WIX | SEO HUB

SEO forecasting in Microsoft Excel

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Using Microsoft Excel for SEO Forecasting

Setting a meaningful SEO target doesn't have to mean you need an expensive forecasting tool. Microsoft Excel* has an excellent native one and in this guide, we'll show how to use it to create a prediction (for the metric of your choosing, e.g. users or impressions) for the future. We'll also explain how to overlay your tactical plans to set a target that combines learnings from the past with plans for the future.

What You Need to Begin Forecasting

All you need to know to create a forecast in Excel and set a target is:

- The type of target you want to set
- The period you'll look to achieve your target in (the measurement period)
- The accuracy of the data you'll forecast with
- Your planned tactics for the measurement period and the expected results.
- Available resources to help you achieve your target
- Market conditions
- Basic Excel formulas

About Excel's Forecasting Tool

Excel's forecast sheet uses a formula that creates a quantitative, time-series forecast. It uses historical data to estimate future outcomes. In other words, it tells you how you're likely to perform in the future based on what you achieved in the past. The formula uses three principles:

- The average monthly volume of the metric you're forecasting with, e.g. Organic sessions
- The trend over time, i.e. is it positive or negative?
- Seasonality, i.e. where are the peaks and troughs?

Forecasting Process

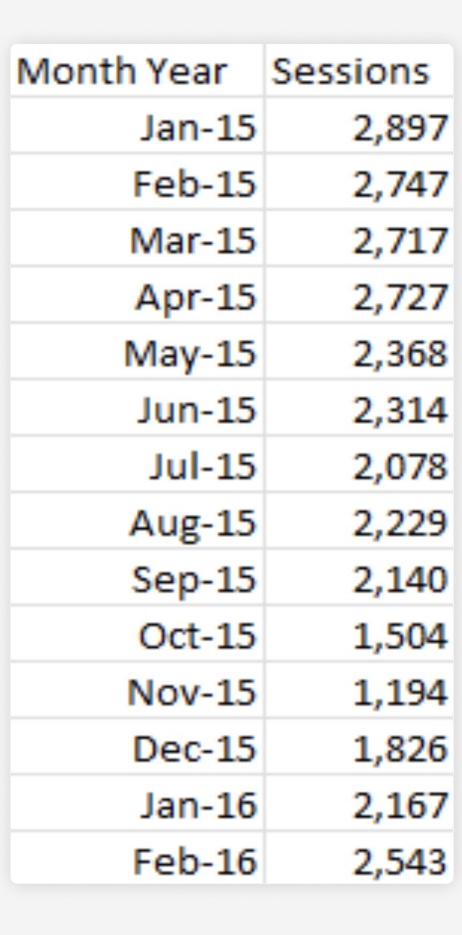
This section shows you step-by-step how to select the data that will inform the SEO forecast, the forecast settings to configure, and the factors to consider when setting your target.

1. Identify the purpose of the forecast and therefore, the type of data you require.
   For example: The intention is to set an Organic traffic target for 12 months. As it takes several months to see results from your website changes and search engine rankings are very volatile from week-to-week, you'll want a monthly forecast. This means you'll need users or sessions (whichever metric you use to measure traffic) by month for Organic. Be sure to use full months, otherwise an incomplete month with fewer sessions/users than usual will influence the forecast.

2. Identify potential inaccuracies or complexities with the data, so their impact can be understood, documented and the forecasting method adjusted. For example, if your data source will be Google Analytics 4 and you know its tracking was removed for 2 months, you can use estimates for those months. The forecast has a native interpolation setting, which provides estimates in place of no data.

3. For your chosen metric, export all historical data. You'll want 24 months as a minimum because it'll give you two years of seasonal patterns that can inform the traffic predictions. That'll be more reliable than only one year of seasonal patterns, especially if performance, resources and budgets were very different in each year.

   The more historical data you use, the greater the prediction accuracy because the forecast can more easily identify anomalies and ensure they don't affect the forecast's predictions. Put the data into two columns: One for 'Month Year' and one for the numerical data. If your export shows the months as numbers, convert these into a mmm-yy format.



Month Year	Sessions
Jan-15	2,897
Feb-15	2,747
Mar-15	2,717
Apr-15	2,727
May-15	2,368
Jun-15	2,314
Jul-15	2,078
Aug-15	2,229
Sep-15	2,140
Oct-15	1,504
Nov-15	1,194
Dec-15	1,826
Jan-16	2,167
Feb-16	2,543

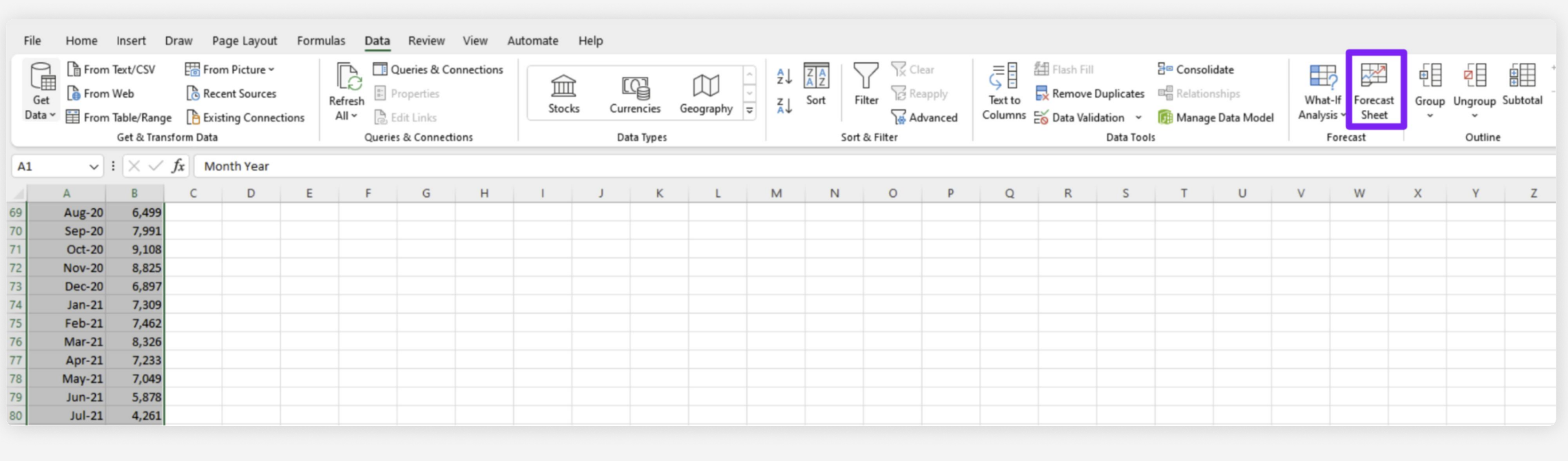
4. Select all the data in your columns and navigate to Data > Forecast Sheet in the ribbon. Configure the forecast's key settings as per the below:

   a. Forecast End: The last month you want a prediction for, e.g. December 2024.

   b. Forecast Start: The last month of your historical data. This ensures all historical data, including the latest month, are used in the prediction.

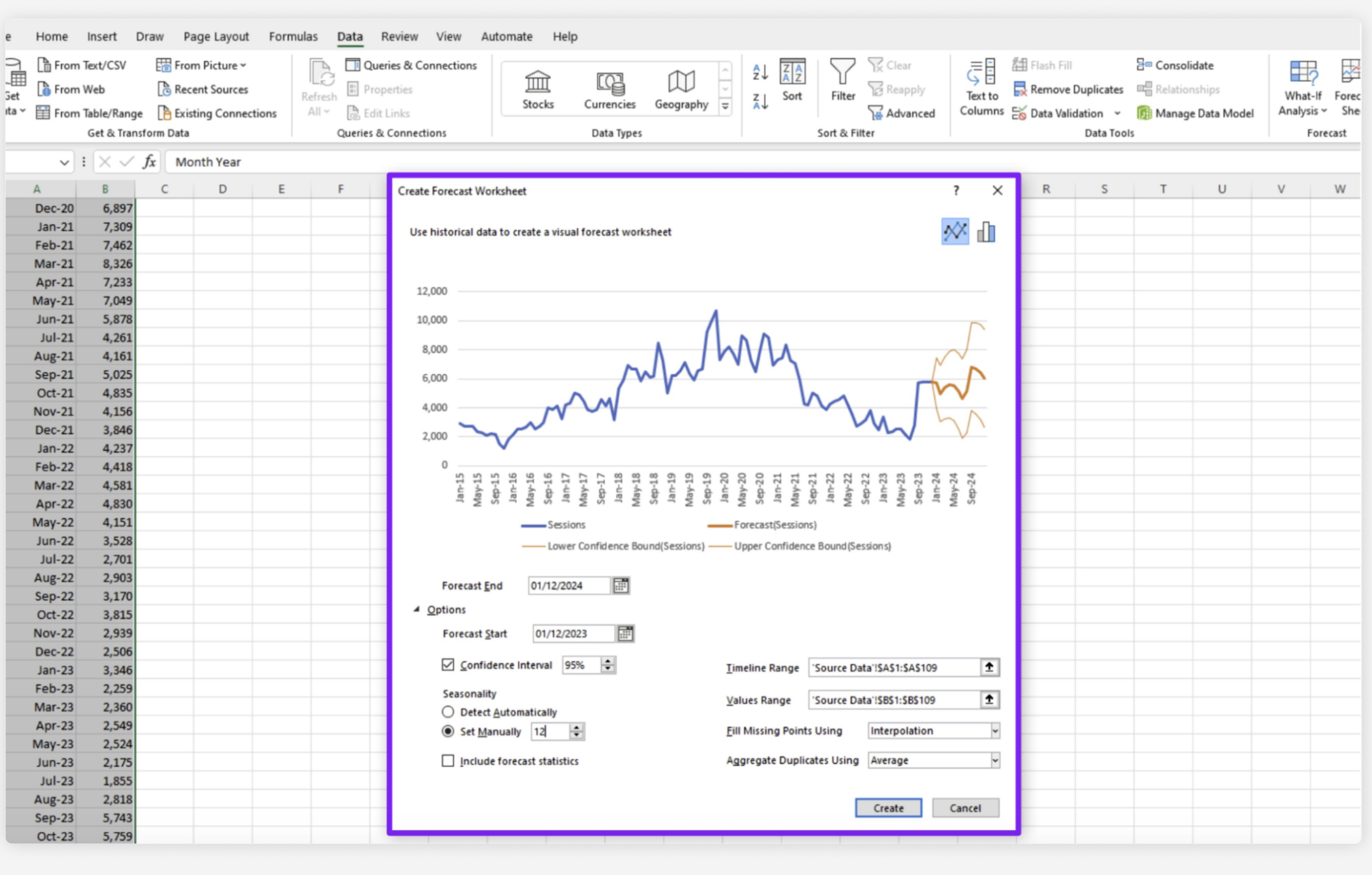
   c. Confidence Interval: How certain the forecast is that the predicted values will fall between the lower and upper bounds. The default 95% is a safe bet for ensuring a high level of prediction accuracy.

   d. Seasonality: This is the number of points in your seasonal pattern, e.g. 12 for a 12-month period, if you're using monthly data. Set manually to your seasonal pattern.



A1 | Month Year

	A	B
69	Aug-20	6,499
70	Sep-20	7,991
71	Oct-20	9,108
72	Nov-20	8,825
73	Dec-20	6,897
74	Jan-21	7,309
75	Feb-21	7,462
76	Mar-21	8,326
77	Apr-21	7,233
78	May-21	7,049
79	Jun-21	5,878
80	Jul-21	4,261



Month Year

A	B
Dec-20	6,897
Jan-21	7,309
Feb-21	7,462
Mar-21	8,326
Apr-21	7,233
May-21	7,049
Jun-21	5,878
Jul-21	4,261
Aug-21	4,161
Sep-21	5,025
Oct-21	4,835
Nov-21	4,156
Dec-21	3,846
Jan-22	4,237
Feb-22	4,418
Mar-22	4,581
Apr-22	4,830
May-22	4,151
Jun-22	3,528
Jul-22	2,701
Aug-22	2,903
Sep-22	3,170
Oct-22	3,815
Nov-22	2,939
Dec-22	2,506
Jan-23	3,346
Feb-23	2,259
Mar-23	2,360
Apr-23	2,549
May-23	2,524
Jun-23	2,175
Jul-23	1,855
Aug-23	2,818
Sep-23	5,743
Oct-23	5,759

Create Forecast Worksheet

Use historical data to create a visual forecast worksheet

Forecast End 01/12/2024

Options

Forecast Start 01/12/2023

☑ Confidence Interval 95%

Seasonality

○ Detect Automatically

● Set Manually 12

☐ Include forecast statistics

Timeline Range 'Source Data'!$A$1:$A$109

Values Range 'Source Data'!$B$1:$B$109

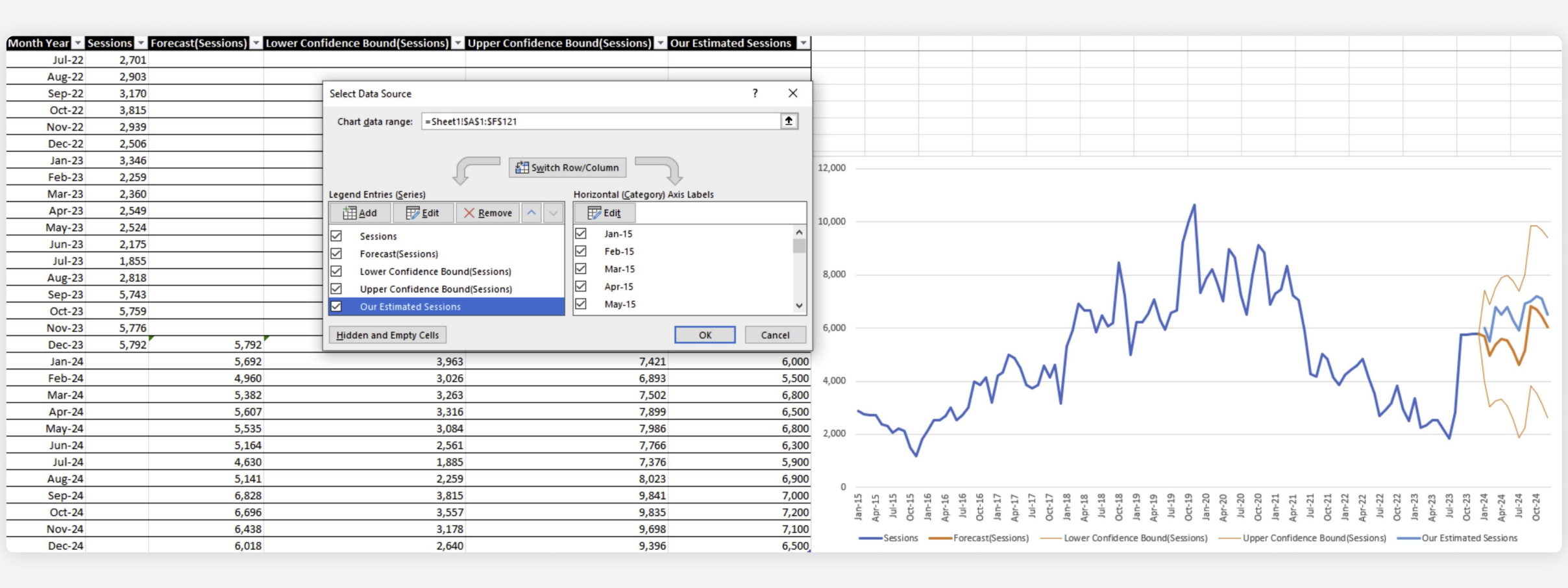
Fill Missing Points Using Interpolation

Aggregate Duplicates Using Average

5. **The output of your forecast will be a table and graph with the historical data, and the forecast with its confidence bounds.** You can now see how you're likely to perform based on what you've achieved to-date. The forecast assumes that what happened in the past (the work you conducted and the results it produced) will remain the same.

   The lower and upper confidence bounds provide a range in which results will occur, i.e. results could range from the lower confidence bound to the upper. As we set a confidence interval of 95%, the range means that in 95% of cases, results will fall between the lower and upper confidence bounds.

   It's important to know that each output isn't equally likely to occur. The forecast remains the most likely outcome and the farther this is veered from, the less likely the result will be.



Month Year	Sessions	Forecast(Sessions)	Lower Confidence Bound(Sessions)	Upper Confidence Bound(Sessions)	Our Estimated Sessions
Jul-22	2,701				
Aug-22	2,903				
Sep-22	3,170				
Oct-22	3,815				
Nov-22	2,939				
Dec-22	2,506				
Jan-23	3,346				
Feb-23	2,259				
Mar-23	2,360				
Apr-23	2,549				
May-23	2,524				
Jun-23	2,175				
Jul-23	1,855				
Aug-23	2,818				
Sep-23	5,743				
Oct-23	5,759				
Nov-23	5,776				
Dec-23	5,792	5,792			
Jan-24		5,692	3,963	7,421	6,000
Feb-24		4,960	3,026	6,893	5,500
Mar-24		5,382	3,263	7,502	6,800
Apr-24		5,607	3,316	7,899	6,500
May-24		5,535	3,084	7,986	6,800
Jun-24		5,164	2,561	7,766	6,300
Jul-24		4,630	1,885	7,376	5,900
Aug-24		5,141	2,259	8,023	6,900
Sep-24		6,828	3,815	9,841	7,000
Oct-24		6,696	3,557	9,835	7,200
Nov-24		6,438	3,178	9,698	7,100
Dec-24		6,018	2,640	9,396	6,500

Select Data Source

Chart data range: =Sheet1!$A$1:$F$121

Legend Entries (Series)

☑ Sessions
☑ Forecast(Sessions)
☑ Lower Confidence Bound(Sessions)
☑ Upper Confidence Bound(Sessions)
☑ Our Estimated Sessions

Horizontal (Category) Axis Labels

☑ Jan-15
☑ Feb-15
☑ Mar-15
☑ Apr-15
☑ May-15

6. **Because the forecast is based on what happened in the past, you must add the results you expect your plans to produce.** For example: Identify the amount of sessions you anticipate you'll generate from the new keywords you'll be targeting in page titles, meta descriptions and body content. Factor in the competitiveness of those keywords and how visible you are for them in the search results at the moment.

   This future planning element is key because the forecast can't know what will happen in your measurement period vs what happened prior to it. It won't know whether your resource and budgets have changed or whether a new competitor has entered into the market, for instance. You add the results from your plans as a new column by considering factors like the below. Add a column next to the upper confidence bound and then input your estimate based on your plans. You'll need input from everyone who will be tasked with helping you achieve your target.

7. **Factors that can Influence the Target you Set**

   a. How much SEO work has been implemented so far.

   b. How much SEO work is still to be implemented.

   c. Variations in client resources for SEO implementation and the estimated date of completion. Client sign-off for SEO recommendations (if applicable).

   d. The level of results you expect your work to generate. It can be helpful to consider keyword search volumes and the competitiveness of those keywords.

   e. It typically takes at least 3 months from the point of implementation for Organic to reap the rewards of the implemented work.

   f. What needs to happen between now and the end of the measurement period for the target to be achieved, and whether it's realistic that it can be achieved.

   g. The nature of your work. For example, if your work has been focused on blog content to-date and the forecast isn't as positive as you'd like, you'll need to switch to an alternative traffic-driving tactic.

   h. Market size, which you can identify from keyword search volumes or industry reports.

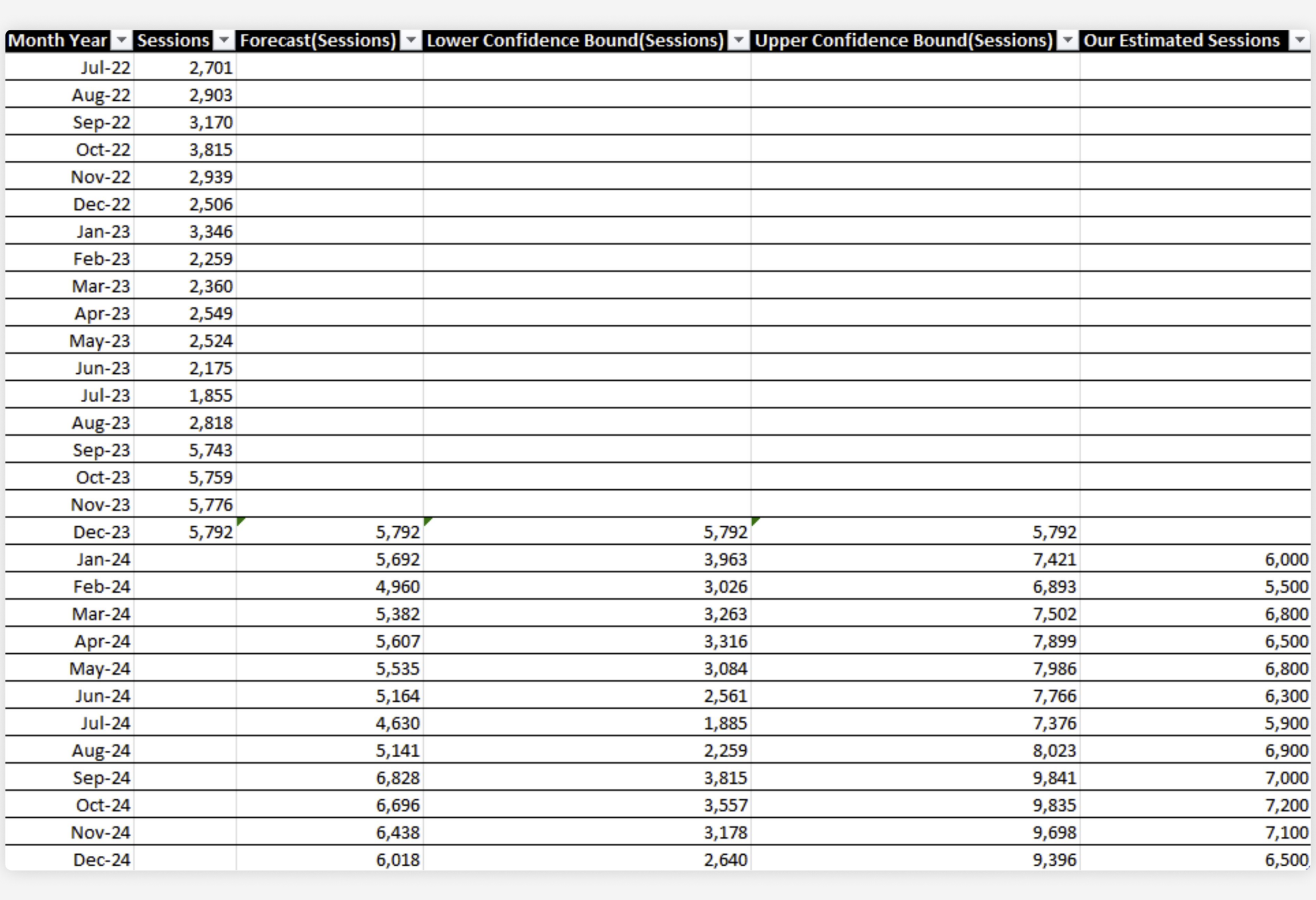
   i. Market competition.

   j. Available resource on your side to deliver the work the client needs and when the work needs to be delivered by, to ensure you can benefit from it.

   k. Seasonality.

   l. Known performance dependencies and how much of an impact you anticipate they'll have on results.

   m. Content Management System (CMS) limitations that impact the type of recommendations you can provide and which can be implemented.



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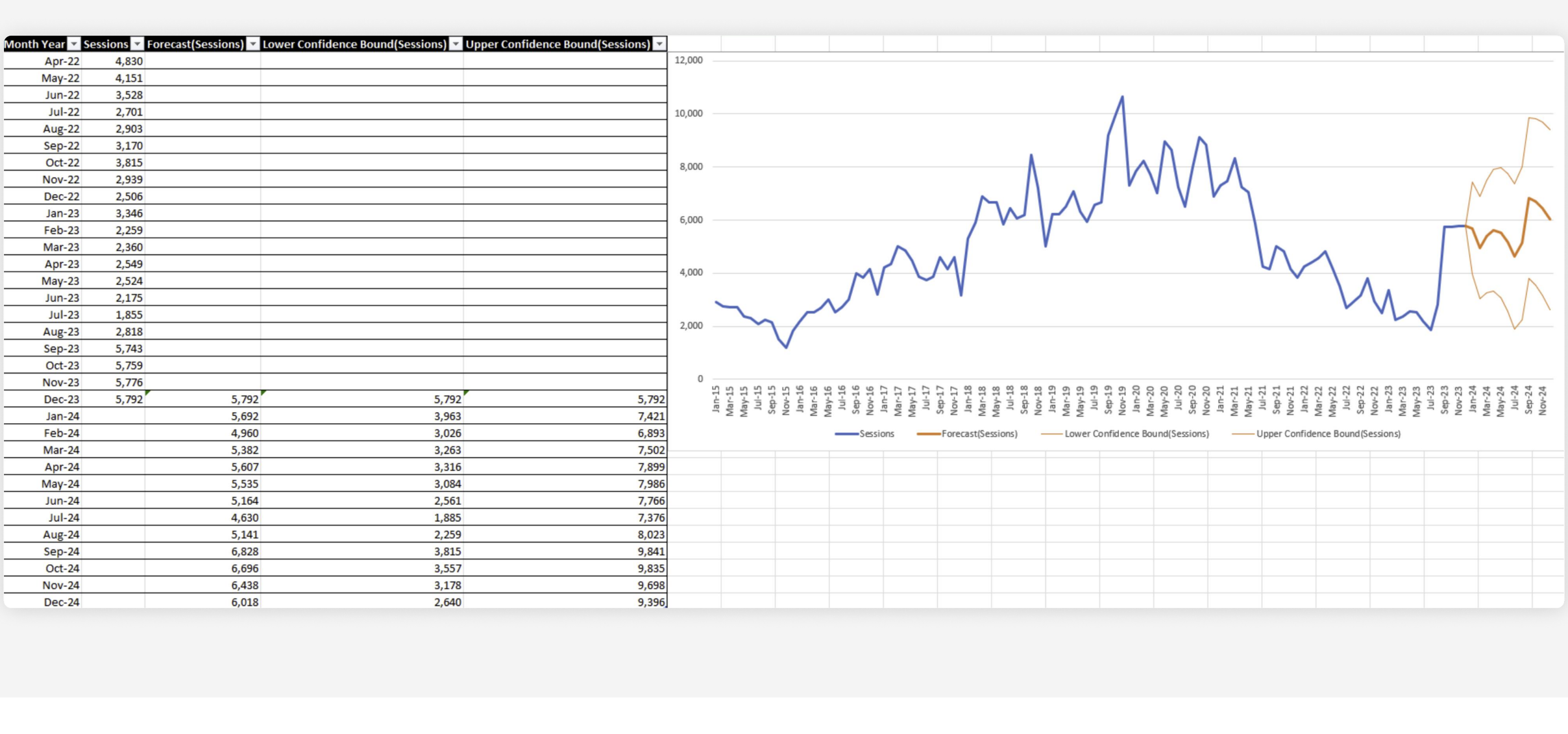
8. **Update the graph to include the data from your new column.** You'll then be able to see how your estimate compares to the forecast. This is a vital step because it's possible that the forecast is overly optimistic or negative in places, e.g. if you'll have reduced or extra resource over the next 12 months, the forecast won't have been able to take that into account.

   Don't worry about estimating the exact amount of sessions/users you'll achieve. Round numbers are fine if you set a target for a year-on-year increase, like in our example.



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Nov-24		6,438	3,178	9,698
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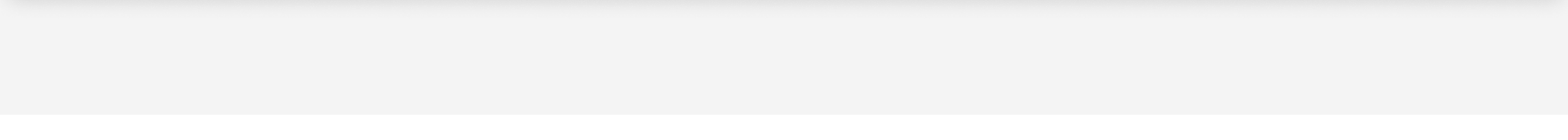
Then you can create a table that calculates your year-on-year increase for the target you want to set, to see how each output compares. Set one increase as your target. If you want to be conservative because there are many variables to account for, e.g. market changes, set a target range. You do that by using the forecast, and either an outcome between it and the upper/lower bound or your estimate.



Period	Forecast(Sessions)	Lower Confidence Bound(Sessions)	Upper Confidence Bound(Sessions)	Our Estimated Sessions
2024	68,092	36,547	99,637	78,500
vs 2023	59%	-15%	132%	83%

In summary, you now know how to use Excel to forecast for SEO. You have a meaningful target that was set using a data and planning-led approach, a culmination of past results and likely future outcomes. Whether your target is for your own business or for a client, you now have a proven method for forecasting and setting an SEO target.

Learn more at Wix.com/seo/learn