

UNDERSTANDING YOUR USER'S WEB SITE EXPERIENCE

According to Wikipedia.org, Web Analytics is defined as, "the monitoring and reporting of Web site usage so businesses can better understand the complex interactions between Web visitor actions and Web site offers, as well as leverage that insight for increased customer loyalty and sales." By tracking movement and monitoring the path and activity of site users, Web analytic tools provide valuable information about individual user behavior. This data provides you with important insights based on watching user movements within your web-site. You will be able to track how users navigate through your site, which pages are most frequented, where users exit your site and any number of other behavioral traits.

Visitor traffic statistics can tell you much more than how many customers visited your site on a given day. A good Web analytics service will provide you with the ability to slice-and-dice your visitor reports so that you can readily identify peak traffic periods by hour, day, week, month and year. The benefit to this granular breakdown is that you can identify trends that can be used to provide an enhanced user experience. For example, if your Web site is used to promote a restaurant, you might tailor your menu pages to display a lunch menu during peak morning Web traffic and a dinner menu during peak afternoon hours. Using Web analytics, you can identify the best hours to present dynamic content. Your Web developer can provide this functionality on your Web site, increasing your users' interest, providing them viable benefits over competitive sites, and bettering the chances that your visitors will find what they are looking for and not abandon their search in frustration.

DO WEB TRAFFIC REPORTS TELL THE WHOLE STORY?

If you are only crunching numbers, it is impossible to accurately judge whether a user has had a satisfactory experience at your Web site. They may have found the information they were seeking, they may even have purchased your products, but visitor number tallies alone cannot tell you if your visitors were confused or frustrated and whether or not they will return to your site in the future. Nor can they tell you what changes you need to make to reduce a user's pain threshold at your site or what changes should be made to increase the overall level of satisfaction with their site experience.

By analyzing the "click path" (also known as "clickstream") of your visitors, you can begin to understand their behavioral patterns. Then, suddenly, behavior analytics becomes a powerful tool for optimizing your Web site content and overall performance.

Click path reports can also be very useful in identifying a navigational issue commonly known as, "click distance." Click distance refers to the distance in which a user has to move their mouse in order to navigate your Web site. If your site navigation is cumbersome, you may be causing the end user more click distance and as a result they may not see, or find, links to pages that are important to your site's success.

In addition to click path and click distance, it is also important to understand the means in which your visitors access your Web site. Statistical information about their computer operating system, browser type and screen resolution can go a long way in helping you provide optimal content and navigation. For example, if your Web site provides a software download, you can improve your visitor's experience by dynamically directing them to a download page that is best suited for their computer type. If, in your operating system analytic reports, you find that you have a high volume of Mac users, then it would be wise to ensure that the nature of your content satisfactorily relates to them. Another great example of technology analytics would be screen resolution. If you have a large percentage of visitors viewing at 800x600 it would behoove you to ensure that your Web pages view well at that resolution. If not, you are forcing unneeded horizontal scroll, which could in fact be a troublesome source of abandoned visits.

THE KEYWORDS TO SUCCESS

It is a well known statistic that 85% or more of Web site traffic is derived from search engines. Search Engines provide a fuzzy roadmap to billions of Web pages -- hopefully this includes yours. If you are listed, you really are the proverbial needle in a haystack, so maximizing your search engine relevancy is one of the most important marketing strategies you can employ. An additional benefit of understanding keyword relevancy is that this data will go a long way in helping you streamline your visitor's experience. Once you have the information, you can take your visitors directly to specific pages within your Web site, potentially bypassing irrelevant levels of information that might otherwise cause them to lose interest, thus prematurely exit your site.

Again, Web Analytics offers insightful information by providing you with actual keywords and key phrases used by real customers who found your Web site from a search engine listing. Within keyword reports, what you do not see is often more important than what you do. For example, if you sell red sweaters and the key phrase "red sweaters" does not appear in your search engine keyword reports, or has limited use, then this provides you with key information about your meta data and marketing efforts for that page(s). If you combine search engine click-through analysis with visitor click path (which pages they are starting on) you can instantly identify which pages are marketed well and which need improvement.

THE BIG PICTURE

To truly understand all the factors contributing to your Web site user's overall level of satisfaction, you must combine your knowledge of visitor traffic, behavioral analytics and keyword analysis. This melding of data provides a far richer, extensive and complete picture of your user's Web site experience and provides you with a vital road map of the actions necessary to enhance your visitors' site experience and this will keep them coming back.