

Monitoring Web Traffic through Site Analytics

Article Body :

Do you know who is visiting your web site? Wouldn't it be great if you also knew where they were coming from, how long they were on your site, and, most importantly, from which page they were exiting your web site and why? Web analytics software and real time web site tracking solutions have now made it possible for web masters as well as for those companies for whom a robust Internet presence is critical to success, to use this form of dynamic data to review performance, correct pitfalls and plan highly successful online marketing strategy. Let us begin by first exploring site tracking and analysis terminology:

Page Views

You have probably noticed this phrase in online marketing brochures where web sites proudly proclaim the large quantum of visitor traffic they have experienced on their sites. A Page View refers to the total views of every page on your web site. A Unique Page View is a page view by a unique person within a twenty-four hour period. Where as page view counts are site specific, unique page views are visitor specific. Both communicate important information about visitor behavior patterns and provide valuable insights into your search engine ranking.

Hits

The reason why there is some confusion about this term is because it emanates from server technology and not from the art and science of visitor tracking and web analytics. A Hit merely refers to the number of information requests received by a hosting server. The number of hits is determined by the number of objects on a page. For example, if your home page has twenty-one objects, your site hosting server will record the page access as twenty-one hits. A word to the wise... It is best to use this statistic cautiously for what it is worth and not to be misled by inflated hit counts when implementing your online marketing plan.

Referrer or Visitor Source

A Referrer or Referring Link also known as the Visitor Source is a page which links to your web site. By looking at your referrers, it is possible to accurately identify the pages from where your site visitors are arriving. Visitors usually arrive from one of these three sources:

- From another web site that has linked to your site
- A search engine results page
- Directly from a browser launch

Referral data is a gold mine of information because it clearly pinpoints the keywords or key phrases being used by searchers to arrive at your web site and the search engines that are sending you the traffic. You can use this data to conduct more targeted and meaningful keyword analysis, refine existing keywords and submit your site to search engines and directories where you are not listed. This data can also be used to further optimize the content of your web pages for improved search engine rankings (SERs).

User Agent

A User Agent is the software that is used by site visitors to access your web site. A User Agent could be a:

- Browser such as Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox or Safari
- PHP script pasted on a web page that points to your site
- Search engine spider programmed to index your site

This valuable data can be leveraged to precisely identify the last time a spybot visited your web site to index it. You can also use this data to map traffic trends, spot site abuse and trigger corrective action.

Geographical Location

Many web analytics packages and hosted services provide this information using IP look-up technology. They compile data about the geographical location of site visitors as well as the time of the day during which they visit your web site. You can deploy this data to fine-tune your marketing strategy specially in those regions of the world from where site traffic is below average.

There are still other types of traffic intelligence web analytics systems can provide. They include:

- The length of time a site visitor stayed on your web site
- The URL of the page on which site visitors land and exit your site
- The operating system (Windows XP, Vista etc.) and browser resolution settings on the monitors of site visitors

Web Analytics and Improved Customer Service

The manner in which you can use web analytics data will depend largely on your site's functionality and its purpose. For instance, if your site has a customer service orientation and provides live chat support for your customers, web analytics data is critical since it will enable you to further tweak the type and nature of your customer service. This key aspect of the overall customer service delivery process is of paramount importance because customer surveys continue to reveal the general level of dissatisfaction among customers regarding the quality of service on Internet e-transaction sites. According to a Harris Interactive survey conducted in August 2007, nine out of ten customers were unhappy with the type of customer service they received when shopping online. The Harris survey polled 2,430 US consumers aged 18 and older and concluded that most online shopping customers were experiencing significant problems when trying to interact with customer service personnel-- a problem that a live chat solution can address and effortlessly remedy.

In the next issue of Live Wire Plus, we will objectively evaluate some of the leading web analytics solutions to help you select the service or product that best meets your needs.

Information in a Box

Web traffic statistics or web stats, as they are commonly referred to, are extremely potent tools used to generate organic data about web site usage. They provide critical information about which web pages on your web site receive maximum traffic. They also generate statistics on the web pages that attract the least amount of site traffic. Site analysis solutions also tell you who is on your site, how long they were on your site, on which page they landed and from where, and finally, from which page they have exited from your web site. Some of the more sophisticated site analytics packages can identify which web browsers are being used by site visitors and which ones should be optimized for improved results. Since these analysis tools compile crucial data on the search engines your visitors are using to arrive on your site and the keywords and key phrases they are typing into search engine search boxes, these tools can go a long way in implementing innovative marketing strategy for your web site or portal. Some can even check for dead links and send error messages.

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