

"How Ya Doin'?"... or, A Traffic Analysis Primer, Part One

By Loren G. Tindall

"How Ya Doin'?"... or, A Traffic Analysis Primer, Part One

Loren G. Tindall
ltindall@WebMarketingUnlimited.com

Web Marketing Unlimited <http://www.WebMarketingUnlimited.com>

"How Ya Doin'?"
A Traffic Analysis Primer, Part One

So, someone asks you, "How's the website doing?"

There's something very satisfying about being able to tell them EXACTLY how well the site is doing, and supply supporting statistics like:

- How many visitors you have each month
- How much each visitor costs
- How much each visitor is worth
- How successful your selling efforts are
- Where the visitors come from
- What the visitors do once they arrive

As impressed as people will be when you tell them this information, they will be doubly impressed when you are then able to compare these numbers to last month's numbers. Beyond the satisfaction of having these facts available lies the value of applying the information to the decision-making process for your site. Is your site's overall design effective? Is each page delivering optimum results? Are you making money or losing it -- and in either case, it's nice to know how much.

How Much Do You Really Need To Know?

How well you can answer these questions depends on the reporting you get from the folks who host your website. If your site is hosted at an Internet service provider (ISP), you should be able to get a basic monthly site performance report from them. A basic report will list how many hits, page views and visitors your site receives every month.

If your ISP doesn't provide you with a monthly site

performance report, don't despair -- there are ways to outsource this capability. I'll tell you more about these at the end of this article. Although most basic reports don't contain enough information for detailed reporting and analysis, there are alternatives ranging from free to inexpensive to wildly expensive. As you might imagine, the more you spend, the more detail you get. The question becomes, "How much do you really need to know?"

A Meaningless Number

There was a time (1996, if you must know) when you could impress someone with how many hits your web site received in a given month. We now know that this is a meaningless number, since a hit only signifies when an individual file is requested from your web server.

A file can be anything -- an HTML file or a graphic image, for example -- and the average web page can be made up of many files. The page you are looking at now contains at least four graphic images, and when your browser pulled it off my web server, my monthly hit counter was increased by five hits (the HTML page plus the four graphic images), even though you're only one visitor.

To compound this meaningless number, consider that the average visitor will look at a number of pages at your site. For our example, let's assume they look at four pages before they exit your site. If each page contains an average of four graphic images, the average visitor will result in 20 hits.

To use hits as an indicator of your web site's success is misleading -- great, if you want to impress someone else, not so great if you're trying to make an informed decision on how to spend your advertising budget.

Another Meaningless Number

O.K., maybe not meaningless, but page views can be dangerously deceptive at the very least. In addition to hits (or files transferred), the standard ISP report will usually tell you how many page views your site has each month.

As we saw in the previous example, a single visitor can view many pages during the course of a single visit. If this visitor returns tomorrow and revisits the same pages, your Page View total is increased again. Now, obviously we all hope that our visitors will return often -- it increases the chances that they will become customers -- but as you can see, the number of pages viewed doesn't really tell you how popular or profitable your site is.

Popular Software Choices

As I promised at the start of this article, here is a list of vendors who provide reporting applications to help you track and analyze your web site's traffic.

www.WebStat.com

If you look at the bottom of this web page, you'll see that I use this free service. To find out more, just click on the image below.

www.HitBoxCentral.com

This is one of the oldest free traffic trackers on the Web. Their web site is worth visiting just for the marketing and development resources alone.

www.WebTrends.com

Not free, but one of the dominant forces in the field. If you host your own web server, this is the way to go.

In the next installment of this series, I'll cover how to use your monthly traffic reports to optimize your advertising and marketing decisions.

=====
Loren G. Tindall hosts Web Marketing Unlimited,
"A Collection of Practical and Proven Resources
for the Internet Marketing Community"
<http://www.WebMarketingUnlimited.com>
mailto:ltindall@webmarketingunlimited.com
=====

Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)