

Maximizing ROI via Web Site Traffic Analysis

By Lee Traupel

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We are clearly well past the innocent "golden age" of the Internet - Darwinian economics have become the order of the day today. Any company worth their salt must maintain a web site as an information resource and/or to generate incremental ecommerce revenue. Qualified traffic is the name of the game, as it's the oxygen that keeps a good ecommerce web site thriving. Consequently, it's very important to have an understanding of your web site traffic or visitor activity; i.e. baseline information that includes the number of visitors during specific time periods, originating location (domain), where the visitors went on a site and how long they stayed on specific sections or pages of a web site. The de facto industry standard traffic analysis tool application is Web Trends, manufactured/supported by netiQ, Inc., which we will focus on in this article.

Fundamentals and Jargon Watch

All traffic analysis tools rely primarily upon information that is extracted from log files; i.e. files that are maintained on your server which show where a visitor came from, what keyword(s) they used to find your site (if applicable), what Operating System and Browser versions they are using, etc. There are literally hundreds of excellent log file analysis tools that can be located via CNet's Download.com or TuCows - both sites are excellent resources for software and information.

It's critical in today's bottom line business environment to have the ability to analyze web traffic (visitors) and patterns and then integrate this knowledge with your overall business processes - what do you pay for traffic, is it converting (people are buying your goods and services), how long are people staying on specific sections or pages of your web site, what marketing expenditures are working and which aren't!

You know your entering the reality distortion field (we marketing types need to justify our fees & services) and need to raise your jargon filters to stun level when you here and/or see these keywords; i.e. clickstream traffic (fancy way of saying traffic or visitors delivered via mouse clicks to your web site), ebusiness solutions (meaning - selling your products/services via an ecommerce site) or my all-time personal favorite, "ebusiness intelligence" (what's ebusiness and what determines if it's "intelligent").

Traffic Counter Applications

First and foremost, do you really need a comprehensive product like Web Trends (more on the

different applications later) or can you get by with a click (traffic) counter application like the Hit Box? The latter company provides a free plain vanilla traffic counter which can be easily set up in minutes via your web site. Hit Box is a great product and used by hundreds of thousands of web sites, so it may be sufficient for your business, if you just want very basic info ("Page Views and Daily Unique Visitors) and don't mind advertising for another company via your web site.

But, there are some downsides to utilizing Hit Box, you must install their "button" on your Index (home) page and it only provides you with basic traffic information (how much per day with a forecast based on these numbers). You can upgrade to their HitBox Professional which is very similar to Web Trends basic application ("Web Trends Log Analyzer") - but, you have to pay for this service on a traffic basis which can get expensive, depending on your overall traffic.

Web Trends Applications and Interface

Web Trends (the company) was acquired by netiQ, Inc. the parent company about 18 months ago due to their strong market leadership position with web traffic analysis software. Like many good web-focused software companies, netiQ enables you to download all of their apps for a 30 day trial period. Estimates range from 60-80% market share for one of their three primary products; i.e. "Web Trends Log Analyzer," their baseline \$500. USD application which is a good solution for most web sites that have a single domain or under 25 in total; "Web Trends Analysis Suite" (SRP \$2.5K USD), which incorporates the functionality of the Log Analyzer product and adds more features for managing bandwidth usage (interior and external), monitoring and alerting an IT Manager or Department for server related problems and handles up to 100 domains (sites); the "Web Trends Intelligence Suite" is their top of the line product (pricing varies depending on bundled services) geared for enterprise customers, it includes integration and training services for integrating the application with Online Analytics Processing Tools ("OLAP" yes another ebiz acronym) or other types of reporting tools.

We've been using and recommending Web Trends to clients for years primarily because of its interface and functionality. It's a browser-enabled app, meaning anyone with a browser (IE or Netscape) can view reports and data. The reports are presented in a straightforward manner that includes basic pie chart or bar types of graphics - you can easily tell at a glance what your visitor traffic was for a given period, where they came from, what pages they visited and how long they stayed on specific pages. You don't need to be a technologist or a marketing geek to use this application - see below for practical tips.

Practical Usage

So what do you want to measure and what type of custom reports do you want to run once you get the software installed? You will want to measure how much traffic (visitors) is coming to your web site per day, week, month, where they are coming from (country of origin), and where visitors going on your web site; i.e. home page, internal pages and of these what specific pages; i.e. About Us Products, Services your Shopping Cart, etc. Pay careful attention to usage times, how long people are staying on specific pages; too long may indicate they can't figure out your content, or your content is so good its meaningful and educational. For example, if your "White Paper Resource" section is the most frequently visited and the visitor sessions (time elements) are long (2-4 minutes) then this means your content is being well received. But, if everyone is just reading your White Papers but not filling out your response forms then you may need to alter some aspects of your business processes and how you communicate them via your web site.

Web Trends compliments ongoing advertising campaigns and processes - it lets you capture critical ROI ("Return on Investment") information by giving you an accurate picture of traffic and usage patterns that should correlate with what your ad agency or marketing partner is telling you or

confirming with their own reports. For example: If your deploying an opt-in e-mail campaign and bringing people to a specific "landing page" (specific page where people are directed to that may include an "offer") you need to carefully monitor if people are clicking through to the page and how long they are staying and/or going to your shopping cart to purchase a product or a registration fulfillment page. If the session times (how long they stay on a page) are short and people aren't filling out a form or converting (purchasing or taking a specific action) then you clearly have some work to do on your web site content and or business processes.

Lee Traupel has 20 plus years of business development and marketing experience - he is the founder of Intelective Communications, Inc. <http://www.intelective.com> , a marketing services and software company which provides strategic and tactical marketing services exclusively to small to medium sized companies. Lee@intelective.com (c) 2001-2002 by Intelective Communications, Inc. Reprinted with permission from Intelective Communications - this article may be reprinted freely, providing this attribution box remains intact.

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