

Measuring the Effectiveness of Your Website

By Scott Buresh

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Scott Buresh
scott@mediumblue.com

Medium Blue <http://www.mediumblue.com>

Although the number of business-related websites continues to grow at a fast rate, many companies don't realize any noticeable return on their website investment. Often, this is simply because the website does not address the offline goals of the business and because there is no reliable mechanism in place to measure its success. When trying to gauge how effective your website is in helping you to meet your organizational goals, the following three basic questions can help.

What is the goal of the site?

Many companies have ineffective websites because there were no predefined goals in place when the site was made. What do you want the site to do? Sometimes the goal is easy to define. If your site sells items online, you most likely want your visitors to make a purchase. For many other companies that sell services (or high end products that can't reasonably be sold online), the goal is to have the visitor initiate a contact so that the sales staff can attempt to convert them into a customer. The important point is that your website should be more than a static billboard that proclaims that your company is open for business- it should be designed to help achieve predefined goals (and unless the site is strictly informational, this usually means encouraging the visitor to take a desired action). Simply "having a website" does nothing to help your business or your customers.

How many people are coming to the site?

Most site owners have access to traffic statistics, usually provided by their web host. This data is an important part of determining the effectiveness of a site. Without knowing how many visitors your site receives over a given time period, you cannot determine whether your site is meeting the stated goals (more on this to follow). Benchmark data over at least a month is recommended to ensure that you have a representative sample. Ideally, this sample will not be drawn from a period in which the company was doing an unusual amount of offline marketing and promotion, since this number would not be indicative of website traffic for an average month.

How many visitors take the desired action?

During the same time period that you tracked the total number of visitors to your site, you should also track the number of visitors that take the action that you desire. For instance, if your primary goal on your site is to get visitors to fill out a contact form, how many forms did you collect in the allotted period? This number, coupled with your traffic data, forms the basis of your site conversion rate. For example, if you had 1000 visitors over a one-month period, and 10 of them sent in a form, your site conversion rate is 1% (10/1000). It is important to draw a distinction between your site conversion rate and your regular sales conversion rates (unless your site is selling online). Not all people who send in a form, for example, will become customers. However, your site conversion rate

is a very useful piece of data to have, as you can use it to measure the success (or failure) of changes that are made to the site.

Three Quick Tips for Improvement:

1. If your traffic levels are too low to draw any meaningful data, consider launching some traffic-building initiatives, such as search engine optimization, affiliate programs, or pay-per-click advertising.
2. Be sure to make it easy for your visitor to take the desired action from any page of your site. For example, if you want them to fill out a contact form, make certain that there is a prominent button inviting them to do this on each page.
3. Check your sales copy to be sure it also invites visitors to take the desired action. Too often, companies use offline brochure copy on their site without taking into account the unique opportunities that the online arena affords.

Conclusion:

While launching a website can be a big step for any business, it is equally important that the performance of the site can be measured objectively. Understanding the goals of your site and establishing a benchmark from which future success can be gauged is critical to your site's long-term success.

NOTE TO WEBMASTER: the following resource box contains the necessary code to make the links active.

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