The Authoritative Guide to Local SEO Call Tracking

convirza.com
Phone: (866) 231-3030
Twitter: @convirza
Facebook: ConvirzaCallTrackingCo
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Introduction

There has been a great deal of discussion about SEO and call tracking over the years. Several local marketers have written articles decrying call tracking, incorrectly saying that it hurts SEO. Other local marketing experts have written rebuttals, stating clearly that call tracking does not hurt SEO when deployed correctly.

Our goal with this White Paper is threefold:

1) To summarize the arguments on both sides
2) To cut through the garbage and give you answers
3) To provide actionable solutions so you can track evermore critical call data AND remain Google’s best friend.

Unprecedented Research and Analysis

No one has written a 30 page White Paper about call tracking and SEO that is this in-depth, this upfront, and this accurate.

We hope it helps you cut through the inaccuracies and find the truth.

“As long as precautions are taken to make certain your tracking number doesn’t get scraped by Google, or some other authority, tracking numbers are totally fine.”

Adam Steele, Nightlite Media

Request a Demo
The Basics of Call Tracking and SEO

Call tracking is a way for online marketers to track which sales and marketing sources, campaigns, and keywords generate phone calls. Hundreds of thousands of marketers across the U.S. and Canada track calls tracking to close the loop on their marketing ROI calculations. Some of the biggest companies in the world use call tracking to measure the effectiveness of their PPC (Pay-per-Click) campaigns, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) efforts, and retargeting. These companies value call data significantly. They spend a lot of money on call tracking solutions.

Marketing agencies also use call tracking. They use it as a way to prove their worth to their clients. It is especially popular among agencies that do PPC and SEO work.

According to BIA/Kelsey, call tracking is, right now, a $1B industry.

It is mainstream.

What is the Truth About Call Tracking and SEO?

Call tracking, when used correctly does not hurt SEO. That is the truth. Even the most ardent call tracking opponents admit this fact.

The correct way to track calls on your website is to use call tracking DNI. This doesn’t hurt SEO. We’ll discuss more about this later in the document.

The problem is that the call tracking industry has traditionally done a very poor job educating marketers about how to use call tracking correctly.

Why Do Some Say Call Tracking Hurts SEO?

Because of NAP.

Google makes it very clear that Name Address and Phone number (NAP) have to be consistent across all online directories. Having different phone numbers in a ton of different places confuses Google’s algorithms and will hurt your SEO. This is why a few local marketers have written articles criticizing call tracking.

They’re right about one thing. Call tracking numbers should not be used in various directory listings across the web. That will hurt your SEO. This is common knowledge (or should be).
However, far too often articles attacking call tracking will lump all uses of call tracking (on-site Dynamic Number Insertion, primarily) together with the incorrect use of call tracking in directories.

And, admittedly, some call tracking companies have not operated with care in this area. They have placed call tracking numbers all over directories without worrying about the consequences for their clients.

**Experts Admit It Does Not Hurt SEO if Used Correctly**

Adam Steele is one of the foremost local marketing experts on the web. He is the Founder of Nightlite Media, a Vancouver-based SEO firm. He wrote an article recently that discussed call tracking and SEO in great detail, this was after a barrage of call tracking and SEO articles on both sides of the debate hit the public.

“As long as precautions are made to make certain your tracking number doesn’t get scraped by Google, or some other authority, tracking numbers are totally fine.”

Other widely known agencies and experts confirm that call tracking doesn’t hurt SEO and recommend that businesses use it.

Another expert, Mike Blumenthal, is one of the foremost experts of local search in the world. His blog says that an entirely safe and acceptable technique would be to “….use a JavaScript to display a tracking number to the user, that guarantees that the Google bot and search from Google always see your local number [not the call tracking number].”

Another expert, David Mihm, confirms simply that “…call tracking can be done safely.”

Even online marketing savants like Michael Fleischner and Jeremy ‘Shoemoney’ Schoemaker openly recommend call tracking.

The list of sources **confirming that call tracking does not hurt SEO when used correctly** is too long to include here. Suffice it to say that call tracking is mainstream and when deployed correctly, it does not hurt SEO.
Why Marketers Demand Call Tracking

Despite the bluster over call tracking and SEO, marketers continue to flock to call tracking in ever-increasing numbers. There are about a dozen major players in the call tracking space. And between them there are hundreds of thousands of call tracking customers.

Why are marketers so interested in getting call data?

1) **Calls are occurring more frequently.** The number of calls businesses receive is increasing not decreasing. This is owing to the massive increase in mobile click-to-call traffic and the availability of smartphones as desktop searches are conducted.

2) **Call tracking fills a blind spot.** If a marketer isn’t tracking phone data, that marketer is missing data on, perhaps, his most valuable ROI stream. Without call tracking data, accurate marketing ROI calculations cannot be made.

"61.3% of advertisers say a telephone call from a prospective customer is the single most important lead."

- BIA/Kelsey LCM Surveys
The Words of Local SEO Experts

One of the best ways to determine if something is true is to examine what experts say...specifically, experts that have nothing to gain in the argument.

This section will focus on the words of noted industry experts—some of whom have been critical of call tracking—to arrive at the truth: does call tracking hurt SEO?

**Local SEO and Call Tracking Expert, Adam Steele**

We initially connected with Adam Steele of Nightlite Media, a Vancouver SEO firm, on Twitter. Adam had been observing the several articles written about call tracking and SEO recently and offered to write a few thoughts about the subject.

When Adam sent us this email about call tracking and SEO, he didn’t initially intend for it to be made public. But once I read it and realized how awesome it was, I asked him if we could post his email. He said yes! Here’s the email:

“I got to thinking about it, read everything I could find on call tracking and local SEO and, realized that the solution is quite well documented.

As long as precaution is taken to make certain your tracking number doesn’t get scraped by Google or some other authority, tracking numbers are totally fine.

Alternatively, if your business is brand new and, you have full rights to your tracking number – that is, whoever you are renting it from, if they went out of biz or some worst case scenario, you would never lose your tracking number and could continue to use it in all your marketing. Right from the start. And forward it to your real number. You just need to be VERY diligent about making sure your real number is never used – even on a biz card.

Historically and, I think this is where a lot of this anger from marketers like myself stems from, companies in the call tracking industry and, outside of the call tracking industry have just abused these numbers without any regard for NAP or the SMB. Hell, I have had client’s businesses held hostage to these companies once.

"Tracking numbers are awesome. I use them all the time, especially in my local lead gen projects. Naturally, it is a wicked and incredible way to measure my campaign results."  
- Adam Steel, Nightlite Media
I think the biggest problem is education. Businesses that employ tracking numbers need to understand the associated/possible implications. They need to know what NOT to do. They aren’t marketers. They don’t understand that if they use this number in their NAP and, then decide they don’t want to use that number anymore, fixing NAP is a complete pain.

For even the determined SMB, correcting all instances of NAP can be almost impossible. Once it enters the local search ecosystem, it will get scraped and published everywhere. Especially over a good amount of time.

So is this the fault of call tracking companies? Some.

Are companies like [name of our competitor deleted] assigning tracking numbers to lawyers and, publishing those numbers on their authoritative, well trusted by Google profile? Totally screwing up NAP in the process? Yup.

BUT I think at the end of the day it boils down to education on both ends. Those companies who aren’t intentionally bending businesses over need to acknowledge the danger associated with these numbers. Not because tracking companies are implementing them wrong, but because ABC company will take this number and throw it on all their other materials. They don’t know any better!! Call tracking companies need to educate. They need to make it crystal clear what NOT TO DO. And ABC company needs to read the bloody fine print (which shouldn’t be fine print).

Tracking numbers are awesome. I use them all the time, especially in my local lead gen projects. Naturally, it is a wicked and incredible way to measure my campaign results. But I know how to use them. I know what not to do.

Dang. That was supposed to be a one liner email.”

Adam is, of course, right. Some call tracking companies have done a poor job of educating their clients regarding tracking number best practices - what do do and what not to do. This is a big deal. We take our customers’ businesses seriously. That’s why we’re so committed to writing article after article on call tracking and SEO. It is also why we’re committed to helping clients, as they sign up, figure out how they’re going to use tracking numbers.

The other takeaway here is this: if used correctly call tracking is a ‘wicked’ and incredible way to gather data about local marketing campaigns. It is the best way. Calls matter.
Mike Blumenthal and Call Tracking

Mike Blumenthal is a true local marketing expert. He’s one of the most respected marketing guys on the web.

Recently he wrote an article that appeared to bash call tracking. Most readers of the article took it as an entirely negative article about call tracking. The article does spend 80%-90% of the time bashing call tracking, but then at the end admits that call tracking is useful and safe.

A close reading of his article makes it quite evident that call tracking is safe. But, most people don’t read articles closely.

Specifically, it says that using dynamic numbers (DNI) for tracking calls is a ‘safe’ way to use call tracking for SEO. This article, however, only mentions DNI call tracking as an afterthought.

Here’s the problem with that: **DNI call tracking is the principle way marketers use call tracking on websites.**

After ripping on call tracking for about a mile, the author finally admits that using call tracking on your website is an environment "...where you have more control and might see some interesting value to using call tracking numbers."

Our response: Well...this is awkward...that’s where 95% of marketers use call tracking numbers. They use them on their websites. So...the entire ranting in the first 15 paragraphs of this article was devoted to the edge-case call tracking user that tries to change up his Google+ number? Really? Writing to an extreme edge-case (and unnecessarily freaking everyone out about call tracking) seems like an "interesting" way to write an article.

"Another technique would be to use a JavaScript to display a tracking number to the user, that guarantees that the Google bot and search from Google always see your local number."

The author later includes a link to a high-powered SEO discussion "...confirming that this is acceptable."

Our response: I was stunned when I read this. Why? Because this is how 90% of companies use call tracking!!!! They use a snippet of JavaScript to display a phone number on their site. This is called DNI call tracking. So, for the author to spend an entire article ripping on call tracking and then to just mention DNI call tracking as an afterthought that is perfectly safe seems silly doesn’t it?
That's like ripping on the safety of automobiles for an entire article--how they'll kill you, paralyze you, hurt you, anger you, decapitate you, kill your children and your mother--and then at the end of the article simply including one sentence about how if you drive carefully cars are very useful.

Really?!?

That doesn't make any sense.

Don't spend an entire article ripping on call tracking, only to admit, at the end, that call tracking works in the predominant and primary way that everyone uses it.
Before we move any farther, we need to discuss a call tracking technology that is critical to the SEO call tracking debate: Dynamic Number Insertion or DNI.

What is Dynamic Number Insertion?

Basically, DNI allows marketers to track the number of calls generated by specific online channels or specific web sessions. It does this by dynamically displaying unique tracking phone numbers on a website. These tracking numbers display depending on how the visitor arrived at the website, i.e. depending on the web referrer for the website visitor. This is done via a snippet of JavaScript code. This allows a call tracking company such as Convirza to determine which specific ad sources and channels generated phone calls.

DNI allows marketers to track the number of calls generated by PPC, SEO, email marketing, social media marketing, and any other online marketing source. Dynamic tracking even allows you to track which keywords someone searched before they called.

This basic understanding of DNI is critical, as Mike Blumenthal already mentioned above. It is critical to understanding this call tracking for SEO issue.
In Harry Potter, Lord Voldemort is sometimes referred to as ‘He Who Must Not Be Named.’ His mystery and infallibility are well-documented. He is so powerful, so all consuming, so omnipotent, that he is mentioned in hushed tones. Google is the same.

While it is true that local SEO marketers want to test and measure every element of their online campaigns, including phone calls, the concept of using various phone numbers for different landing pages, directory listings and campaign sources still strikes fear into their hearts. But using call tracking is not what scares them, rather it’s Google.

The Infallible Google

You see Google tells you what you can and can’t do to drive traffic to your site. They determine what is good search engine optimization and what is bad. And They do it in the name of their customer, the end-user, so we go along with it.

They own the best channel on the planet to reach our target customers. And They, the infallible Google, have spoken: “Name-Address-Phone Number or NAP consistency across all business listings on the web is an important element to higher ranking search engine results” for local businesses.

Don’t get me wrong. I am a fan of the big “G”. But sometimes they can be a bit overbearing. This policy basically takes away a valuable tool for online marketers that care about driving phone calls driven by web visits. Just like they have taken away keyword visibility, this NAP policy hurts marketers and doesn’t really help consumers.

Using dynamic numbers

Technology to maintain NAP from Convirza enables you to safely leverage call tracking for SEO. This technology simply dynamically assigns and displays phone numbers on a web page basis, on referring channel source (websites), URL (link click), and visitor session. Display your default phone number on the page for indexing spiders, but use Convirza to create a pool of phone numbers that can be dynamically displayed via JavaScript.

Thus, DNI is a straightforward method to maintain the SEO integrity of your page and gather call metrics. Hundreds of thousands of businesses across the U.S. and Canada use this method to gather call metrics maintain, SEO integrity and not get ‘dinged’ by Google.
Call Tracking and Local SEO: Let DNI Calm Your Marketing Soul

For those marketers out there that like to drive phone calls from SEM (Search Engine Marketing), measuring results has always been a challenge. After all, the phone is not connected to the web, so all of the analytics and visibility related to visitor behavior and clicks goes away into the vacuous black hole of a phone call.

Then, along came a great way of measuring phone conversions, call tracking. Marketers could place a unique phone number on their landing pages and attribute phone calls to different campaigns and traffic sources. And life was good.

NAP, Local SEO and, Call Tracking

Then...Google made NAP (Name, Address, Phone Number) consistency a part of their ranking algorithm for local search. If your business listed different phone numbers in different places, it could negatively impact your rankings. Marketers had to make a choice, accurate phone call lead attribution OR better Google search ranking.

Or do they???

If properly implemented, call tracking does not have to impact search engine rankings. You can maintain NAP consistency and still display various phone numbers on a web page for different traffic sources.

How?

One way, is by implementing a method called Dynamic Number Insertion.
Dynamic Number Insertion’s (DNI) phone numbers can be displayed to your web visitors based on rules you define while still listing a consistent default phone number for search engine spiders to index. This is done using a bit-o-JavaScript placed within the HTML. The JavaScript detects website visitor information like referring website, AdWords data, etc. It also determines which phone number to display. Just as the webpage is being generated it dynamically swaps out that default number with a unique tracking number for the specific source or campaign which gets assigned to a phone call and the visitor if he or she places a phone call through that tracking number.

Since search engine indexing typically does not execute JavaScript, DNI preserves the original default number for the search engine to crawl and compare with other listings to determine consistency.

So wait...
Call Tracking Does Not Hurt SEO!

Some marketers still insist that DNI negatively impacts SEO. These marketers are hypothesizing consequences in a vacuum. If Google search engine indexing executed JavaScript, the implementing things like analytics tools, marketing automation tools and optimization tools would also, in theory, all hurt SEO. Which, they don’t.

If call tracking is implemented correctly, NAP is maintained. Analytics are gathered. And all is right with the world.
Reason #924 Call Tracking Doesn't Hurt SEO

Misconceptions and stereotypes can linger, even when they have been proven false. Such is the case with call tracking and SEO. Local marketers fear that call tracking will hurt SEO because
A) they don’t understand how call tracking works or
B) they aren’t aware of changes in call tracking technology.

Recently we hosted a webinar with the CEO of Convert.com, a tool that allows marketers to A/B test almost anything on a website. If you use Convert.com, eventually you will know precisely the ideal way a landing page or website should be constructed for the most optimal conversion rates.

Their tool is great. I invite everyone to listen to the webinar in the Convirza webinar library.

After the webinar, someone asked a question about call tracking: "Can it hurt SEO?"

I answered that it didn’t hurt SEO for two reasons:

1) You don’t have to change your number, and thus Google’s all-important NAP is not impacted.

2) You could implement call tracking Dynamic Number Insertion (DNI). A feature which dynamically generates a unique phone number for every visitor to the site, or for each referring source, or for each referring URL. This allows marketers to track the sources, keywords, links, etc. that produce phone calls. This unique and dynamic phone number is generated via a unique snippet of JavaScript.

The phone number is changed before the visitor can tell a unique phone number is on the page.

Long story short: the 'hard-coded' HTML phone number that’s been on your site remains unchanged. Thus, NAP remains intact, SEO is not harmed, and all is right with the world.

YAY!!!!!
A/B Testing Platforms Work in the SAME WAY!

After I answered the question on the webinar, Dennis, the CEO of Convert, said he often gets the same question: "Doesn't A/B testing hurt SEO?"

People are concerned that dynamically generating several different versions of landing pages for A/B testing purposes, hurts SEO. The content is always changing, won't this upset Google and hurt SEO?

No, it won’t.

Dennis explained that dynamic A/B testing works the same way as Dynamic Number Insertion--specifically, that the page dynamically changes via specific JavaScript parameters immediately before the user sees the page. This is how every A/B testing platform works!

The hard-coded HTML stays the same. Thus, SEO is not impacted negatively at all.

Call tracking DNI and A/B testing services use the EXACT same method.

And yet...thousands of local SEO experts are willingly using A/B testing platforms but fear call tracking. They clearly don’t understand how DNI works. They clearly don’t understand that Google doesn’t crawl JavaScript for SEO purposes. And they clearly don’t fully appreciate the massive benefits that both call tracking and A/B testing provide.

This is sad.

We have call tracking clients that save THOUSANDS of dollars in their marketing budgets every week because they’re able to optimize ROI on a real-time basis. They’re able to spend money on campaigns that produce calls, not waste money on campaigns that don’t.

Local businesses need call tracking data, and it is up to marketers to provide the data to them.
Motive: Why Some SEOers Hate Call Tracking?

Lately, a few local SEO companies have been writing articles bashing call tracking. They claim that it hurts SEO.

It doesn’t. Studies have been conducted, and we’ve written SEO blog, after SEO blog, after SEO blog, detailing why and how SEO isn’t harmed by call tracking. Tens of thousands of local marketing companies use call tracking, millions of businesses in North America use it. Some of the biggest, most sophisticated companies in the world use call tracking.

When used properly, call tracking does not harm SEO. Period.

So here’s the question: Why do some local SEO companies insist that it does? What is their motive?

There are only about 5 possible motives. We’ll explore each of them.

1) They don’t understand new methods of call tracking

It is likely that some local marketing firms bash call tracking simply because they don’t understand it.

Call tracking no longer relies on changing phone numbers in directory listings or hard-coded numbers on your website. That’s how call tracking used to work. Companies were forced to change the numbers on their directory listings.

This hurt their SEO.

So the call tracking industry developed new technology that allows companies to NEVER change directory listings AND to keep their phone number hard-coded on their site. At the same time companies then dynamically, via a snippet of JavaScript, display call tracking phone numbers dependent on the source, keyword, or campaign.

The hard-coded number on the site never changes. NAP is maintained. SEO is not harmed.

It is quite clear that people criticizing call tracking don’t understand this new call tracking method. They still believe that call tracking depends on switching phone numbers in listings.
Seriously, they believe this! Their entire articles contain criticisms of call tracking being used in directories. CALL TRACKING HASN’T ADVOCATED THIS FOR 10 YEARS. This is like someone criticizing America for not allowing women to vote in 2013.

We’ve allowed it for 100 years now.

They’re criticizing something that isn’t a problem anymore. The problem was solved years ago.

2) They’re stuck in 1990 call tracking land

My guess is that the people writing these articles haven’t actually spoken to a call tracking company in 15 to 20 years. Honestly, when was the last time they had a demo of a modern call tracking tool?

It must be 15 to 20 years since they talked to a call tracking company.

Why do I assume this?

Because their knowledge of the technology is outdated. If it were current, they wouldn’t slam call tracking.

3) They don’t value phone calls

The other possible reason local search companies bash call tracking is that they don’t value phone calls to begin with. That is, they don’t believe phone calls are valuable leads.

This is foolish and highly unlikely.

Most local marketers--I hope--know that phone calls are statistically their most valuable leads (BIA/Kelsey), result in more business and revenue than any other lead source (UNLV), and are the fastest growing lead generation area in the local space (BIA/Kelsey).

Hopefully, they know all this. Hopefully!

4) They don’t want their clients to know how many phone calls they’re generating

This might sound a little conspiracy theory-ish. Think about what I’m suggesting here. I’m suggesting that there are SOME (not a lot, but some) local marketing agencies that would rather keep their clients in the dark than give them marketing data.
Why on Earth would they do this? Hmmm...

Perhaps they’re scared that if their clients knew how few calls they were actually generating, their clients would be upset.

Don’t think this is realistic? Don’t think a local search company would be so short-sighted and shallow? Think again.

Yesterday I was on the phone with a major marketing company. They indicated that they loved the idea of call tracking, but that, “They were concerned with client visibility.”

I asked what that gibberish sentence of business-speak meant.

There was a brief period of silence followed by this, “We’re concerned that if they can tell how few phone calls we’re generating, they won’t work with us.”

In this case, call tracking isn’t the problem, their marketing tactics are the problem. This local marketing company was afraid.

5) They need something to write about

We’re in the age of content marketing. Content is the new king of SEO. There is pressure on every company, especially so-called marketing experts to produce content. This pressure is real and is ever-present. That’s why we’re writing 3 blogs each day.

Isn’t it possible that these local marketing firms that so malign call tracking are simply struggling for things to write about? And as they’re sitting at their computer with the blinking cursor and an empty screen mocking them, they suddenly remember something they read 10 years ago about how awful call tracking is.

Boom. The article practically writes itself. This happens. As a guy who writes a lot, I can tell you that this happens.

The bottom line is this: when call tracking is used and applied correctly, it DOESN’T HURT SEO.
The 8 Evidences: Local Search and Call Tracking

Lately some local marketing folks have been claiming that call tracking harms SEO. We have to assume these folks are well-intentioned and intelligent. They’re certainly not purposefully trying to dissuade you from using a tool that will give you incredible visibility into your ROI.

We’ve written several blogs about call tracking and SEO. We’ve shared specific data points and case studies.

This White Paper is a bit different. This section of the White Paper will present in brief terms the specific evidences that indicate call tracking does NOT hurt SEO.

**Evidence 1 - When call tracking is used correctly (via DNI), there is no evidence that it hurts SEO**

Have you seen the data that shows call tracking DNI hurts SEO? I haven’t. I’ve seen data that companies using call tracking make more money than those that don’t. I’ve seen data that shows company after company saving thousands of dollars on marketing each month because they use call tracking.

I’ve seen Fortune 500 companies (BIG ones) insisting on using call tracking. It is such an integral part of their marketing budget and ROI calculation that they have an entire team devoted to managing and analyzing call tracking data. I’ve seen SMBs that use call tracking and credit it with saving their business by shining light into their marketing blind spots and solving their marketing problems.

But data about call tracking DNI hurting SEO? Nope, haven’t seen that.

**Evidence 2 - Call tracking DNI is the same technology used by A/B testing sites - Do they harm SEO?**

Did you know the JavaScript technology that call tracking companies use to dynamically generate phone numbers is the same technology that tools like Convert.com and other A/B testing sites use to dynamically generate entirely different versions of websites and landing pages for testing purposes?
Hmmm...

So, if someone argues that call tracking hurts SEO, they must also argue that A/B testing tools hurt SEO. I don’t hear this; however, many local marketers make this argument.

**Evidence 3 - Call tracking DNI is the same technology used to dynamically generate content and ads. Do they hurt SEO?**

So, when a site dynamically inserts content or ads based on location or preferences, how do you think that content is uniquely and dynamically generated? Yep, generally via JavaScript.

Does that dynamic content hurt SEO?

Of course not.

**Evidence 4 - MILLIONS of businesses use call tracking**

If call tracking hurt SEO, one would assume that these millions of businesses would have figured that out by now. They would have experienced precipitous drops in their pagerank and would have been slammed by Google. Thus, they would have stopped using call tracking immediately.

Companies surely would have figured out that call tracking hurt their SEO right? They’re not dumb, are they?

There must be a lot of dumb people out there that haven’t figured out how terrible call tracking is.

(Sarcasm dripping from my keyboard).

**Evidence 5 - Hundreds of thousands of local search firms, SEO companies, and agencies use call tracking**

These agencies provide call tracking to their clients. You’re telling me that all of these people are dumb? You’re either saying that, or you’re saying they are willfully hurting their clients’ SEO.

OR….there’s the possibility they understand that call tracking via DNI doesn’t hurt SEO at all, but instead provides incredibly valuable, nay critical, data.
Evidence 6 - We have thousands of clients, and it hasn’t hurt their SEO

NOT ONE client has ever come to us and cancelled their service because call tracking hurt their SEO.

NOT ONE CLIENT. EVER.

We’ve even had some clients use call tracking incorrectly--by putting call tracking numbers in their directory listings--and they still claim it hasn’t hurt their SEO.

Evidence 7 - The number doesn’t change; it’s hard-coded into the site

The argument that call tracking hurts SEO because it changes the number on your site is by its very nature invalid. Why? Because the number doesn’t change. It remains hard-coded on the website. A unique number is merely displayed for a finite period of time.

Evidence 8 - Publishers that depend on SEO implement call tracking with EVERYTHING they do

Companies like ReachLocal and other directory/publisher/agencies type companies integrate call tracking into every listing they have. And at the same time, these companies depend on SEO. High search results are the lifeblood of their business.

Why would they endanger their entire business model by using call tracking?

You’re right. They wouldn’t.

These companies depend on search results to make money and thus, use call tracking because they know how valuable it is. PLUS they know call tracking doesn’t hurt SEO.
Show Us the DATA:
That Call Tracking Hurts SEO

We’re throwing down the gauntlet.

We dare you to show us data that call tracking—when used properly—hurts SEO.

Please note that sharing a random story about a guy you knew that did call tracking once and then his page exploded and his dog died, or a personal experience that involved a single landing page, doesn’t qualify as data. Also note that your data has to reflect an instance of call tracking being used properly, i.e. DNI use only.

How is Call Tracking Not Used Properly?

There are some call tracking companies out there that advocate using call tracking numbers on directory listings such as Google My Business, Bing places for business, Yelp, Citysearch, YP, and other online properties.

This is not proper use of call tracking.

Using call tracking numbers in that way could hurt SEO. However, some businesses still choose to ignore the possible penalties because the call data is so valuable.

How is Call Tracking Used Properly?

Call tracking can be used well and responsibly to track phone calls at local businesses. According to substantive research from BIA/Kelsey, an inbound phone call is the best lead a local business can get. These calls generate more revenue than any other ad source. Callers buy more frequently and more quickly.

Phone calls are the most valuable leads.

How can we possibly not track our most valuable leads? That is a pretty gigantic blind spot in your marketing ROI calculations. How are you supposed to make marketing decisions about your campaigns, tactics, and keywords without tracking phone calls?

“Not a single case study has been produced that demonstrates that call tracking, when used correctly, hurts SEO. Not. One.”

- Blog.Convirza.com
You’re right. You can’t.

Call tracking can be used to track traditional marketing channels like direct mail, print, radio, TV, etc. It can also be used to track online marketing via Dynamic Number Insertion. This means that your default, existing phone number remains hard-coded on the site, but that a unique phone number is displayed temporarily and dynamically via a snippet of JavaScript.

Your phone number remains on the page and remains visible to Google. Therefore, NAP is not impacted and SEO is not harmed. Thus, you can sleep at night.

This dynamic JavaScript technology is used by hundreds of thousands of businesses across the country to gather call analytics. It is the exact method that companies like Convert.com use to dynamically alter landing pages for testing. This technology is utilized by competitors of Convert.com as well. It is also the same technology that dynamic content tools use to personalize content based on geographic area or preferences of the visitor. This dynamic JavaScript technology simply doesn’t harm SEO.

The technology is widespread.

And if one maintains that this method for call tracking hurts SEO, one must also maintain that dynamic content hurts SEO and that A/B testing hurts SEO as well. Again, provide data that this is true.

Don’t Throw the Baby Out With the Bath Water

Some articles about call tracking aren’t nuanced. They attack a nuanced issue with a sledgehammer. They condemn all of call tracking when only a few uses of it are problematic.

They condemn call tracking because there are some call tracking providers (I won’t name names) and some clients that use call tracking incorrectly and thus, hurt their SEO.

These articles wrongly advocate that call tracking shouldn’t be used at all. These articles claim that marketers shouldn’t use call tracking even when it is totally safe.
They are throwing the baby out with the bath water.

**Phone Call Tracking Basics for Maintaining Local Search Data Integrity**

If marketers just reject call tracking out-of-hand because they fear that it will hurt their SEO, they are making a huge mistake. The question of call tracking and SEO is somewhat nuanced. It, therefore; deserves a nuanced answer. Not a blanket, YES or NO statement.

That’s why some of the recent articles are so frustrating.

And when I say it is nuanced, I’m not saying that it is complicated. I’m simply saying that marketers just have to use call tracking with a little common sense. For example, should you change every directory listing phone number to a different phone number? No. That would be dumb. But, should you use Dynamic Number Insertion on your website to insert a temporary phone number even as the hardcoded number remains constant? Yes.

Some marketers aren’t dedicated enough to find the truth about call tracking and thus, know the truth about their ROI. They aren’t dedicated enough to learn when call tracking works and when it doesn’t. They don’t care enough to read a few articles and figure it out. We’re not talking about reading a giant book on call tracking. We’re talking about reading a few blogs and figuring out how to implement call tracking.

The bottom line is simple: call tracking doesn’t hurt SEO if it is used correctly.

**Don’t Go Government Style**

During campaign seasons you will hear incredibly nuanced questions about immigration, budgets, debt, guns, etc. answered with general statements that are far too simplistic. Candidates are speaking, frankly, to the lowest common denominator, and they give very basic answers to very difficult questions.

So it is with call tracking.

Some bloggers make blanket statements about call tracking and SEO without exploring the nuances of the subject. They wrongly throw the baby out with the bath water.

There are substantial benefits to using call tracking. Marketers that use call tracking make more money than those that don’t.
Implementations to Avoid SEO Harm

In addition to providing arguments and proof that call tracking, when used properly, doesn’t hurt SEO, we also want to provide actionable tips to avoid SEO harm.

Here are six suggestions—some technical, some not—to use call tracking and utterly and completely avoid SEO harm.

1. **Use Call Tracking DNI**

   As we detailed above in great detail, the best way to use call tracking safely is by using DNI on your—or your clients’—site. Experts universally agree on this. There is no longer any meaningful debate on the matter.

   Displaying call tracking numbers via JavaScript is totally safe and totally acceptable. It is also the most common usage of call tracking numbers.

   Remember that it is best to only use call tracking on your, or clients’, website. Don’t use call tracking on a directory, citation or online yellow page listing. This will lead to NAP confusion and make Google angry.

2. **Turn Your Existing Number into a Call Tracking Number**

   Some marketers just opt to avoid call tracking numbers altogether. Instead, they simply ‘port’ their existing local or toll-free number to Convirza and gather call tracking data via that number. There are pros and cons related to this strategy:

   **Pro:** YOU retain ownership of the number. Don’t ever let a call tracking company tell you otherwise. The number belongs to you.

   **Pro:** You avoid any and all SEO concerns because your number stays the same.

   **Con:** You don’t get very granular data. Obviously, if you are only using one number, you can’t A/B test or even track the source. It kind of defeats the purpose of call tracking. We recommend using DNI instead of porting. It is just as safe and more powerful.
3. Use Call Tracking for Offline Advertising Methods

Many marketers plug call tracking numbers into direct mail campaigns, print YP ads, local print ads, radio ads, TV ads, etc. These functions have, obviously, no impact on SEO.

And honestly, I don’t know why anyone would conduct a direct mail campaign, for example, without using call tracking.

4. Use a “No Script” Tag

This is a suggestion from the Minnesota Search Association.

To quote:

“...call tracking solutions are often powered by JavaScript. Because of this, we use a No Script tag in combination with the JavaScript so that there is an official NAP friendly phone number listed in the code of the site that is indexable. The No Script code looks like this:

<noscript>612-567-2736</noscript>

NOScript is a World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) recommended script that “allows authors to provide alternate content when a script is not executed”. It is for visitors, spiders, and user-agents who visit the site with an old browser, have JavaScript turned off, and/or are unable to activate the script. They will now be able to read a phone number if the JavaScript does not load.”

5. Use DNI AND Consistent Site Wide Footer NAPs

Our data shows that this isn’t necessary, but it does make some people feel more comfortable. To quote MarketingLand contributor and WhichTestWon Advisory Board Member, James Svoboda:

“So much of the call tracking angst that I’ve heard is from worrying about whether or not search engines will index the official business phone number or the tracked number. To compensate for this, we make sure that the official business phone number and address are listed in the footer section of every page of the website. No call tracking numbers are used here. By establishing a repetitive and consistent NAP signal we are able to eliminate NAP confusion.”
6. Use Schemas to Send a Clear NAP Signal

From the Minnesota Search Association:
One of the little talked about schemas for local businesses is the telephone itemprop. This piece of microdata is intended to be the spoon that feeds the engines your business phone number. Since schemas are used by Google, Microsoft, Yandex and Yahoo, you can send them another great signal in the structured data markup form that they will be looking for.

To use it correctly, just add itemprop="telephone" to the html source code of your phone numbers. It’s usually added to a Span tag like this:

<span itemprop="telephone">(612) 567-2736 </span>
Get Started

Hopefully, this extremely long White Paper gives you a few answers. Here is a summary:

1) Even experts that decry call tracking admit that, when used correctly, it does not hurt SEO.

2) The call tracking technology that implements DNI via JavaScript is widely used, simple to implement, and does not hurt SEO.

3) There are multiple ways to ensure call tracking doesn’t harm SEO.

We work with thousands of marketers—agencies, SMBs and Fortune 100 companies—and NOT ONE has ever indicated to us that their SEO has been harmed in any way.

Call tracking is safe if you use it correctly. Period.
Additional Resources

Call Tracking 101: What is Dynamic Number Insertion?
www.convirza.com/blog/call-tracking-101-what-is-dynamic-number-insertion/

Using Dynamic Number Insertion (DNI) – Who, What, Why?
www.convirza.com/blog/using-dynamic-number-insertion-dni/

Dynamic Number Insertion (DNI) – A Key Ingredient for the Marketer’s Secret Sauce
www.convirza.com/blog/dynamic-number-insertion-dni-marketers-key/

Dynamic Number Insertion
www.convirza.com/dni/

4 Things You Want to Know About Call Tracking DNI
www.convirza.com/blog/4-things-you-want-to-know-about-call-tracking-dni/

Which of the 3 Types of Dynamic Number Insertion Call Tracking Do You Need?
www.convirza.com/blog/which-of-the-3-types-of-dynamic-number-insertion-call-tracking-do-you-need-2/

Use These Quick Local SEO Tactics
www.convirza.com/blog/local-seo-tactics/

3 Ways to Tell if You Should Fire Your Local SEO Company
www.convirza.com/blog/3-ways-to-tell-if-you-should-fire-your-local-seo-company/

Winning At PPC: How to Implement Call Tracking DNI
www.convirza.com/blog/winning-at-ppc-how-to-implement-call-tracking-dni/

Why You Should Use DNI Call Tracking With Your PPC Campaign [150 Words]
www.convirza.com/blog/why-you-should-use-dni-call-tracking-with-your-ppc-campaign-150-words/

Webinars

The Death of 'Old School' SEO And The 5 New Rules To Follow
www.convirza.com/blog/death-old-school-seo-5-new-rules-follow/

3 Local Marketing Mistakes That Make You Look Like An Amateur (And How to Fix Them)
www.convirza.com/blog/3-local-marketing-mistakes-make-look-like-amateur-fix/
About Convirza

Convirza is the next generation of intelligent call tracking and marketing automation. It is an inexpensive tool for marketers seeking to optimize performance and maximize lead quality. Convirza is critical for any business conducting online or mobile marketing campaigns. With award-winning features and sophisticated tools like Dynamic Number Insertion (DNI), and full-scale Google Analytics integration, Convirza is the best call tracking solution on the market.

Convirza is also the winner of the Amazon Web Services (AWS) Global Startup Challenge and the Grow America business competition.