The Best Tools for Consumer Insights: Lessons From Google BrandLab

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The best RFPs, creative briefs, and content strategies have one thing in common: meaningful consumer insights. Here, Global Director Kim Larson and Insights Lead Jason Klein—who work with hundreds of brands each year at BrandLab— share the Google tools that make it easy to find relevant consumer insights.

think with **Google**

When it comes time to write a brief or RFP, most marketers and advertisers lean on a psychographic profile to uncover a great audience insight. Brands spend hundreds of thousands of dollars developing these profiles so that they can reach their ideal consumer, which they name something like the "successful experienced creative American enthusiastic explorer."

What brand wouldn't want to target a "successful experienced creative American enthusiastic explorer"? They sound so fun! What's less fun is the time, money, and outdated data that often drive the development of these psychographic profiles. It can take weeks—often months—of focus groups, which have their own limitations, like sample size or selection bias.

In nearly all of our workshops at Google BrandLab, there's an "a-ha!" moment when marketers realize they can sharpen consumer insights and collect data from larger samples with Google's public market research tools. These kind of insights help brands get the quantitative research they need to inform their marketing strategies. Here, we'll share our favorite tools and how to use them in the hopes that you might have that "a-ha!" moment, too.
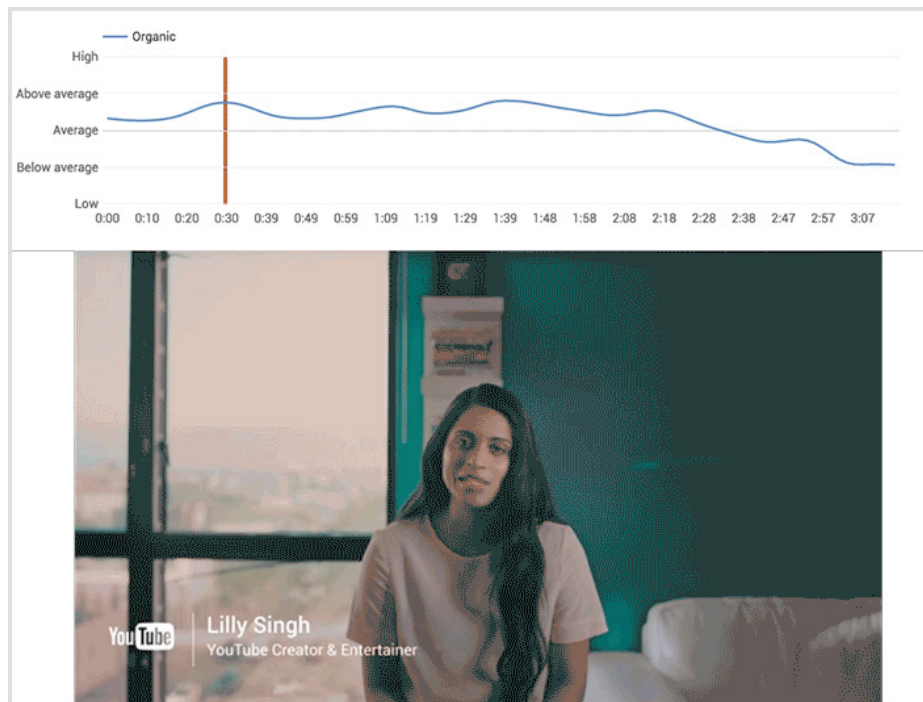
1. For fast focus group data: YouTube Analytics and Google Consumer Surveys

You probably know the lyric: "Start at the very beginning, it's a very good place to start." As marketers, we know different. For us, every new beginning starts with the end … of our last campaign. What specific, actionable learnings from last time can we apply before we begin? To pinpoint those learnings, know who on your internal or agency team has access to your YouTube Analytics dashboard and ask them to take you through the results of your last campaign.

These aren't your run-of-the-mill analytics reports. Sure, you can see views and engagements. But check out the Audience Retention tool. Using this tool, you can actually play your brand's video alongside a graph showing retention. You might uncover why your audience stopped watching your last video ad or what kept them especially engaged. Those are insights your creative team could use to make more "unskippable" YouTube ads. Make sure they're in the brief.

For example, in the below graphic, a video from the YouTube Advertisers channel gets more engagement when Lilly Singh, aka IISuperWomanII, is on screen. Lilly is a hugely popular YouTube star with more than 9 million fans. You can see their enthusiasm in the four hills that appear below when she appears on screen—they're watching and rewatching her cameos.

Tracking viewer engagement with Google's Audience Retention tool

Another tool you might consider as you develop your brief or RFP is Google Consumer Surveys. We've already talked about how valuable these surveys are when you want to poll your audience about an existing or past campaign. But even before a campaign begins, you can use Google Consumer Surveys to test your consumer insight or understand your customer's mindset.
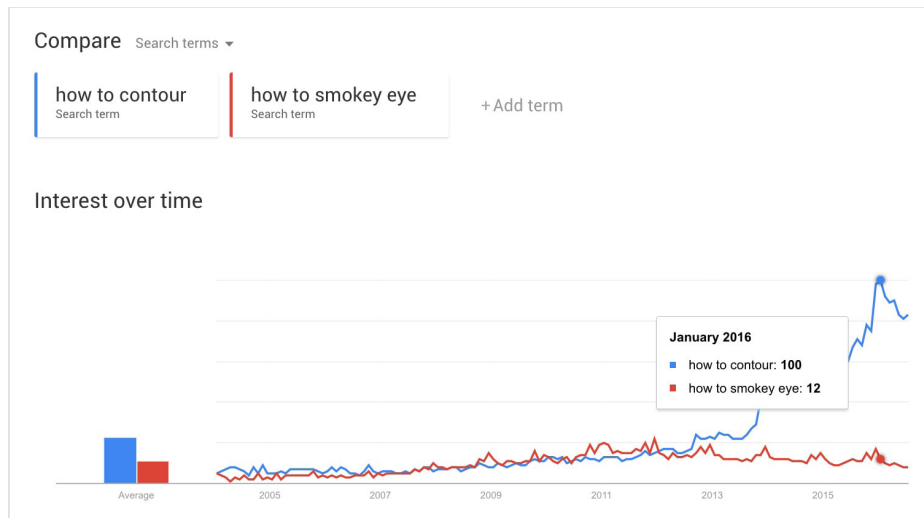
Plus, you can cut Google Consumer Survey results by age, gender, geography, income, family structure, and more to make sure your insights are relevant to your exact target. Best of all, these are focus groups on the fly: You get thousands of results in days instead of tens of results in weeks, so you can use them as you're writing a brief or RFP. And, they won't break your budget. The average cost per response can be as little as 10 cents per complete. Learn more about Google Consumer Surveys here.

2. For in-depth consumer insights: Google Trends

Google Trends is another great tool to confirm hypotheses about your audience's interests. Or if you're still exploring topics, Google Trends will show you where your audience's interest is growing or dying off. Within your competitive set or industry, what topics of interest can you uniquely own? Google Trends will help you find an answer.
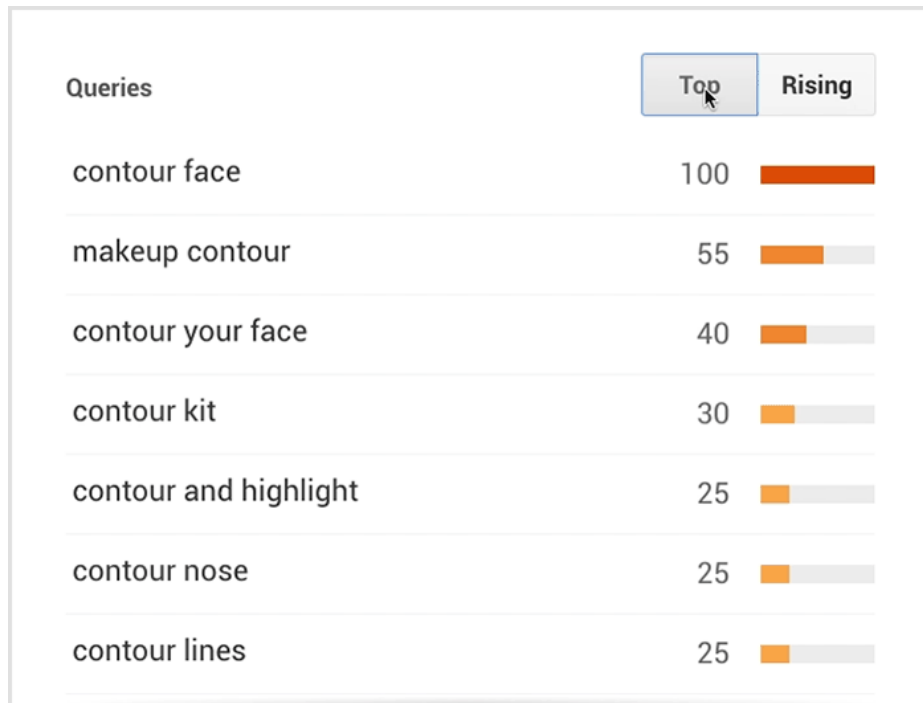
As an example, think about how a beauty brand might want to stay on top of the next big video trend in makeup. We already know beauty fans are turning to YouTube in their I-want-a-makeover micro-moments. By using Google Trends, the brand team could see which beauty trends are rising and falling. With the below search, for example, it would see that that "'how to contour'" is where it's at right now, and that "how to smokey eye" is so five years ago.

Search interest comparison of "how to contour" and "how to smokey eye" over time on Google Trends
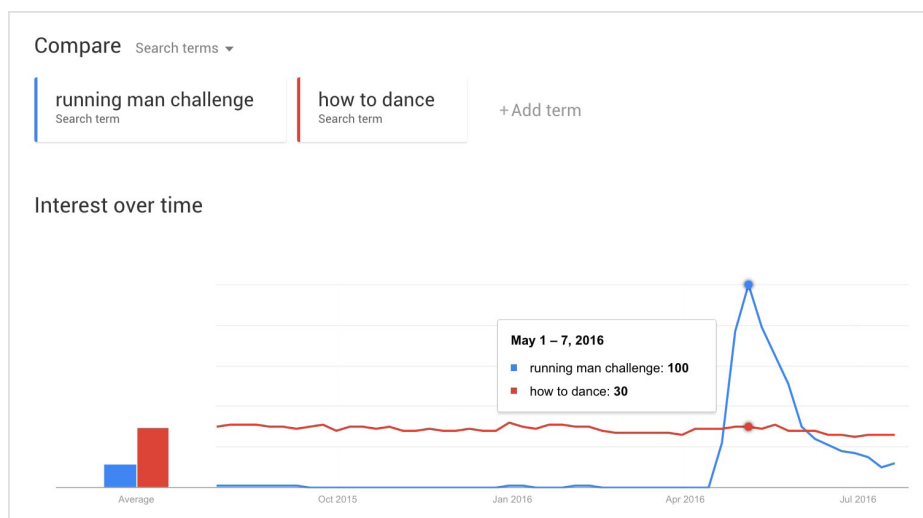

So, let's say our beauty brand team wants to use this consumer insight that people are passionate about contouring. The brand decides to create a series of contouring videos on YouTube. But what should each video be about? Google Trends can help with that, too. The "related searches" section shows both top queries and rising queries, so you can understand exactly what contouring enthusiasts search for, like how to "highlight" or how to contour their noses:

Viewing top and rising search queries related to makeup contouring

Queries		Top	Rising
contour face	100		
makeup contour	55		
contour your face	40		
contour kit	30		
contour and highlight	25		
contour nose	25		
contour lines	25		

One important learning from BrandLab: When it comes to Google Trends, it's better to plan for an ongoing trend rather than trying to capture lightning in a bottle. For example, rather than hurrying to make a "running man challenge" video at exactly the right moment, a brand might capitalize on the evergreen trend of "how to dance" videos.

Relative YouTube search interest of "running man challenge " and "how to dance" on Google Trends in the last 12 months

Compare Search terms ▾

running man challenge
Search term

how to dance
Search term

+Add term

Interest over time

May 1 – 7, 2016
■ running man challenge: **100**
■ how to dance: **30**

Average   Oct 2015   Jan 2016   Apr 2016   Jul 2016

Not sure what a "how to contour" or "how to dance" video would even look like? Fear not! Helpful channels like "Popular on YouTube" and "YouTube Spotlight" share examples of top videos and video trends. Alternatively, if your brand buys Google Preferred (YouTube advertising on the top 5% of content), you can use the Google Preferred Lineup Explorer to see how creators in your Google Preferred lineups are tackling trends. Here's Desi Perkins' take on how to contour, for example:

How to: Contour and
Highlight

If you want to rethink your video content plan around the trends you uncover, we've got a lesson from Google BrandLab on that, too. Check it out here.
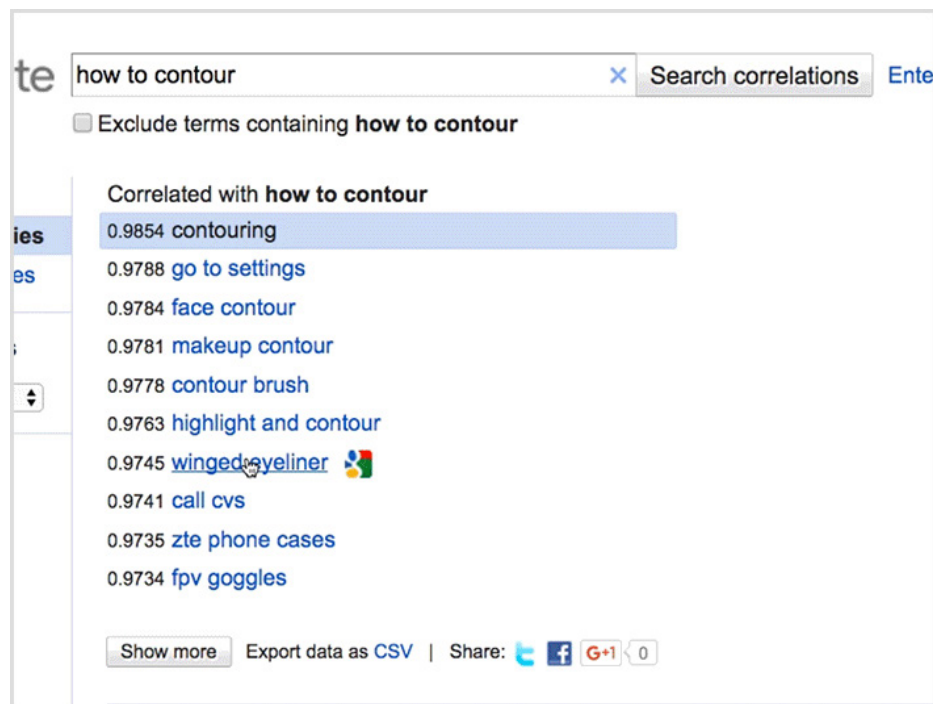
3. For more ideas on what consumers love: Google Correlate

The last tool we'll explore is Google Correlate. Think of Google Correlate as a matchmaker for search trends. Say you've discovered a rising trend—like "how to contour"— and you want to find more topics like it that your audience is interested in. Google Correlate looks for other queries that follow a similar search pattern. Unlike "related searches" in Google Trends,

these are not searches that are necessarily related to contouring—just searches that happen along the same timeline. You can learn more about Google Correlate and how to use it here.

Let's take a closer look at Google Correlate with that "how to contour" example. When you enter "how to contour" into Google Correlate, you can see that "winged eyeliner" is searched with similar patterns. You can also see that certain products are correlated with contouring (contour brush, beauty blender) and even certain online platforms like YouTube.

Discovering search patterns related to "how to contour" with Google Correlate
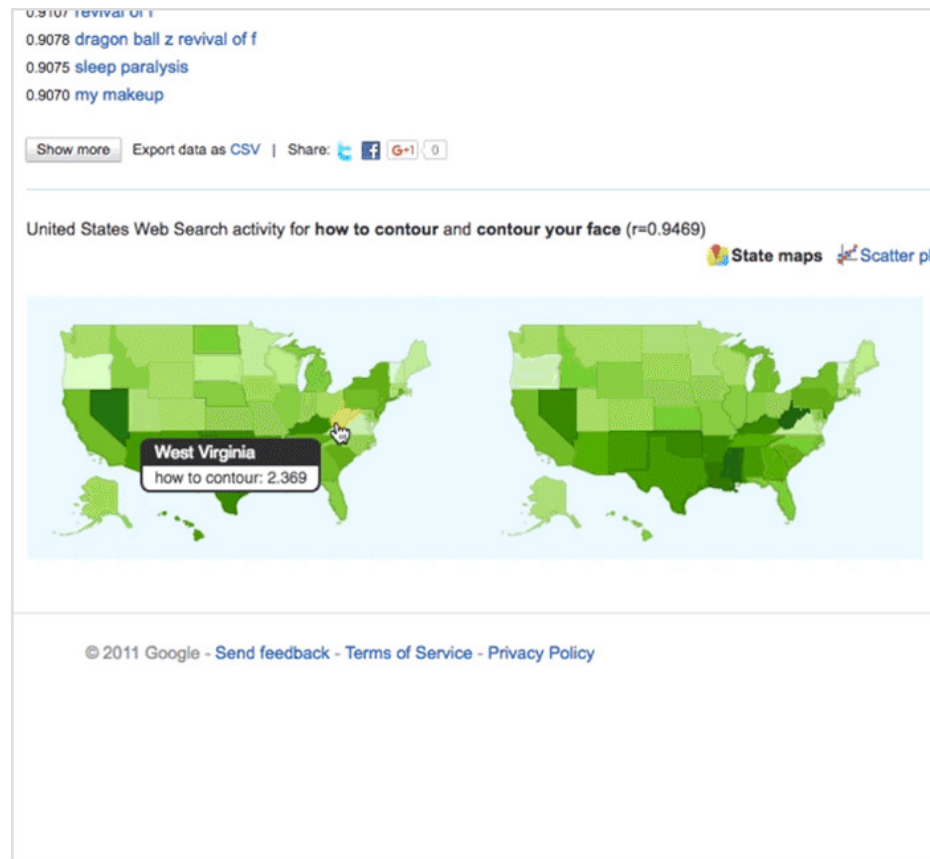

If "related searches" in Google Trends help brands go deep on a single insight, Correlate helps brands uncover insights that might not otherwise be visible. These correlations could have implications for a beauty brand's video creation (should it add more "winged eyeliner" videos to the lineup?), search optimization, related content, and cross-promotional efforts, and even the platforms it promotes its videos on.

And now for the grand finale. The coolest tool we'll explore today IMHO is the geographic mapping option within Google Correlate. Try clicking "Compare US states" in the upper left corner of the Google Correlate tool. When we look at "how to contour" across the United States, we uncover that contouring is most popular in the South. Who knew?

Exploring relative search patterns by location with Google Correlate

Now that you have the tools, the hard work begins. Taking the data—the "science"—and shaping it into a meaningful insight is the "art" only your brand can make. That happens through pushing and pulling on the data—there's no magic tool or formula for that. Still, we hope these tools will help your consumer insight go from "successful experienced creative American enthusiastic explorer" to "beauty addict from Louisiana who

needs a new contouring brush."

If you found this lesson helpful and want more from BrandLab, be sure to check out our lessons on building a content strategy and identifying the right video KPIs, too.

For more ways to mine consumer insights and trends, explore other planning tools from Google.