

Boosting business with Google Analytics: part 1

The web analytics industry has come a long way in recent years. What used to be a technical subject for tracking server performance, error pages and hits has evolved into a dream for both webmasters and marketers. [video]



By [Stephen Newton](#) 23 Oct 2009

Different conversion metrics and funnel paths are now visible and can be cross-referenced with other data such as the visitor's geographic location or which search engine and keyword they used to arrive at a website.

Success of offline marketing

With the correct implementation, modern analytics packages can even get a handle on the success of offline marketing campaigns. Essentially, if a visitor arrives at a website, then you can measure not only how they got there, but also their interaction with the site.

However, despite the growth in features and capabilities of the tools used to measure online marketing activity, there has been slower growth in the understanding and consideration for the power of such tools. A problem we've seen in even the largest of organisations is the fateful lack of time and resource invested in ensuring the right tool is implemented, and correctly.

This is one of the key philosophies behind why we have chosen to make Google Analytics free. Other than making it available to all website owners, regardless of size, Google believes that customers should invest in gaining insights from the tool, rather than the tool itself.

This means hiring skilled data analysts at the outset (not just after a poor implementation has already been made) who are aware of the online business objectives and reporting requirements for all the key stakeholders and whose job it is to ensure that the correct tool is implemented, and is capable of delivering such insights.

Still surprising

Most online businesses are aware of their basic traffic numbers and resulting sales leads. However, something which is still quite surprising is the general acceptance of poor online conversion rates, which would probably cause alarm bells to ring in the offline world.

This can, of course, be attributed to the significant difference in maturity between the two sales channels, as online is generally considered to be still in relatively early development. An interesting research finding is that about two-thirds of shopping carts in the UK are abandoned at the online checkout: something that would be regarded as a catastrophe if it were to occur on a London high street.

Using an analytics tool does not have to be daunting. Whatever you are using, you should be able to answer some fundamental questions regarding the performance of your website. However, before you even begin to look at any data, you need to determine what the objectives of your website are and how they tie into your online business strategy:

- Does your site exist to sell?
- Provide a service or information?
- Generate offline leads?

Use to understand

With the objectives in mind, you can use the data to understand whether the site is successful in achieving these and whether the user is coming to the website for the same purpose as what you had intended.

Start by looking at how visitors arrive at your site. Visitors can arrive via a number of channels, be it organic (by clicking on a link under the natural search listings in a search page), paid (clicking on a sponsored link), direct (by manually typing the URL or clicking on a bookmark), or via a referral link on another site or email campaign. There is a lot of information to be gauged, whichever method is used.

Campaign tracking functionality and Google's seamless integration with AdWords allows you to measure the performance of your marketing campaigns. Discover which keywords, affiliates, newsletters, etc are working best. You may find that a particular keyword is great at attracting visitors, but has a high landing page bounce rate.

This is essentially a single access page view where the visitor exited the site before clicking further or interacting with the page in any way. What's gone wrong here? It may be that your site is not meeting visitor expectations when clicking on that keyword. Or, the page loading time is too long. Each bounce is a lost opportunity, and if it is via a pay per click (PPC) campaign, it is also impacting your overall ROI.

Missed opportunities

Set up goals and measure conversion rates against these. Goal completions (such as successful purchases) are great ways of measuring success, but not where you have missed opportunities. For this, reports such as funnel path analysis are instrumental in analysing whether people are following your expected conversion path, where people are dropping out of the process and why.

Identifying and rectifying these so-called bottlenecks to conversion can be instrumental in improving your bottom-line.

Making the most of Analytics doesn't end there. In [part two](#), we'll look more at what people are doing once they get to your site, so stay tuned.

Useful YouTube clips:

Beginning analytics

Best keywords

Bounce rates

ABOUT STEPHEN NEWTON

Formerly the Google head of analytics and commerce for Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), Stephen Newton is the new country manager for Google South Africa. Stephen is an accomplished business leader who has spent nearly a decade working in the online space, where he has been responsible for growing and leading top on-line companies. Before joining Google, Newton was VP of Double Click's Ad Exchange and GM of Hitwise UK. For more, email press@google.com.
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