

Web Analytics:

This Generation of Tools Provides Insight Versus Just Data

By Kathleen M. Hosfeld

Many of us remember the early days of web statistics “analysis” – if it can even be called that. Reams and reams of data generated by user clicks on web pages. Lots of data. Not much analysis. A lot has changed. Today, web statistics can be whipped easily into answers to questions such as:

- How do people find your site?
- How do people navigate through your site – what page do they start on and where do they go from there?
- How often do they accomplish a particular goal such as reaching your contact information or downloading a product spec sheet?
- What words and content are most helpful or useful to users?
- What differing types of users find your site and what do they use it for?

Web analytics have taken quantum leaps forward, and many very robust tools are available for free. Types of analytical tools shake out by method of how data is tracked. Google Analytics, for example, tracks data by pieces of JavaScript code placed in each page of your site. ClickTracks, as another example, uses Web log data.

One tool we use and recommend to clients is Google Analytics because of its ease of use and because its free.

How it Works: Your Web technician sets up a Google Analytics account and inserts a snippet of Google Analytics code in each page of the site. In your account settings, you can specify specific goals to track such as going to an order page, going to a survey, getting contact information, or finding content on the site that might be specified in advertising or promotion. After set-up, you log in to see your results, which can be sorted and filtered in a variety of ways. You can also share your data internally and externally as pdfs or excel files.

According to one of clients, Karen Pederson, Web strategist for Marylhurst University, the ability to focus and share reports is important to her.

“One thing I have found useful with Google Analytics is the ability to create reports for specific directories and to give others access to only those reports. For example, (one of our librarians) asked for stats on the Library’s pages, and I used Google Analytics to allow him to view and create reports specific to his needs,” she said.

One helpful use of Google Analytics is to help plan for significant redesigns of websites. We recommend placing code in an existing site and letting it sit for at least six weeks. Evaluation of the resulting data helps determine changes in content, navigation, information architecture and more.

In a previous article, we talked about the basics of Search Engine Optimization, and how the process leads organizations to clarify their messages. Clearer messaging leads to better marketing results.



Another use of web analytics systems to clarify messaging is to monitor key words – the words that people use when they search for your site or find it while searching for something else. They find those words in the content written on each page and they find them in the meta data (meta tags) placed into the code as well as in code comments, style sheet tags, and alt tags on images.

While paid search and ad words are great marketing tools, we maintain that effective use of keywords and meta tags within the site still do a lot of the heavy lifting – at lower cost – in bringing the right kind of traffic. A tool like Google Analytics lets you monitor the effectiveness of certain keywords and other messaging so that they can be refined.

“Marketers that crack the code on search will gain a considerable competitive advantage,” says Steve Rubel, a writer for the trade magazine, Advertising Age.

Companies that care about managing their sales funnel, decreasing the sales cycle, and closing more sales will find the new generation of Web analytics tools a treasure trove.



Kathleen Hosfeld is the President of Hosfeld & Associates, Inc. Since 1989, Hosfeld & Associates' strategy and marketing services have launched, grown and inspired visionary for-profit and non-profit organizations and projects. We help clients think more clearly and boldly about their goals. We provide the skills and resources clients need to implement breakthrough strategies for profitability, service, and contribution. For more information, please visit <http://www.hosfeld.com>

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