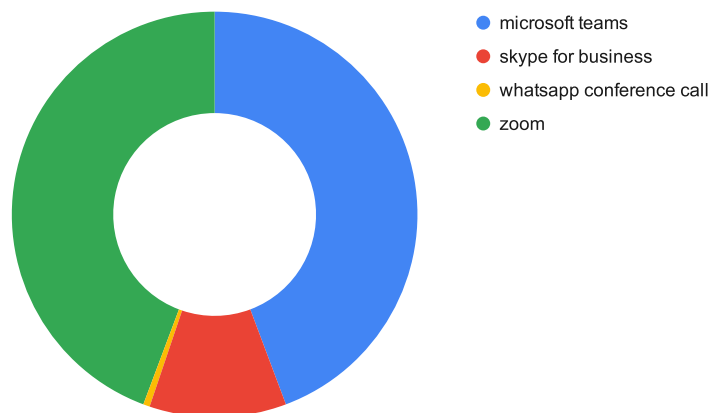
- Broader adoption of flexi-working and work from home policies beyond disruptor companies
- Rapid shift in favour of companies who are digital innovators and fast adaptors
- **Trial period of video-conferencing over national and international business travel**

Following government advice, where possible, employees are working from home. This has resulted in a noticeable rise in searches for how-to and troubleshooting guides. How-to and FAQ schema can be beneficial to sites to be prominent in the SERPs and to ensure new users can find the information they're looking for quickly.



- Video-conferencing tools have more users than ever before with a rapid increase in virtual meetings. This doesn't appear to be central to one tool in the UK with a variety of platforms utilised.

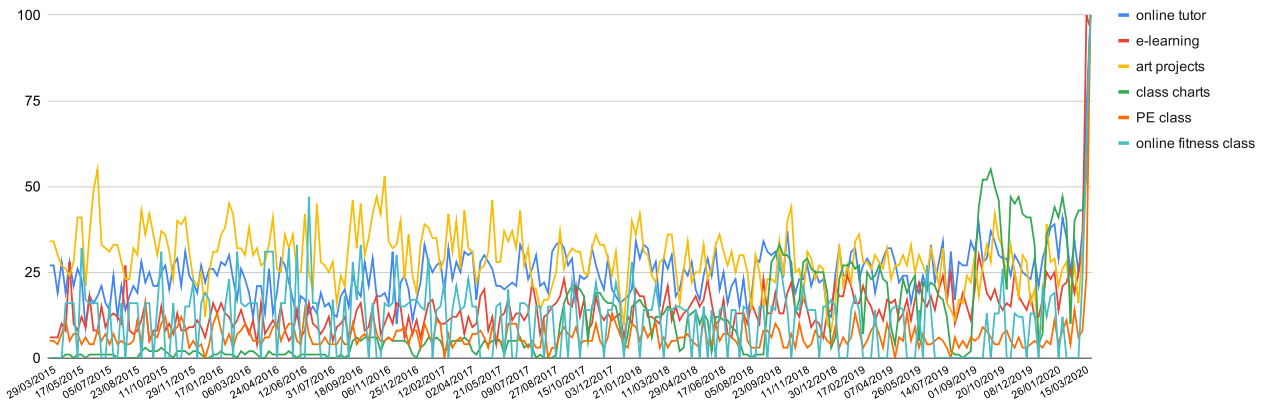
Conference Call Tool Search Volume



• **New ways of learning**

Parents are adopting homeschooling to keep kids' routines as consistent as possible which has led to an increase in online educational resource searches and a growth in the volume of resources available.

Education Search Interest

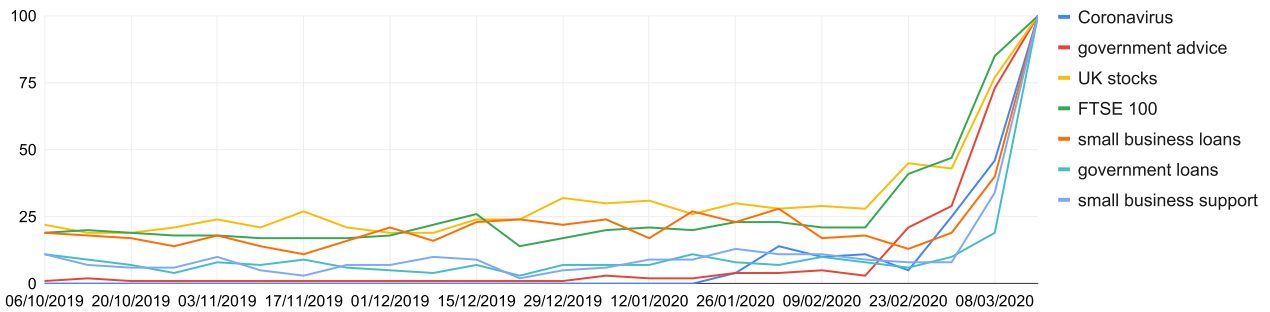




Vertical- Specific Search Trends

Finance

Coronavirus, Government, and Business

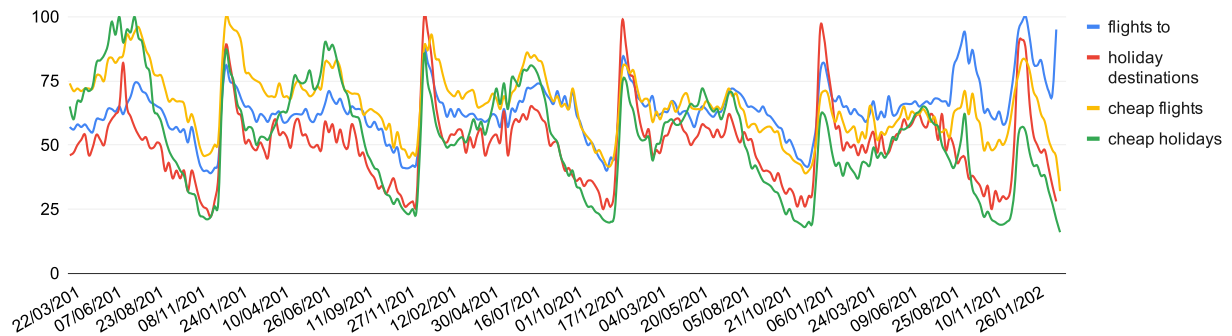


The financial industry was the first major responder to Covid-19 besides disease and healthcare specialists. As coronavirus began to drastically impact both Chinese demand and output as movement restrictions were put in place, reverberations were felt in financial markets globally. Search interest in the terms 'UK stocks', 'FTSE 100', 'government advice', and 'coronavirus' began to rocket in the week beginning 01/03/2020.

The full economic impact for other sectors became clear only as the UK began tightening its response, heightening its campaign of information and education as well as the strictness of recommended changes to daily life. Resulting changes in consumer behaviour finally led to dramatic increase of search interest in 'small business loans', 'government loans', and 'small business support', a full week after the financial sector made its comparable mobilisation.

Travel

Travel Search Interest

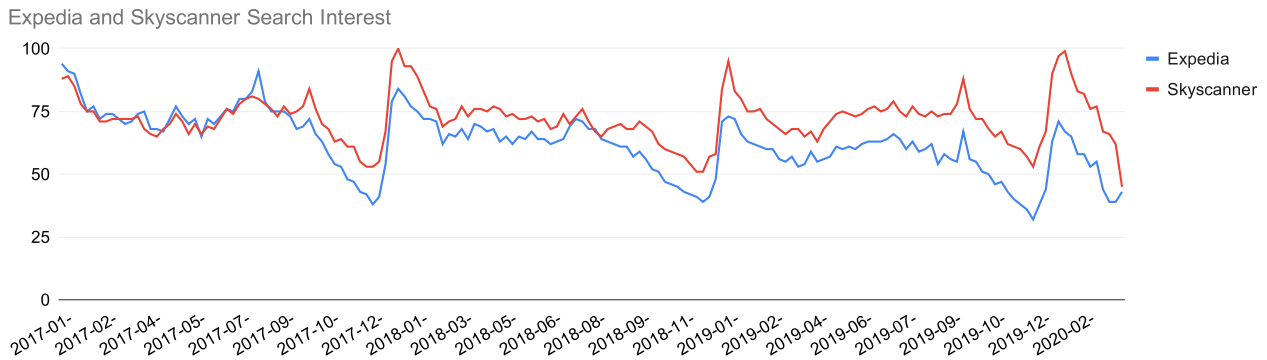


Travel sees an annual peak in searches at the end of December into January as consumers look to book their next holiday. In 2020 however, the yearly restabilisation after the January blues has instead fallen off into steep decline. Consumers are no longer looking to arrange holidays, with the terms 'holiday destinations', 'cheap flights', and 'cheap holidays' showing significant anomalous decline from the week beginning 16/02/20, as international efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus ramped up. This relationship is put into relief by the performance of 'flights to', which saw a sudden increase in search

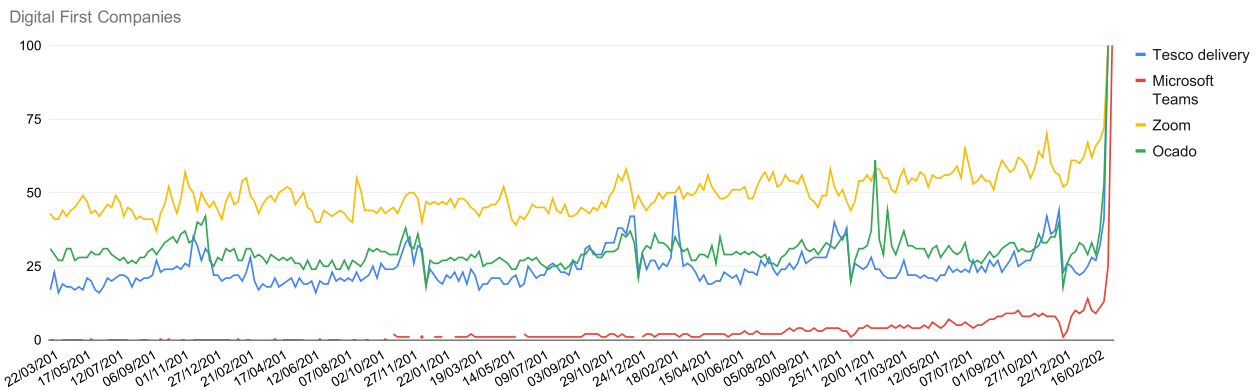


interest at that time. Travellers began to look for information on whether their flights will still be running in response to border closures and country-specific arrival bans.

Search interest in brands such as Expedia and Skyscanner reflect the crisis facing the travel sector.



Digital First



This could be the final breakaway for digital brands and branches from their highstreet counterparts and tech disruptors from legacy platforms.

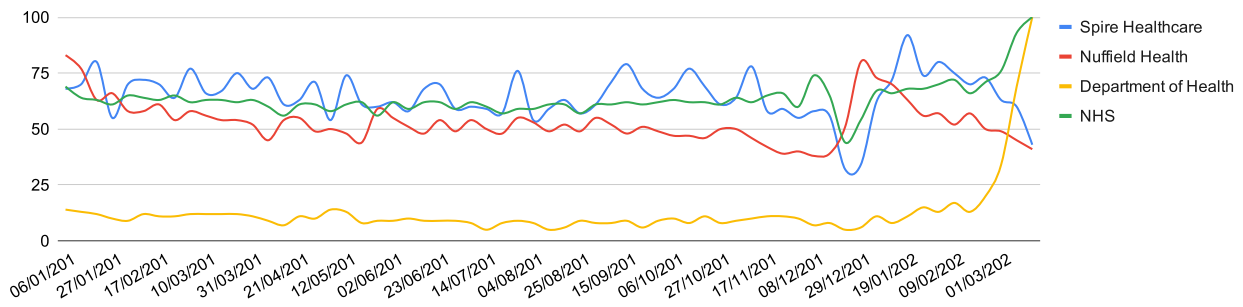
Digital first companies are taking on a crucial role in enabling some areas of the economy to continue functioning, with services enabling people to work from homes seeing a huge surge in popularity.

Healthcare

As coronavirus spreads, users are looking more and more to the most trustworthy sources for reliable information. The Department of Health and the NHS offer the government’s consolidated action plan, pulling users away from private corporations they would otherwise call on.

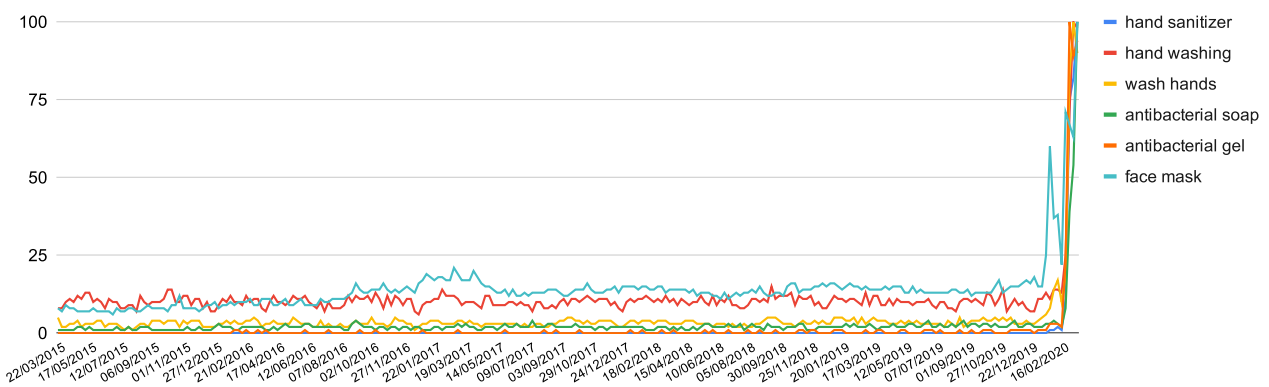


Healthcare Search Interest



Hygiene

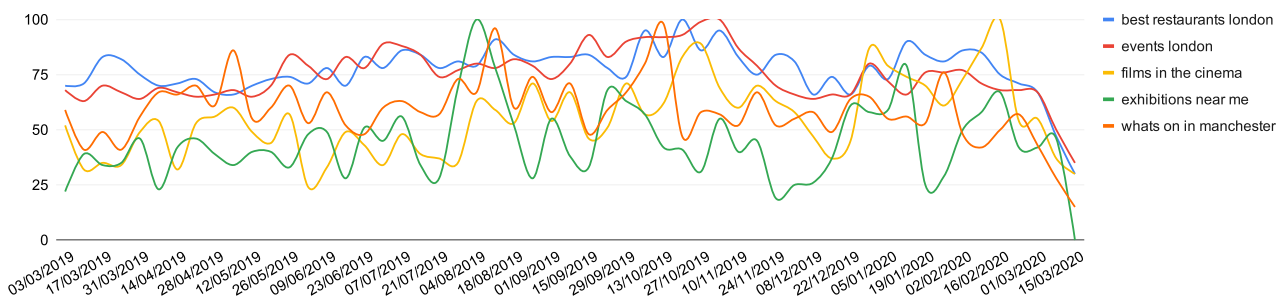
Hygiene Search Interest



Searches surrounding hygiene practices to combat coronavirus have increased in the UK since late January. The trend began with research into facemasks as curiosity of the pandemic grew. As the virus spread users began to search more for the correct method to wash hands and products to use (e.g. hand sanitizers and antibacterial gels). These searches were not just to find sellers of these products but also to see shop shortages and evidence of stockpiling.

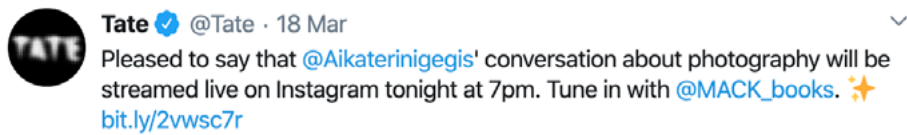
Events, Arts and Culture

Events Industry Search Interest



March saw the sudden drop off of search demand for events in shared spaces. The hospitality, events, and arts and culture industries are seeing catastrophic loss of demand, first as more wary consumers eschew enclosed gatherings and again with the introduction of stricter government recommendations against social contact. With estimates for this period of social distancing now standing at anywhere between 12 weeks to 'most of a year' (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies), many industries are rapidly coming to terms with being in this for the long haul.

Many agile events, arts and culture businesses have seen increased consumer engagement via existing digital channels and have leveraged the power of social media to promote online experiences which can fill the event-shaped hole in peoples' lives.



A network diagram consisting of several nodes (small circles) connected by thin lines, set against a bright yellow background. The nodes are scattered across the upper and middle portions of the page, with lines connecting them in a web-like structure. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

Concrete Steps to Handle the Crisis



1. Make sure your customer service team are briefed on your company's policy
2. Divert resource to providing great customer service in a time of uncertainty
3. Update your website and Google My Business listings
 - a. Add notices to your homepage and any other relevant high traffic landing pages
 - b. Alter your service offering on your site where applicable
 - c. Address FAQs which have resulted from the pandemic on your site and add mark-up schema
 - d. Update Google My Business times
 - e. Create Google My Business Posts with current information
4. Time for small retailers to set up ecommerce channels. Platforms such as Shopify offer a quick route into making online sales.
5. Invest in long-term strategies such as SEO to give your brand the best chance of being chosen by consumers when they eventually return to market
6. Keep communication channels open and regularly update your customers on changes to the service provided





Get in touch

1-2 Berners Street
London
W1T 3LA

+44 (0)20 8102 8500
roast@tipigroup.com

weareroast.com