

One of a series of fact sheets on economic issues for communities

How can I learn more about visitors to my Web site?

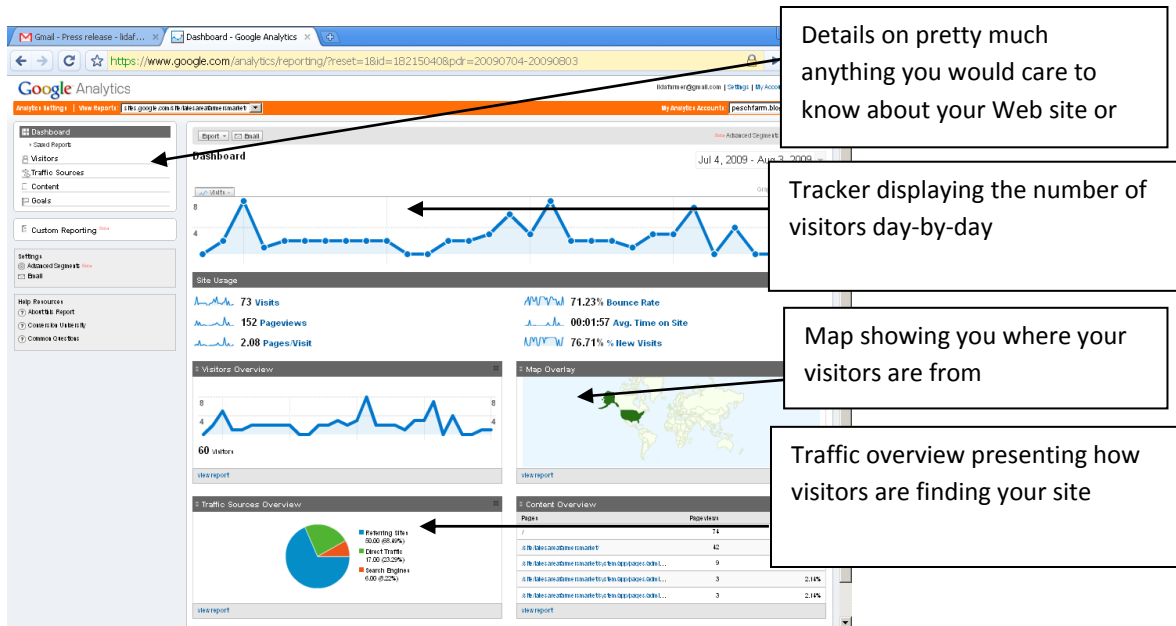
Tip: Use Web analytic software to gather information about your customers and patrons

If you're part of a small business or other organization, you probably know that analyzing the traffic to your Web site or blog is one of the best ways to learn more about your clientele so you can serve them better. But how do you get that information?

The answer is Web analytics—the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of Internet data to help you optimize traffic to your Web site or blog. Even more important, Web analytics can assist you with business and market research to improve your products and services. Web analytics can help you learn more about the visitors to your Web site or blog so you can make better decisions.

There are various brands of Web analytic software on the market today, including Google Analytics, which we will focus on in this fact sheet. We chose Google Analytics because it's free and relatively easy to understand. However, we strongly recommend that you check out other Web analytic products to find the one that best suits your needs and budget. You can find a list on Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_web_analytics_software

What does a Google Analytics report look like?



The image shows a screenshot of the Google Analytics dashboard interface. Several callout boxes with arrows point to specific features:

- Details on pretty much anything you would care to know about your Web site or** (points to the top navigation and report selection area)
- Tracker displaying the number of visitors day-by-day** (points to the 'Visitors Overview' line chart)
- Map showing you where your visitors are from** (points to the 'Map Overlay' showing a world map)
- Traffic overview presenting how visitors are finding your site** (points to the 'Traffic Sources Overview' pie chart)

The dashboard itself displays various metrics and charts, including:

- Site Usage:** 73 Visits, 152 Pageviews, 2.08 Pages/Visit
- Performance:** 71.23% Bounce Rate, 00:01:57 Avg. Time on Site, 76.71% New Visits
- Visitors Overview:** A line chart showing daily visitor counts.
- Traffic Sources Overview:** A pie chart showing the distribution of traffic sources.
- Map Overlay:** A world map showing the geographic location of visitors.
- Content Overview:** A table listing content items and their performance.



Where does Google Analytics fit into my organization?

Although Google Analytics can deliver a wide variety of statistics, you need to focus only on those you need. This requires identifying your Web presence goals (if you haven't already created them), then using the software to track your progress in those specific areas (Inc. magazine, 2008). Start by asking, "What am I trying to accomplish with my Web site or blog?" Your answers will be your goals.

Many organizations have a primary goal to attract more clientele via their Web site, but you might have secondary or more specific goals, too, such as "I want to increase sales to customers from nearby towns." Google Analytics can help, starting with basic statistics on how many visitors your Web sites gets in a day, a week, a month, a year—whatever time span you choose.

Google Analytics also can analyze data at a deeper level, providing reports on which key words visitors use to find your site, the zip codes where they live, which pages they visit the most and how long they stay there. Google Analytics also is capable of analyzing sophisticated e-commerce sites—tracking how visitors navigate the site from landing page to final purchase.

In short, Google Analytics provides valuable intelligence you can use to make changes to attract more visitors to your Web site, and ultimately, more customers or patrons. You need to decide what level of data you need to meet your goals.

Don't get carried away, though. Information overload is a real danger, especially to small organizations with few people on staff. Greg Sterling, an Internet analyst with Opus Research, estimates that less than 10 percent of small businesses check their Web analytics findings due to feeling "overwhelmed" (CRM Magazine, 2009). Even managers of large corporations do not use a majority of the information their Web analytics software is capable of providing (Forrester, 2009). It's best to start slow with Google Analytics, or any other Web analytics tool—use it only to track one or two pieces of information first, then expand your use later.

What are some more examples of how I could use Google Analytics?

1. Detect the effect of advertising

Gauging the effectiveness of traditional advertising (print, radio, television) can be difficult. For example, did your recent newspaper ad draw more customers to your store or was it simply the good weather? Asking customers directly through a survey is probably the only way to get a definitive answer to that question. But Google Analytics can give you some sense of the ad's impact when you



incorporate your Web address into your ad, then check the number of visitors to your Web site in the days immediately after the ad appears.

2. Diagnose Web site usability problems

Organizations and businesses can learn about the quality of their Web sites through monitoring statistics like the bounce rate and time spent on individual Web pages. Bounce rate refers to the percentage of visitors who leave the first page they land on (without going to others). If your bounce rate is high and time spent on the site is low, visitors might not find the information useful or they're confused about how to get to other pages on your site. In that case, you'll probably want to consider changing your content or your site navigation.

3. Inform online advertising

Google Analytics also reports use of Adwords, Google's online advertising system. Adwords, and other online advertising systems, charge on a "pay-per-click" basis. This requires businesses and other organizations to pay each time a Web visitor clicks on their ad. Although this sounds risky and costly, advertisers actually have a great deal of control over the timing, frequency, and cost of their ads. For example, if you operate an ice cream parlor, you can choose to limit your ads only to those visitors who use the keywords "ice" and "cream" and are searching from the zip codes "56572 and "56573." Tracking which keywords are driving traffic to your site and where those visitors live allows you to properly target your potential customers.

4. Identify partnership opportunities

Another important metric measured by Google Analytics is referral page information. This is information about other Web sites or blogs referring visitors to your site. Referrals might come from your local chamber's Web site, a customer blog, or another business Web site. This information is invaluable to forming new strategic partnerships to cross-promote or cooperatively market so all partners benefit. At the very least your business or organization can return the favor to your top referrers by adding a link to their Web sites from yours.

How do I get started?

Erica Akela, Web analyst with Xerox Direct who does Web analysis daily, advises five steps to get up and running on Google Analytics (E. Akela, personal communication, February 23, 2010):

1. Sign up for Google Analytics at <http://www.google.com/analytics/>
 - Create a Google account.
 - Place code on your Web site, as instructed.



2. Verify that Google Analytics is gathering data and that everything is in order 24 to 48 hours after registering.
3. Wait at least a week to gather enough data for analysis.
4. Begin to collect “benchmark” data, e.g., average visitors and sales by day, week, or month, and so on.
5. Set goals to provide a context for the data and take necessary action. For example, if your goal is 3,000 visitors to your Web site daily but only have 500, you’ll need to find ways to increase traffic. Of, if you offer a Web form and discover people quit halfway through completing it, you will need to modify the form.

The support pages for Google Analytics are very accessible. Check out the Getting Started Guide at <http://www.google.com/support/analytics/> to begin exploring.

What’s the bottom line?

Google Analytics and other brands of Web analytics software are valuable tools, many of which are free or low-cost, for conducting business and market research. Web analytics provide valuable information about customers and patrons that businesses and organizations can use to improve their products and services. This fact sheet provides a starting point to using Web analytics software. With your business or organization’s goals in mind, we suggest you learn more about what Web analytics software can do to help you achieve those goals.

References

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