



Making Better Decisions with Web Analytics

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We all know web analytics is important to track website performance. But, how do we move beyond “tracking” to making informed decisions? In order to find answers—gain analytics insights—we need to ask the right questions. Data alone is meaningless. It only matters if it affects decision making and effective change. This guide contains examples of paring key metrics with meaningful questions about web analytics insights.

How do we decide what new content to publish?

Response

Metric(s)

Determine if people successfully find content

Keyword searches

Tracking what people look for on our site gives us insight into what content visitors consider valuable. We can also learn if they find that information or not.

Create content that caters to new audiences

Track referring websites and search engine traffic

Understanding who our visitors are—where they come from—allows us to provide more relevant content.

Create attractive content using appropriate types

Track and compare content types

Monitoring visitor engagement for copy, images, video, Flash and other content types, we can create content in a format that is most effective for the message and the audience.

How do we decide what content to update?

Response

Metric(s)

Determine if content is engaging or confusing

Exit and bounce rates

Understand how visitors value our content by tracking exit and bounce rates. When they land on a page, do they stay and dig deeper or leave because the content was confusing or not what they expected?

Gauge content quality

New vs. returning visitors

Understanding if a visitor is new or returning is a gauge of the quality of the content. If it's valuable, people will return.

Determine if recent updates increase or decrease traffic

Track newly updated pages

When we update a page and include a call-to-action, are people more or less responsive?

How do we prioritize web projects?

Response

Metric(s)

Prioritize updates by greatest impact on web strategy

Site traffic and unique visitors

Understanding where site traffic originates, allows us to set priorities by target audience.

Quickly correct 404 errors and broken links

Files not found (error pages)

Correcting broken links and misinformation is always a high priority.

Publish during peak traffic periods

Traffic cycles

Publish new content during high-traffic periods and design/layout updates during low-traffic periods.

How do we decide what technology to use?

Response

Metric(s)

Optimize site for users' technical capabilities

Technical capabilities

Optimize site based on the technical capabilities of our users, not our capabilities. This includes operating systems, browsers, hardware (desktop, laptop, smart phone), network speeds, etc. Web developers are never the average user.

Determine if content is accessible by our visitors

Flash compatibility

If we use Flash movies containing critical information and a portion of our visitors don't have a compatible version of Flash to see the content, not only do we compromise their experience, but we lose them as a customer.

Determine optimal page dimensions and file size limits

Screen size and network speed

If we publish content that takes users longer than 5 seconds to access, we'll likely lose them. If our pages don't fit users' screens, they are missing content.

How do we decide where to target ads?

Response

Metric(s)

Track volume and quality metrics by geographic region

Map overlay

Identifying promising regional markets will help us effectively target marketing campaigns and site visitors.

Modify campaign target regions by customer interest

Track email campaigns

Tracking email campaigns and tying them into web analytics allows us to substantiate interest by region.

Cater ad campaigns to relevant, high-quality customers.

Track online and offline ads

Track banner ads, as well as print ads, to gauge effectiveness. Then, revise an ad campaign and target more relevant, quality customers.

How do we know if our content is effective?

Response

Metric(s)

Track engagement by our target audience

Average page views, time on site, bounce rate

Track engagement by target audience. If our target audience is prospective students, exclude internal traffic.

Track repeat visits to gauge interest	Visitor recency
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If a page has a low visitor recency, the content is not engaging or relevant or useful.

Cater ad campaigns to relevant, high-quality customers.	Track online and offline ads
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How do we measure success?

Response	Metric(s)
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Track goal conversions, exit rates, leads, subscribers	Business metrics
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Track goal conversions: do people complete an inquiry form, or an application, or register for an event. Track exit rates: Does valuable content end at the second tier navigation, or are they encouraged to dig deeper? Also, track leads, subscribers to RSS feeds, newsletters, etc.

Track repeat visits, pages per visit, bounce rate	Usability metrics
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Track repeat visits: Do people find our content valuable enough to return? Pages per visit and bounce rate: is the user experience positive and enabling visitors to engage?

Track inbound links, Google index, page ranking.	SEO metrics
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Are we attracting inbound links from news sites, blogs, and social media? Is Google effectively crawling our site? Is our content receiving high page rankings? How do we compete on keywords?

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