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Blue Papers



Google[®] Analytics

Google® Analytics:

You've got an account ... now what?

Are my search engine marketing tactics working?
How can I use my website to best leverage my marketing goals?
What do I do with my web analytics, and what the heck is this graph with all these squiggly lines?
How do I translate it all into news I can use?



If these questions keep you up at night—or at least momentarily distract you from your morning coffee—you're not alone.

Businesses of all industries employ web analytics software and tools in conjunction with their websites. Yet, few actually know what to do with all of the data they have collected.¹

The most popular of these tools (and some would argue the most powerful) is Google® Analytics. In fact, roughly 53 percent of the top 10,000 websites (by traffic) currently employ Google Analytics to track visits and monitor or measure marketing campaigns.²

Among many things, Google Analytics offers basic insights into what most savvy marketing people want to know:

- Who is coming to a website
- Where these visitors are coming from
- When they are visiting the site
- How much time they are spending on the site
- What they are clicking on within the site
- How they are leaving the site



But, those marketers really looking to go beyond the basics stand to benefit profusely from digging a bit deeper and grabbing hold of information for interpretation.

Web analytics don't just offer information on website usage: When used effectively, they also help marketers understand what content and marketing tactics resonate most with their audience. This data can then be used to improve return on investment across all areas of marketing, both on and offline.

¹ "Imagining the Internet." Elon University. Web. 08 Aug. 2010.

<http://www.elon.edu/web/predictions/futureweb2010/future_web_analytics.xhtml>.

² "Google Analytics Usage Statistics." BuiltWith Technology Usage Statistics. Web. 10 Aug. 2010.

<<http://trends.builtwith.com/analytics/Google-Analytics>>.

In this Blue Paper, you'll find advice on how to set goals, develop a strategy for using data, ideas for interpreting data, explanations of top Google Analytics features that go beyond the basics, benchmarking by industry and tips and tricks for getting the most out of Google Analytics. You've collected it all, now put the data to work!

Setting goals

Just like any other business or marketing strategy, a strategic approach to interpreting web analytics starts with goals. The only way to be certain that a website is achieving business and marketing objectives is to set goals and measure them. What's more, not all of the metrics in the Google Analytics dashboard will make sense in the context of all objectives. Defining goals will help narrow the focus of the data. Grab the existing marketing or business plan and develop online goals in tandem with overarching organisational goals and objectives. Then, take a moment to fill in the blanks:

- 1) What needs to be accomplished? Sales? Impressions?
- 2) What role will the website play in accomplishing this? Driving traffic? Delivering information?
- 3) How will it be known online when this has been accomplished? Conversions? Number of visitors? Page views?
- 4) Can changes be made to marketing efforts based on the data that is found?

Often, marketing professionals will develop Google Analytics goals that fall into two very broad categories: Those that aim to monitor or increase the effectiveness and reach of offline marketing efforts (like direct mail), and those that aim to monitor and increase the effectiveness of online tactics (like online advertising campaigns or e-mail marketing). Identifying a category and defining these questions will help articulate the goals for a Google Analytics strategy.

The last piece of the Google Analytics goal creation is about relevancy—pairing a goal with a unit of measurement, similar to these examples:

Goal:

- Increase awareness of product x online
- Increase conversion rates

Measurement:

- Achieve 15,000 downloads of x in six months
- Generate 25% of total business revenue from website sales within a year



- Improve the customer service experience
- Decrease calls to support centres by 55% in a year

Pro tip: While many people opt to monitor goals individually, Google Analytics actually allows you to set certain goals through your dashboard as a way to help make the visual connection between business objectives and website results. To get started, log into your Analytics account and click on 'Goals' in the left hand vertical menu. Then, click on 'Set up goals and funnels.'"



Continue on to select one of the four sets to create your goal in—these sets can contain up to five goals each and are presented in sets so you can categorise what it is you're tracking. For example, if you want to track downloads or registrations as separate goals, you can group them separately as sets. Set 1 would be assigned to up to five pages tracked as downloads while set 2 would track registrations.



Click on a set, name it, turn it on, select a position (it will default automatically to numeric order of creation at the time of the initial goal set up) and then determine the goal type: URL, time on site or or pages per visits. Google defines these as³:

³ "What Are the Different Goal Types and How Do I Create Each One? - Analytics Help." Google. Web. 08 Aug. 2010. <<https://www.google.com/support/googleanalytics/bin/answer.py?answer=148375>>.

- URL destination—This goal lets you specify a page with its own URL as a goal. To begin setting up a URL destination goal, select the ‘Destination’ radio button and then choose one of three options for selecting a destination match (an exact match, a head match where only the first portion of a URL matches, and an expression match for URLs that vary across a site). Then enter the URL. See below:



- Time on site—This goal gives you data about a particular type of behaviour on a site, such as measuring the engagement of a particular page, based on how long a visitor stays on that page. This is helpful in determining the quality of content on a given page. To create this goal, select this option followed by a condition that is either greater than or less than the time on site you want your visitor to reach. See below:



- Pages per visit—This kind of goal type can be valuable for giving insight into how engaged a user is with your site. For example, if you own a catalogue site that lets users click around before they buy an

item, this goal type is useful since you can understand the depth of the visit. To create this goal, select the 'Pages/Visit' option and enter the number or pages that you deem meaningful in the field along with an optional goal value. See below:



Then, for even more precise goals, Google Analytics allows you to set filters that can be used to exclude traffic from specific IP addresses or domains to ensure, for example, that your own visits and the visits of employees are not counted in the Google Analytics report. These filters are set by clicking on 'Filters' on the profile page, just below the list of goal sets.

Progress in these goals will be monitored and displayed on the main 'Goals' page, accessible in the left hand vertical menu on the dashboard.

Developing an action plan

After identifying goals and setting measurements, it's time to connect the dots with a plan and set the plan into action. Ideally, a Google Analytics plan co-ordinates with the overall business or marketing plan, much like the goals that are established. This helps break down the Google Analytics process to look at individual pieces of the analytics pie to determine overall success and effectiveness. (For example, offering different links for different marketing mediums or demographics.)

Google Analytics has myriad features to help do this, but for the sake of Blue Paper brevity, let's focus on four especially helpful options that go beyond the basics and are still easy to understand and implement:

1. Campaigns
2. Segments
3. Search engine marketing considerations
4. Benchmarking

Campaigns

One tactic offered by Google Analytics is the tracking of certain campaigns—either from a specific URL, source, search engine or e-mail address, to a conversion on a website (such as a purchase or registration). Doing so helps track the effectiveness of marketing materials promoting a specific link or the response to an e-mail.

Yes, many e-mail marketing services allow you to track open rates and click-through rates. While this information is helpful, don't you want to know what happens once recipients actually click through to your site? That's where analysing campaigns can be useful.

So how does it work? In a nut shell, each visitor to your site enters via a link indicating where they clicked from, the keywords used (if any), as well as campaign and medium information. This information is based on parameters set by you⁴:

- Campaign source (utm_source)—identifies the source of the click through, such as the name of your e-mail marketing system, like Constant Contact® or a social media platform.
- Campaign medium (utm_medium)—identifies the campaign medium used, such as e-mail or source URL.
- Campaign name (utm_campaign)—identifies the name of the actual campaign, most marketing people tend to use the subject line of an e-mail the link was placed in.



Google Analytics then analyses the link to obtain this information. Information is gathered by a tracking code placed on the code of each individual web page. Google then takes into account the cookies of those visiting the tracked pages in order to ensure that it 'remembers' the original referrer of traffic in order to maintain accuracy in campaign tracking. What's more, campaigns can be fully integrated with goals to easily link established Google Analytics goals with individual campaigns. This is monitored by selecting 'Traffic sources' and clicking on 'Campaigns.'⁵

Segments

Overall, the Google Analytics option for segmentation allows for analysing web data with great precision. It allows you to select what types of visits are to be considered when generating very specific data for an analytics report.

⁴ Forootan, Dan. "MarketingProfs : Subscribe Today, It's Free. Marketing Newsletters and Articles." *MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals*. 3 June 2008. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/8/google-analytics-metrics-track-email-marketing-foootan.asp>>.

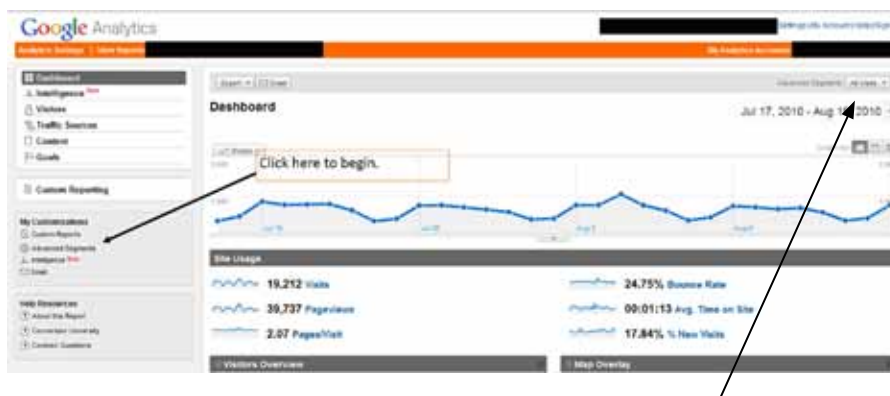
⁵ "How Does Campaign Tracking Work? - Analytics Help." Google. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.google.com/support/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=55540>>.

For businesses with big websites and lots of data, segmentation helps to pare information down and filter it.

If you are looking to find out what return visitors are doing on your site, or whether paid search traffic visitors act differently to non-paid, segmenting will be useful. Google Analytics has a number of default segments that, while broad, can be helpful to get started. Such as segmenting out new visitors, returning visitors, direct traffic, referred traffic paid and non-paid search traffic and a few others. Custom segments can be created in conjunction with the defaults for added power, focusing on just traffic from social media sites or traffic that results in downloads.

As Google Analytics expert and internet marketing blogger, Dave Chaffey points out, branded search terms often dominate the keywords that visitors use to find a website. Usually, they account for more than 50 percent of search-related visits for well-known brands⁶. For this reason, segmenting can also help isolate brand searches, among other things, to truly get a grasp of those that know your brand and those that don't. Simply set up custom segments to monitor traffic from searches, both organic and paid, that include a direct reference or keyword to your brand name.

This can be done through the 'My customisations' link toward the bottom of the left-hand menu on a profile's dashboard:



These are then viewed right on the dashboard via the drop down tab just above the date in the dashboard graph.

Segments are easy to set up—dragging the elements in the green (shown below) and dropping them into the main portion of the page:

⁶ Chaffey, Dave. "Use Google Analytics Custom Segments to Audit and Improve Search Marketing | SEOptimize." Search Engine Marketing & UK SEO Agency | SEOptimize. 4 June 2010. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.seoptimise.com/blog/2010/06/use-google-analytics-custom-segments-to-audit-and-improve-search-marketing.html>>.



Start by creating a new advanced segment, selecting a traffic source dimension—such as a keyword, campaign, or advertising slot—setting a condition, the search dimension (paid or organic), naming the segment, testing the segment and then implementing through the main dashboard view.

Search engine marketing considerations

In order to use a website as a powerful data-culling tool, people have to visit it, which is why search engine optimization (SEO) should be taken into consideration when developing a Google Analytics plan or strategy. It pays to analyse Google Analytics data to fine-tune aspects of a SEO strategy, especially when paid searches and keywords come into play.

For a start, it can be helpful to build custom landing pages that align with specific offers advertised in any paid searches. This is done by looking at the keywords in the Google Analytics dashboard that visitors are using to find your website. Then, consider taking the top consistent keywords and turning them into specific landing pages with adverts to match. Keep in mind that Google Analytics only shows organic search words so it might be helpful to cross-reference these keywords with Google AdWords®.⁷

Beyond this, the keywords or specific web pages people are using to find you, may be indicators of an untapped audience or shift in audience interest. It may be worth your while to integrate keyword monitoring with segmentation too, in order to help focus keyword use in content and marketing efforts based on segments and demographics.

⁷ 3 Google Analytics Tips for Search Engine Marketing | Trada Blog: Paid Search Marketing, Online Advertising and Small Biz." Paid Search Marketing with Trada Is Revolutionizing the Way Agencies, Advertisers and PPC Experts Build and Manage PPC Marketing Campaigns. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://trada.com/blog/2010/07/16/3-google-analytics-tips-for-search-engine-marketing/>>.

Benchmarking

While not exactly part of the plan, if your business is willing to opt-in to share its web analytics data anonymously, another great option for monitoring comes in the form of Google Analytics benchmarking. This shows how your website's statistics compare to other industry data. Currently in Beta testing, Google Analytics benchmarking lets you compare your site's visits, page views, pages per visit, bounce rate, average time on site, and new visits data in comparison with other sites from similar industries that have opted in to the service. According to Google, this enables you to further use data to gain broader context for your site so you can identify additional opportunities to improve your site's effectiveness.

This service is located under the 'Visitors' section of your reports.

Further analysing data

After exploring different Google Analytics options for pursuing a plan or strategy, a gameplan for what to monitor and analyse should also be set forth. Revisit basic metrics and consider warning signs and other activity that should prompt your business to dig deeper⁸:

- 1) **Number of visits:** The number of people who visited your site during a certain time period (this defaults to a month in the dashboard). If you just launched a new site, this number is particularly important but if you have an established site, it is usually more important to see whether this number is going up or down. From a marketing perspective, these numbers should be traced to specific activities to see what is working and what is not.
- 2) **Bounce rate:** The number of people who left your site after viewing the first page – a high bounce rate usually means one of two things – the landing page is not effective or that there is a mismatch between the message on the landing page and the link that sent the person to your site. In either case, a high bounce rate (greater than 20 percent) means that you need to take action.
- 3) **Pages per visit and average time on site:** Pretty self explanatory, these will vary by the type of site your business has. A blog will usually have smaller values, while an e-commerce site is likely to have larger values.
- 4) **How visitors reached your site:** Search engines, referring sites, direct traffic, or adverts, it's important to get a sense of where visitors are coming from in order to fine tune the marketing plan based on what works and what doesn't.



⁸ Lavenda, David. "Getting Started With Online Marketing – Web Analytics – Part II | Fast Company." *FastCompany.com - Where Ideas and People Meet | Fast Company*. 17 Mar. 2010. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/1586722/getting-started-with-online-marketing-web-analytics-part-ii>>.

- 5) **Who your visitors are:** Look at the geographic areas where site visitors are coming from, as another way to confirm that your audience is indeed who you think they are or to identify if there is an untapped opportunity to expand your business.

Once you absorb this information and compile it in reports, you'll be able to begin making changes as necessary. As David Lavenda, vice president of technology company Mainsoft, points out in a recent FastCompany.com article, high bounce rates or low pages per visit can indicate an issue with content.

"This means that people didn't find what they were looking for on your site," says Lavenda⁹. He also goes on to explain that this often happens for one of the following three reasons—AdWords (if using) keywords aren't accurate, messages are not relevant or the keywords are relevant, but your site does not capture the audience.¹⁰

If the problem is that the number of visitors is falling, it's time to make some correlations. Go back and look at when the numbers began to drop off and see if a particular marketing piece or communications message coincides with it. Perhaps a change was made to a link or web copy—seemingly small details that could have big impact.

Top 10 tips of the trade for Google Analytics

As some of the options for Google Analytics are explored slightly beyond the basics, it's important to keep a few things in mind. Consider this list of top ten tips of the trade ...

- 1) **Spend some time with Google Analytics.**

Designate time on a regular basis (weekly, bi-weekly or monthly, depending on the range of goals) to review Google Analytics data and weave it into measurement of overall business and marketing goals. While not all businesses will require constant monitoring of Google Analytics, many will benefit from carefully watching changes in order to identify, and even predict, potential problems or changes in visitor behaviour.

- 2) **Think long-term and all-encompassing.**

Businesses and marketing professionals should approach web analytics with an eye on the big picture. Data is often most insightful when analysed over time or compared with historical figures. Website data



⁹ Lavenda, David. "Getting Started With Online Marketing – Web Analytics – Part II | Fast Company." FastCompany.com - Where Ideas and People Meet | Fast Company. 17 Mar. 2010. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/1586722/getting-started-with-online-marketing-web-analytics-part-ii>>.

¹⁰ Lavenda, David. "Getting Started With Online Marketing – Web Analytics – Part II | Fast Company." FastCompany.com - Where Ideas and People Meet | Fast Company. 17 Mar. 2010. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/1586722/getting-started-with-online-marketing-web-analytics-part-ii>>.

is no different. Change measurements based on goals, but keep some consistency in what is being measured throughout the years. Should your business get a new site or URL, continue to keep the data from the old Google Analytics account profile in order to compare the two sites. In addition to time frame, consider the full scope of business and marketing efforts, and ensure that channels (such as social media and direct mail) and the website are working together to drive traffic and conversions.

3) **Similarly, combine web analytics with other measurements.**

As media impressions are measured, social media engagement is tracked and event attendance is logged, be sure to bring all these indicators of success or failure full circle with the data gleaned from Google Analytics. Doing so will help illustrate the connections between online and offline marketing efforts, as well as add to the visible ROI of a marketing or business plan.

4) **Segment audiences.**

No, we're not being repetitive here. While segmentation discussed earlier was in regard to brand traffic, there are other ways businesses and marketers should segment audiences to monitor and measure. This segmentation is based on demographics such as location and anticipated behaviours of types of visitors, like job seekers, investors, potential customers, readers of your blog and more. Doing so allows for content to be most appealing and effective. In many cases, segmenting is done simply by monitoring pages within a site that are specific to individual audiences.

5) **Sweat the small stuff, sometimes.**

While small fluctuations in numbers like site visitors might not be of concern, sometimes it's the small changes to the site itself that can turn into a larger issue. Something as small as a link change or the placement of an image on a page can drastically change how visitors interact with an individual page. Careful monitoring of behaviour after a change will help a business or marketer correct an issue and gain insight on improvements that could be made elsewhere.

6) **Make sure your team has skills.**

While the basics of web analytics are quite straightforward, the more information a business or marketer is hoping to glean from Google Analytics, the more knowledgeable they or their team must be. "Web analytics require a unique combination of different abilities; this includes an understanding of statistics, business acumen and deep knowledge of digital and interactive marketing," says Aliya Zaidi,



research manager for econsultancy.com¹¹. Sometimes to find this team or individual, you'll have to create it by investing in training and education. There are many companies out there certified to teach the workings of Google Analytics, although some charge a fee. Consider hiring someone to train your staff.

7) **Don't forget about mobile.**

Mobile phones and other devices are fast becoming a common way for many people to regularly access the internet. The thing is, many analytics solutions use JavaScript® page tags and cookie tracking, which most mobile phones do not enable or support. There are ways around this, but it truly depends on the mobile site or mobile accessibility built into a site.

8) **Use Google Analytics to determine the best time to run an advert.**

Some people call this "day parting." Essentially, it's using data to determine which time of day an online advert will get the most exposure or highest click-through rates. Google Analytics offers a great way to monitor this in order for businesses and marketers to allocate an online advertising budget appropriately. Monitoring this is simple: From your profile's dashboard, set a date range in the upper right hand corner. Then, go to 'Visitors,' 'Visitor Trending,' then 'Visit' to click on the 'Graph by hour button' to see the average visits to a page or site broken down by hour, as seen below:



11 "Five Tips for Investing in Web Analytics in 2010 | Econsultancy." Econsultancy | Community of Digital Marketing and Ecommerce Professionals. Web. 10 Aug. 2010. <<http://econsultancy.com/blog/5201-five-tips-for-investing-in-web-analytics-in-2010>>

9) **Analyse, don't report.**

While some people focus on numbers, without context the number of page views to a site or the number of referring links means little. Keep the general idea of this Blue Paper in mind at all times: Business and marketing teams simply cannot rely on an output of data from Google Analytics ... the data needs to be put into context in order to garner valuable customer insights. Leverage the data collected by Google Analytics to improve marketing efforts, increase engagement on a page or an entire site and support overall organisational goals.

10) **Don't forget the human.**

When search engines and keywords are involved, it can be easy to focus content on the robot "spider" instead of the human. While this may help lead people to a website or page, it won't make them 'buy'. Quality content that provides visitors with something useful only helps to seal the deal, and using data to bridge the gap between traffic and conversions will set a business up for greater success.

All in all, web analytics can tell businesses not only how a website is being used, but also help in understanding content, interpreting trends and making correlations. Tools like Google Analytics are powerful, and when you understand how they can help, it's easy to use the data to improve return on investment of the entire marketing department. Go beyond the basics of counting visitors and page views—start making sense of the bigger picture.



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