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eMarketing

The essential guide to digital marketing

4th Edition



Rob Stokes
and the Minds of Quirk

What's inside: You will learn about the different types of **web analytics packages**, and the benefits and challenges of each. The **metrics for web analytics** are introduced as well as an approach to **understanding and analysing web data**. **Single page analysis packages** and **approach** are also explained.

20.1 introduction

Picture the scene: you've opened up a new fashion retail outlet in the trendiest shopping centre in town. You've spent a small fortune on advertising and branding. You've gone to great lengths to ensure that you're stocking all of the prestigious brands. Come opening day your store is inundated with visitors and potential customers. **And yet, you are hardly making any sales.** Could it be because you have one cashier for every hundred customers? Or maybe it's the fact that the smell of your freshly painted walls chases customers away before they complete a purchase. While it can be difficult to isolate and track the factors affecting your revenue in this fictional store, move it online and you have a wealth of resources available to assist you with **tracking, analysing** and **optimising** your performance.

To a marketer, the Internet offers more than just new avenues of creativity. By its very nature, it allows you to track each click to your site and through your site. It takes the guesswork out of pinpointing the successful elements of a campaign, and can show you very quickly what's not working. It all comes down to knowing where to look, knowing what to look for, and knowing what to do with the information you find.

20.2 history

Testing, analysing and optimising are not new to marketing. Being able to gauge the success of any campaign is crucial to growth.

Early web analytics packages came to the fore in the mid 1990s; a couple of years after the first Mosaic browser was launched. Early analysis reflected the nature of the early web, focusing only on hits with some very basic click stream analysis. With one page websites being the norm, it was enough to know how many clicks came to the website. Traffic meant you were doing well. You can still see hit counters on some websites today. The websites you find these on usually look as sophisticated as this tool.

However, as websites became more complex, and as more people had access to the Internet, better analysis became more important. Measuring hits was, and is, not enough. In fact, measuring hits is a fairly meaningless task. Web analytics split into two types of tools: page tags and log files. Both continue to become more sophisticated, capturing information about visitors to a website, and recording detailed information related to their time on a website.

There are several log file analysis tools which cost nothing to use. Sophisticated page tag web analytics became available for free when Google bought Urchin in March 2005 and launched Google Analytics as a free service. Are you wondering what the difference is between page tag and log file analysis? Don't worry, it's coming!

20.3 key terms and concepts

term	definition
A/B Split Test	Testing two variables for statistically significant influence.
Click path	The clicks taken by a visitor to a website in one visit.
Conversion	A visitor completing a target action.
Conversion funnel	A defined path that visitors should take to reach the final objective.
Count	Raw figures captured for analysis, these are the most basic web analytics metric.
Event	A step a visitor takes in the conversion process.
Goal	The defined action that visitors should perform on a website or the purpose of the website.
Heat map	A data visualisation tool that shows levels of activity on a web page in different colours, reds and yellows showing the most activity and blues and violets the least.
Hit	Every request to the server is recorded as a hit, mistakenly used in web analytics as an indication of a successful website.
JavaScript	A popular scripting language also used in web analytics for page tagging.
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	A metric that indicates whether a website is achieving its goals.
Log files	Text files created on the server each time a click takes place, capturing all activity on the website.
Multivariate test	Testing many variables to determine statistically significant influences on outcomes.
Page tags	JavaScript files embedded on a web page and executed by the browser.
Ratio	An interpretation of data captured, a ratio can be between counts, ratios or a ratio and a count metric.
Referrer	The URL that originally generated the request for the current page
Segmentation	Filtering visitors into distinct groups based on characteristics so as to analyse visits.
Visitor	An individual visiting a website that is not a search engine spider or a script.

20.4 how it works

20.4.1 Tracking and Collecting Data

Currently, there are two main approaches for collecting web analytics data: **log file analysis** and **page tagging**.

Log file analysis software reads the records, called log files, on the web server, which record all clicks which take place on the server. Web servers have always stored all the clicks which take place in a log file, so the software interprets data which has always been available. A new line is written in a log file with each new request. For example, clicking on a link, an Ajax call or submitting a form will each result in a new line being written.

Page tagging, on the other hand, sends information to a third-party server, where statistics can be generated. The browser executes JavaScript code which communicates with the tracking software.

Pixel tracking can be used to track email campaigns. Here, a tiny 1 pixel by 1 pixel is placed in the email. When you load the images in the email, you will also load the tiny image which tracks your activity.

What you should know:

Log file analysis

- Log files are normally produced by web servers, so the raw data is readily available. Page tagging, however, requires changes to the website.
- Log files are very accurate – they record every click. Page tagging can be less accurate. If a user's browser does not support JavaScript, for example, no information will be captured.
- Log files are in a standard format, so it is possible to switch vendors and still be able to analyse historical data. Page tagging is proprietary to each vendor, so switching can mean losing historical data.
- Log files record visits from search engine spiders – useful for search engine optimisation.
- Log files record failed requests, whereas page tagging only shows successful requests.

Page tagging

- JavaScript makes it easier to capture more information (e.g. products purchased, or screen size of a user's browser). You can use log file analysis to capture this information, but it will involve modifying the URLs.
- Page tagging can report on events, such as interactions with a Flash movie, something log file analysis cannot.

- Page tagging can be used by companies which do not run their own web servers.
- Page tagging service providers usually offer a greater level of support. This is because it is a third-party service, whereas log file analysis software is often managed in-house.

Due to the different methods of collecting data, the raw figures produced by the two services will differ. Sometimes, both are used to analyse a website and raw figures not matching up should not be a problem. It is in the interpretation of these figures that you will be able to understand how effective your digital marketing efforts are.

Website analytics packages can be used to measure most, if not all, digital marketing campaigns. Website analysis should always account for the various campaigns being run. For example, generating high traffic volumes by employing various digital marketing tactics like SEO, PPC and email marketing can prove to be a pointless and costly exercise if the visitors are leaving your site without achieving one (or more) of your website's goals. Conversion optimisation aims to convert as many of a website's visitors as possible into active customers.

20.4.2 Setting Objectives, Goals, and KPIs

The key to the success of any website or online campaign is that it is designed with clearly defined objectives in mind. These will be used to measure the success of the website or campaign, and are crucial to maintaining focus within online activities. Sometimes, words like "objective" or "goal" can be used in different situations with slightly different meanings. For the sake of clarity, this chapter will use them as described below, unless otherwise indicated.

The **objective** of a website or online campaign is aligned with the strategic outcomes of the business. The objective of a campaign may be to create awareness for a new business or it might be to increase sales of a product. Sometimes campaign objectives are referred to as goals, although goals can have another meaning in web analytics.

The **goal** of a website or campaign in web analytics refers to an action that a user takes on a website or a type of user behaviour. This action could be making a purchase, signing up for a newsletter, or viewing a certain number of pages in a visit. Goals related to visitor behaviour such as time spent on site or page-views per visit are sometimes referred to as engagement goals. Goals are usually aligned with the business objectives.

note

Caching is when a browser stores some of the information for a web page, so it can retrieve the page more quickly when you return to it. If a web page is cached by your browser, when you look at the page again, it will not send a request to the web server. This means that that particular visit will not show in the log files. Page tagging, however, would capture this visit. But, some browsers do not support JavaScript, and page tagging would not capture those visits. This is why there is often a discrepancy in the numbers reported by the two services.

Key performance indicators or **KPIs** are metrics which indicate whether objectives are being met. There are many metrics to be analysed, and so determining which are important will help to focus on what really matters to a particular campaign.

The objective of a website or campaign may depend on the type of industry, but usually it will be an action which results in revenue for the company. The goal of a website is also intrinsically linked to the action that you want visitors to perform.

Although a website has an ultimate goal, the process of achieving that goal can be broken down into several steps. These are called **events** or micro-conversions. Analysing each step in the process is called **funnel analysis** or path analysis and is critical to understanding where problems in the conversion process may lie. The clicks a visitor makes once landed on a site, whether they follow the desired steps or not, are referred to as a **click path**.

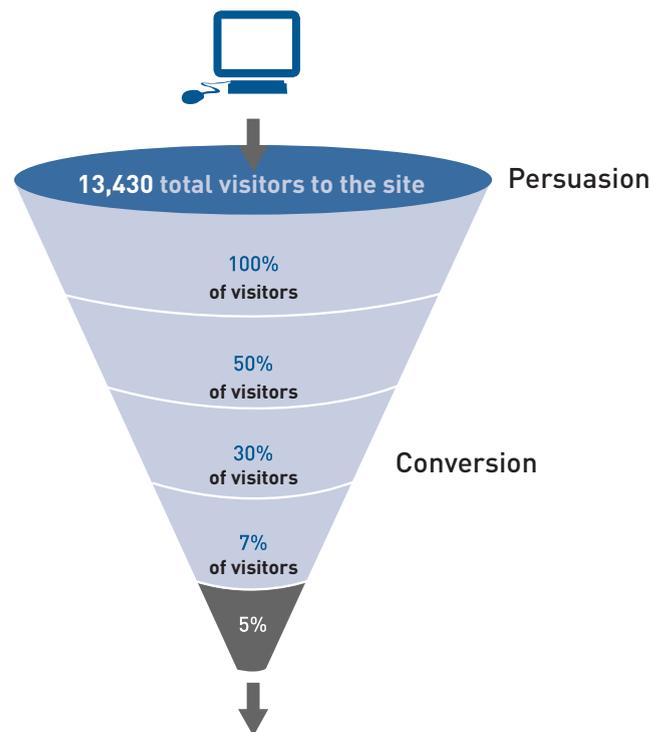


Figure 20.1 An example of a conversion funnel.

For example, on a hotel website, the ultimate goal is that visitors to the site make a booking on the website with a credit card.

Each step in the process is an event which can be analysed as a conversion point.

Event 1: Perform a search for available dates for hotels in the desired area.

Event 2: Check prices and amenities for available hotels.

Event 3: Select a hotel and go to checkout.

Event 4: Enter personal and payment details and confirm booking (conversion).

One expects fewer users at each step that's why it's called a funnel. Increasing the number of visitors who progress from one step to the next will go a long way to improving the overall conversion rate of the site.

There are also other pointers, or indicators, of whether you are achieving your goals.

Here are some examples of objectives, goals and KPIs for different websites:

Hospitality ecommerce site, such as www.expedia.com

Objective: increase bookings
Objective: decrease marketing expenses

Goal: make a reservation online

KPIs:
conversion rate
cost per visitor
average order value

News and content sites, such as www.news24.com

Objective: increase readership and level of interest
Objective: increase time visitors spend on website

Goal: a minimum time on site

KPIs:
length of visit
average time spent on website
percentage of returning visitors

KPIs help you to look at the factors you can influence. For example, if your objective is to increase revenue, you could look at ways of increasing your conversion rate (that is the number of visitors who purchase something). One way of increasing your conversion rate could be to offer a discount. So, you would have more sales, but probably a lower average order value. Or, you could look at ways of increasing the average order value, so the conversion rate would stay the same, but you increase the revenue from each conversion.

Once you have established your objectives, goals and KPIs, you need to be able to track the data that will help you analyse how you are performing, and will indicate how you can optimise your website or campaign.

note

Events and KPIs are not the same thing. Events can be seen as steps towards a goal and are usually an action performed by a visitor. KPIs are indicators that the website's goals are being met.

KPIs and events break down the factors and steps that can be influences so as to achieve the goals of the website. They allow you to see on a micro level what is affecting performance on a macro level.

What information is captured

KPIs are the metrics which help you understand how well you are meeting your objectives. A metric is a defined unit of measurement. Definitions can vary between various web analytics vendors depending on technology and the approach to gathering data, but the standard definitions are provided here.

Web analytics metrics are either a:

- **count** – these are the raw figures captured that will be used for analysis.
- **ratio** – this is an interpretation of the data that is counted.

discussion

Why would you want to look at the activity of a single visitor?
Why would you want to segment the traffic for analysis?

In analysis, metrics can be applied to three different spheres:

- **aggregate** – all traffic to the website for a defined period of time.
- **segmented** – a subset of all traffic according to a specific filter, such as by campaign (PPC) or visitor type (new visitor vs. returning visitor).
- **individual** – the activity of a single visitor for a defined period of time.

Here are some of the key metrics you will need to get started on with website analytics:

Building block terms:

- **Hit** – a request to the server (and a fairly meaningless number on its own).
- **Page** – unit of content (so downloads and Flash files can be defined as a page).
- **Page views** – the number of times a page was successfully requested.
- **Visit or session** – an interaction by an individual with a website consisting of one or more page views within a specified period of time.
- **Unique visitors** – the number of individual people visiting the website one or more times within a set period of time. Each individual is only counted once.
 - o **new visitor** – a unique visitor who visits the website for the first time ever in the period of time being analysed.
 - o **repeat visitor** – a unique visitor with two or more visits within the time period being analysed.
 - o **return visitor** – a unique visitor who is not a new visitor.

These are the most basic web metrics. They tell you how much traffic your website is receiving. Looking at repeat and returning visitors can tell you about

how your website features in terms of creating loyalty. As well as growing overall visitor numbers, a website needs to grow the number of visitors who come back. An exception might be a support website – repeat visitors could indicate that the website has not been successful in solving the visitor's problem. Each website needs to be analysed based on its purpose.

Visit characterisation:

- **Entry page** – the first page of a visit.
- **Landing page** – the page intended to identify the beginning of the user experience resulting from a defined marketing effort.
- **Exit page** – the last page of a visit.
- **Visit duration** – the length of time in a session.
- **Referrer** – the URL that originally generated the request for the current page.
 - o **internal referrer** – a URL that is part of the same website.
 - o **external referrer** – a URL that is outside of the website.
 - o **search referrer** – the URL has been generated by a search function.
 - o **visit referrer** – the URL that originated from a particular visit.
 - o **original referrer** – the URL that sent a new visitor to the website.
- **Clickthrough** – the number of times a link was clicked by a visitor.
- **Clickthrough rate** – the number of times a link was clicked divided by the number of times it was seen (impressions).
- **Page views per visit** – the number of page views in a reporting period divided by the number of visits in that same period period to get an average of how many pages are being viewed per visit.

These are some of the metrics that tell you how visitors reach your website, and how they move through the website. The way that a visitor navigates a website is called a click path. Looking at the referrers, both external and internal, allows you to gauge a click path that visitors take.

Content characterization:

- **Page exit ratio** – number of exits from a page divided by total number of page views of that page.
- **Single page visits** – visits that consist of one page, even if that page was viewed a number of times.
- **Bounces (or single page view visits)** – visits consisting of a single page view.
- **Bounce rate** – single page view visits divided by entry pages.

When a visitor views a page, they have two options: leave the website, or view another page on the website. These metrics tell you how visitors react to

note

A search referrer, visit referrer and original referrer are all external referrers. An original referrer will send new visitors to the website. The visit referrer is for returning visitors.

note

A repeat visitor may be either a new visitor or a return visitor.

your content. Bounce rate can be one of the most important metrics that you measure. There are a few exceptions, but a high bounce rate usually means high dissatisfaction with a web page.

note

For the most up to date definitions, visit www.webanalyticsassociation.org to download the latest definitions in PDF format.

Conversion metrics:

- **Event** – a recorded action that has a specific time assigned to it by the browser or the server.
- **Conversion** – a visitor completing a target action.

Other metrics which apply to digital marketing tactics include:

- **Impression** – each time an advert or a page is served.
- **Open** – each email that is deemed open, usually if the images are loaded an email is considered open.

In order to test the success of your website, you need to remember the TAO of conversion optimisation:

Track
Analyse
Optimise

Now that you know what tracking is, you can use your objectives and KPIs, you can choose what metrics you'll be tracking. You'll then need to analyse these results, and then take appropriate actions. And the testing begins again!

20.4.3 Analysing Data

A number is just a number until you can interpret it. Typically, it is not the raw figures that you will be looking at, but what they can tell you about how your users are interacting with your website. Because your web analytics package will never be able to provide you with 100% accurate results, analysis needs to look at trends and changes overtime in order for you to understand your brand's performance.

How to analyse

Avinash Kaushik, author of *Web Analytics: An Hour A Day*, recommends a three prong approach to web analytics:

- **Analysing behaviour data that infers the intent of a website's visitors. For example why are people on our website?**
- **Analysing outcomes metrics that shows how many visitors performed the goal actions on a website. For example are visitors performing the actions we want them to?**
- **Testing and analysing data that tells us about the user experience. What are the patterns of user behaviour? How can we influence them to optimise/achieve our objectives?**

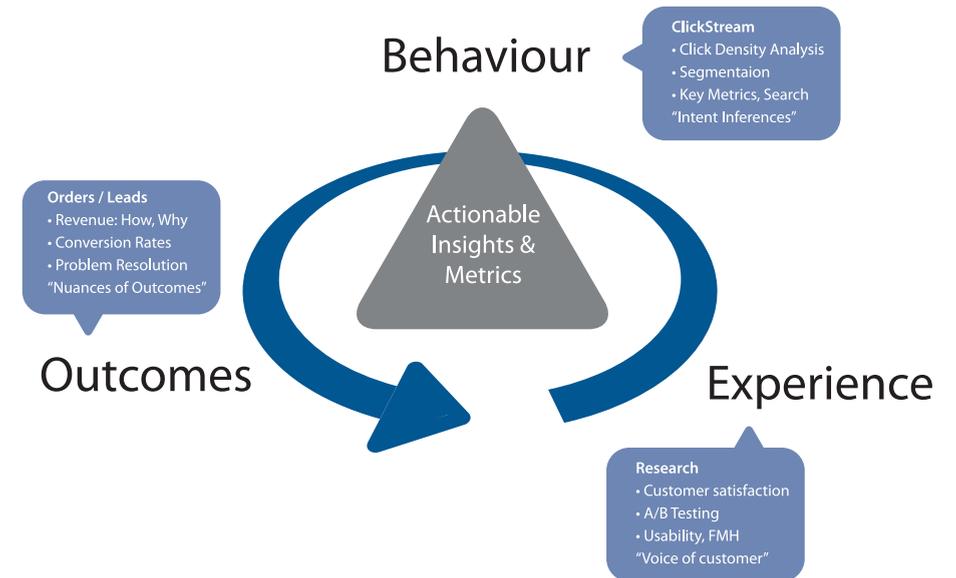


Figure 20.2 Avinash Kaushik's three prong approach to web analytics
www.kaushik.net.

Behaviour data: intent

Web users' behaviour can indicate a lot about their intent. Looking at referral URLs and search terms used to find the website can tell you a great deal about what problems visitors are expecting your site to solve.

Click density analysis, segmentation and metrics that define the visit and content, can all be used to gauge the intent of your visitors.

A crucial, and often overlooked, part of this analysis is that of internal search. Internal search refers to the searches that users perform on the website, of the website's content. While a great deal of time is spent analysing and optimising external search – using search engines to reach the website in question – analysing internal search goes a long way to determining how effectively a website is in delivering solutions to visitors.

Internal and external search data is likely to be very different. Internal search data can go a long way to exposing weaknesses in site navigation and the internal search itself, and can expose gaps in inventory on which a website can capitalise.

For example, consider the keywords a user might use when searching for a hotel website, and keywords that might be used by a the user when on the website.

Keywords to search for a hotel website:

- Cape town hotel
- Bed and breakfast cape town

Once on the website, the user might use the site search function to find out further information. Keywords they might use include:

- Table mountain
- Pets
- Babysitting service

Analytics tools can show what keywords users search for, what pages they visit after searching and, of course, whether they search again with a variation of those keywords or different ones.

Outcomes: meeting expectations

At the end of the day, you want people who visit your website to perform an action which increases the website's revenue. Analysis of goals and KPIs indicate where there is room for improvement. Look at user intent to establish how your website meets the user's goals, and if they match with the website goals. Look at user experience to determine how outcomes can be influenced.

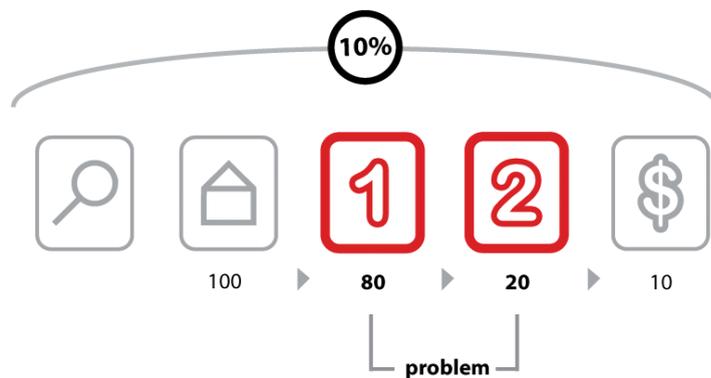


Figure 20.3 The above image shows how analysing each event can show where the website is not meeting expectations.

After performing a search, 100 visitors land on the home page of a website. From there, 80 visitors visit the first page towards the goal. This event has an 80% conversion rate. 20 visitors take the next step. This event has a 25% conversion rate. 10 visitors convert into paying customers. This event has a 50% conversion rate. The conversion rate of all visitors who performed the search is 10%, but breaking this up into events we can analyse and improve the conversion rate of each event.

Experience: why users acted the way they did, and how that can be influenced

In order to determine the factors that influence user experience, it is necessary to test and determine the patterns of user behaviour. Understanding why users behave in a certain way on your website will show you how that behaviour can be influenced so as to increase your successful outcomes. This is covered in the next chapter on *Conversion Optimisation*.

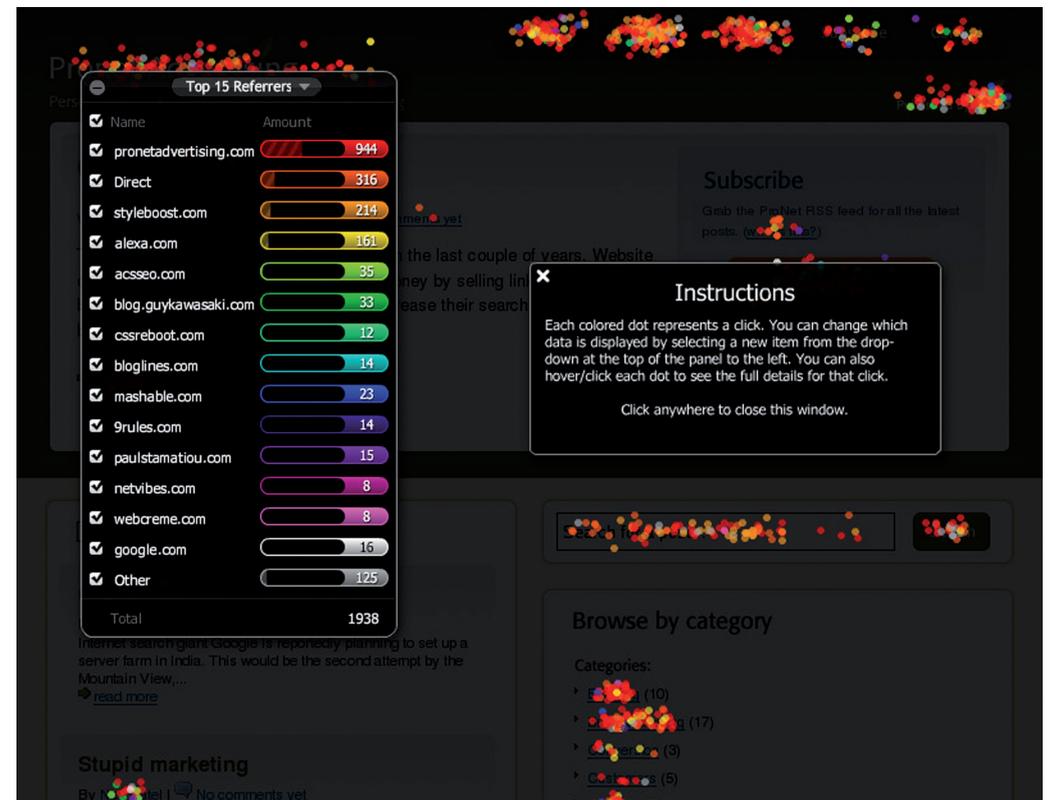


Figure 20.4 CrazyEgg can produce information that will help you understand where users are clicking on your website.

Single page heat maps

Companies such as Crazy Egg (www.crazyegg.com) have software that can show you exactly where users click on a web page, regardless of whether they are clicking on links or not.

It produces information that helps you know what areas of a website are clickable, but attract few or no clicks, and what areas are not clickable but have users attempting to click there. This can show you what visual clues on your web page influence where your visitors click, and this can be used to optimise the click path of your visitors.

There are many factors that could be preventing your visitors from achieving specific end goals. From the tone of the copy to the colour of the page, everything on your website may affect conversions. Possible factors are often so glaringly obvious that one tends to miss them, or so small that they are dismissed as trivial. Changing one factor may result in other unforeseen consequences and it is vital to ensure that we don't jump to the wrong conclusions.

Segmentation

Every visitor to a website is different, but there are some ways we can characterise groups of users, and analyse metrics for each group. This is called segmentation.

Some segments include:

Referral URL

Users who arrive at your site via search engines, those who type in the URL directly and those who come from a link in an online newspaper article are all likely to behave differently. As well as conversion rates, click path and exit pages are important metrics to consider. Consider the page on which these visitors land to enter your website – can anything be done to improve their experience?

Landing pages

Users who enter your website through different pages can behave very differently. What can you do to affect the page on which they are landing, or what elements of the landing page can be changed to influence outcomes?

Connection speed, operating system, browser

Consider the effects of technology on the behaviour of your users. High bounce rate for low bandwidth users, for example, could indicate that your site is taking too long to load. Visitors who use open source technology might expect different things from your website to other visitors. Different browsers might show your website differently – how does this affect these visitors?

Geographical location

Do users from different countries, provinces or towns behave differently on your website? How can you optimise user experience for these different groups?

First time visitors

How is the click path of a first time visitor different to a returning visitor? What parts of the website are more important to first time visitors?

20.5 tools of the trade

The very first thing you need when it comes to web analytics is a web analytics tool for gathering data. Some are free and some are paid for. You will need

to determine which package best serves your needs. Bear in mind that it is possible to switch vendors with log file analysis software without losing historical data, but it is not as easy to do so with page tagging software.

Below are some leading providers:

- Google Analytics (page tagging analysis) - www.google.com/analytics
- ClickTracks (log file and page tagging) www.clicktracks.com
- AWStats (log file analysis) - awstats.sourceforge.net
- Webalizer (log file analysis) - www.mrunix.net/webalizer
- SiteCatalyst - <https://sitecatalyst.omniture.com/login/>

When it comes to running split tests, if you don't have the technical capacity to run these in-house, there are a number of third-party services that can host these for you. Google's Website Optimizer (www.google.com/websiteoptimizer) can help you do just that.

A basic split test calculator is available at www.usereffect.com/split-test-calculator.

Crazy Egg (www.crazyegg.com) is a strange sounding name, but this tool can help you to see exactly where visitors are clicking on a web page.

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Split Test Calculator & Decision Tool

The calculator below can be used to interpret the results of a usability-oriented split (A/B) test. This is a basic scenario where you have two groups of *Visitors* (A & B) who each get to see one version of your website and for whom you track the number of *Conversions* or *Goals* (purchases, downloads, click-throughs, etc.).

Simply enter the number of unique *Visitors* for each group and total *Goals* or *Conversions* for that group below, and click [Calculate] for your results.

	Visitors:	Goals:
Group A:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Group B:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Calculate

This calculator is based on the **Chi-Square** (χ^2) statistic. There are, admittedly, other Chi-Square calculators out there, so what makes this one different?

- Usability-oriented language
- Automatic calculation of Conversion Rates
- Clear explanations of results
- Confidence levels for significant results
- Suggestions for tests that haven't reached significance

If you have any questions or comments, please contact peter@usereffect.com.

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Figure 20.5 An example of a split test tool.

20.6 pros and cons

Tracking, analysing and optimising is vital to the success of any marketing efforts, and even more so to digital marketing efforts. digital marketing allows for easy and fast tracking, and the ability to optimise frequently.

However, it can be easy to become fixated on figures instead of using them to optimise campaign growth. Generally, macro, or global metrics should be looked at before starting to analyse micro elements of a website.

Testing variables is vital to success. Results always need to be statistically analysed, and marketers should let these numbers make the decisions. Never assume the outcome – wait for the numbers to inform you.

20.7 summary

The ability to track user behaviour on the Internet allows for analysis of every level of a digital campaign, which should lead to improved results over time.

The foundation of successful analysis and optimisation is to determine campaign and business goals upfront and use these to determine KPIs for that campaign. Analysing metrics which are not indicators of success will detract from timely optimisation.

Web analytic packages come in two flavours: log file analysis and page tagging analysis, although some packages combine both methods.

Metrics are either:

- Counts
- Ratios
- KPIs, which are either counts or ratios

Data can be analysed to infer user behaviour and intent, outcomes achieved and user experience. Testing to optimise user experience can demonstrate ways to influence user behaviour so that more successful outcomes can be achieved.

Testing is covered in the next chapter and can be performed via:

- Listening labs
- A/B split testing
- Multivariate testing
- One page analytics

Segmenting the audience allows for analysis and optimising for specific groups of users.

20.8 the bigger picture

Tracking, analysing and optimising are fundamental to any digital marketing activity. The Internet allows for sophisticated data gathering, so it is possible to track almost every detail of any campaign.

Most analytics packages can be used across all digital marketing activities, allowing for an integrated approach to determining the success of campaigns. While it is important to analyse each campaign on its own merits, the Internet allows for a holistic approach to these activities. The savvy marketer will be able to see how campaigns affect and enhance each other.

The connected nature of the Internet has made it possible to reach out to far greater audiences, and for people around the world to interact, create and share. The same connected nature is what makes it possible for website owners to track and analyse how users around the world interact with their website, and to optimise it for those users.

chapter questions

1. Why is a “hit” not strictly a useful metric?
2. What would you learn from a single page heat map?
3. What is the difference between a goal and a KPI?

20.9 references

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further reading

- *Web Analytics 2.0* by Avinash Kaushik – if you are looking to get started in web analytics, you can't go wrong with this book by Avinash Kaushik
- www.kaushik.net/avinash - Avinash Kaushik is an analytics evangelist, and his regular insight is essential reading for any digital marketer

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Reviews and Comments

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