

**TEAM REPORT**

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Contents

[Executive Summary 3](#_Toc415725999)

[Introduction 3](#_Toc415726000)

[Team Members 4](#_Toc415726001)

[v0.1 4](#_Toc415726002)

[v0.2 5](#_Toc415726003)

[v0.3 7](#_Toc415726004)

[v0.4 9](#_Toc415726005)

[v0.5 11](#_Toc415726006)

[v0.6 14](#_Toc415726007)

[Technology Stack 14](#_Toc415726008)

[Testing 14](#_Toc415726009)

[Project Future 14](#_Toc415726010)

# Executive Summary

# Introduction

The Loving Paw is a small business dedicated to designing and selling products that will raise awareness about animal adoption. Run by Alexis Enright out of Scottsdale, Arizona, the business sells t-shirts, custom dog tags and other animal adoption related products and donates 10% of the proceeds to the 501(3) non-profit organization Athletes for Animals. The business is run on a user built site hosted on GoDaddy and Alexis designs and creates her products out of her house. In addition to her online orders, Alexis travels the country and attends various pet related events in order to help spread the positive message about animal adoption (as well as sell a few more products). Due to her efforts, The Loving Paw has been steadily growing over the past few years and Alexis is ready to start expanding the business into more professional territory.

The work Alexis needed done stemmed from her lack of technical knowledge when it comes to website design and e-commerce strategies. She has had personal experience with animal adoption and the benefits that it provides and came up with an idea a few years ago of selling hand made products that help support her cause. She donates part of her proceeds to the non-profit organization Athletes For Animals and has been steadily increasing her sales by attending pet adoption events as well as through her current website registered and hosted by GoDaddy. Given the steady increase of sales over the past few years however, she has decided that her current site is no longer enough for her needs and wished to consult with us for a better design and functionality of the site that will allow her to increase both her revenues as well as her voice in the pet adoption community.

Our solution to the project involved doing an analysis of the current Loving Paw website to identify its strengths and weaknesses and use those to develop a new site using an ecommerce service that would allow her to easily manage the site once the project is completed. After researching several different options, we presented her with our findings and recommendations for Shopify, GoDaddy with enhancements or a site design built from scratch. The client elected to use Shopify as it allowed for the most dynamic web site design while still being easy to manage for someone who isn’t technologically inclined. As part of the site design, we also decided to do several marketing pushes for her while using Google Analytics to collect behavior and sales patterns of the site visitors. This would presented to client at the end of the project along with recommendations as to where and how she should be reaching out to new potential customers to both increase revenues as well as raise awareness for a cause that she believes in.

# Team Members

# v0.1

We made contact with Alexis immediately after the group decided on The Loving Paw as our project. We were able to set up a meeting with her the weekend after the project selection. Unfortunately, due to other commitments by both the client and team members, the meeting was only able to last 90 minutes to do preliminary requirements gathering. We sat down with Alexis to discuss what her business does, is it a profit or non-profit organization, walk through her current site, find out what technology she is currently using to register and host her site and discuss further what she was looking for from us.

Alexis’ message to us was that she was looking to start expanding her business from a home garage operation to a legitimate small (primarily) business but that she didn’t like her current site hosted by GoDaddy and designed by her with GoDaddy site making tools. She also made very clear to us that she is technologically illiterate when it comes to designing things online, even with site building tools. On top of this, her site had designed piecemeal using GoDaddy for hosting, WordPress for her blog, and Etsy for her shop. The Etsy shop in particular was frustrating for her because it redirected from The Loving Paw site to Etsy itself which has some stifling policies for growing businesses. From our discussion with her, we determined that what she wanted was a brand new site with professional looking design that has centralized features (i.e. shopping cart featured on the site instead of a redirect), and the same features as her previous site. In addition to this, the site had to be easy to manage and edit for someone who has no knowledge of computer code. Most importantly however, due the small size of the company, the web site needed to be completely functional and ready to use by the end of the semester as there was no IT department that would be able to take what we had completed and improve upon it.

With these requirements in mind, the team sat down to discuss our options. After a robust two hour discussion in which every team member contributed quite a few ideas, the following options were decided on as potential choices for our client.

1. Remain with GoDaddy/Etsy/Wordpress. Though this was almost explicitly what the client said she DIDN’T what, a financial analysis revealed that at the level she was at, it would be the most cost effective decision to stay with the format she had.
2. Sign up for Shopify and let us design the site and site functions for her. This option was more in line with what the client wanted and provides easy to use, “out of the box” tools that would make it easy for the client to maintain and manage once our part of the project is completed. Additionally, the site functions are centralized with many available apps to add additional functionality to the site if she decides upon it later. Though this was the least cost effective option for her at this time, her goal of growing of her business means a site on Shopify will eventually come more in line with her goals if she is able to increase her sales.
3. The third option for the client was to allow us to design her site from scratch. This idea was easily the most cost effective as it would cost very little aside from site hosting and domain name registration and provided the most potential creativity as we wouldn’t be restricted by the paid service site building tools. The risk of this option is that there was no guarantee that we would be able to complete the site with the necessary functionality by the end of the semester.

We presented the clients with this option and after some discussion, she elected to use Shopify for her site hosting and designing needs. This was primarily due to the fact that a centralized site that would be easy to maintain and would be completed for her was the primary goal over cost and potential creativity. Understanding that the project that she needed would be completed relatively quickly, we also decided to start brainstorming ideas for analytics campaigns for her new site to try and provide some extra value to the client for her future endeavors.

# v0.2

Release v0.2 started with us reconnecting with Alexis to get a better feel for what kind of site design she was looking for using the Shopify tools. We presented her with numerous sample sites using Shopify for her to get some ideas for what she wanted to do. She came back to us saying that she wanted a “rustic modern” feel for The Loving Paw that was gender neutral and gave the site a down to earth, natural feel that she felt would appeal to her customers.

We began by going through the ready-made Shopify themes to decide what templates would allow us to meet the goals of The Loving Paw the best. We eventually settled on the “Minimal” theme which initially looked very much like it sounded. We selected this theme as we thought it would give us the most flexibility in deciding how we wanted to style the site. We quickly found out though that though the theme probably has good functionality for some organizations, for us it was just dull. Attempting to add colors or background images ended up looking cheap and tacky. We attempted using the client’s suggestion of using reclaimed woods phots as a background image which did provide quite a bit of aesthetic appeal but unfortunately gave the site a bit of an identity crisis. After several days of working with this particular model, we decided we needed to come up with something different.



Minimal Theme

We ended up finding the “New Standard” theme that seemed to have a little more of what we were looking for, particularly in regards to a shopping cart that kept a running total of the user’s purchases through the entire site. We decided to use a parchment style background to take some of the harsh white glare off of the background. We began work on importing all of the information, products, blogs and inventories from her Go Daddy site to the new Shopify site and tried to style it in a way that would give the site some personality. Unfortunately, despite the better suited template design that we had going, we still couldn’t find a way to add color or images to the site without it quickly becoming over stimulating and gaudy.



New Standard theme

After reviewing the site once the basic functionality was built, we considered attempting to build a theme from scratch using Shopify tools. Because we had encountered at least one fundamental problem using any theme we had previewed or worked with, we thought that perhaps building one ourselves would allow us to create a theme that would exactly fit needs of The Loving Paw instead of just mostly. However, after trying to find ways to recover the time that we would lose with this approach, we decided that it would be too labor intensive and may prevent us from finishing the rest of the necessary work for the project. Though we had concerns about the visual appeal and lack of the material on the site, we decided it was a good Minimum Viable Product to begin user testing and feedback on. Using that approach, we could figure out if our concerns were warranted or if we were essentially worrying about nothing.

It was also in this time period that began brainstorming about what we would want to do for the marketing and analytics portion of the project. We decided to go with Google Analytics as it provided a no-cost, user friendly approach that we could use with (and eventually turn over to) our client. For testing purposes, we put the tracking code into the Shopify site so we would be able to see the results of our upcoming user feedback tests. In addition, a separate tracking code was added to the existing Go Daddy site to establish a baseline metric to work off for comparison when the Shopify site goes live. We also began discussing ideas for email, paid and social media campaigns in the upcoming weeks.

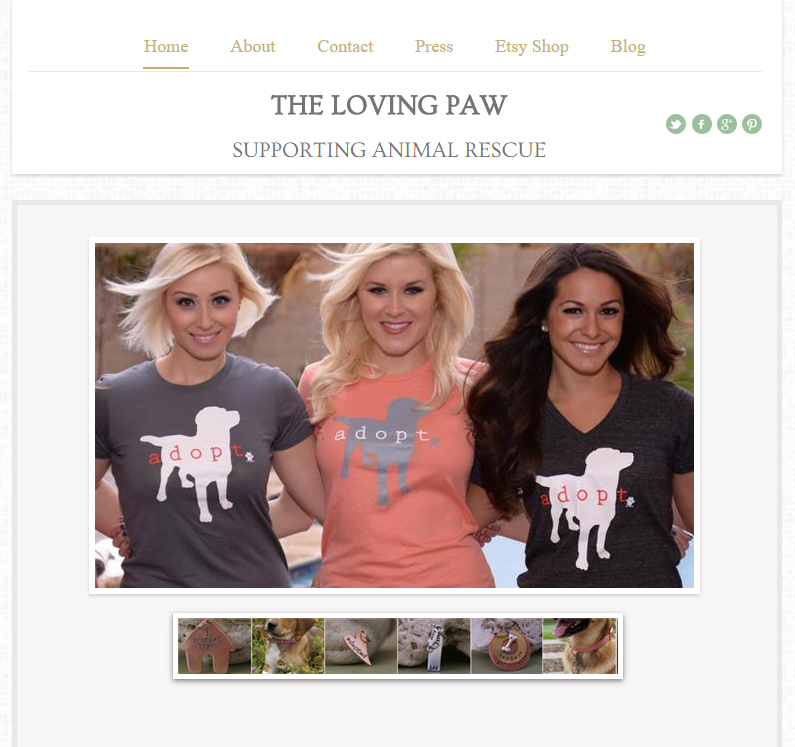
# v0.3

Our plans for release v0.3 were to get client feedback and go live with the site so that we could start Analytics testing sooner rather than later. We ended up starting off a bit rocky however as our meeting with Alexis to discuss her feedback for the initial site design and preparations to move forward was cancelled due to illness. Further attempts to set up the meeting were also derailed as the client’s illness extended into the next two weeks. This ended up being a blessing in disguise though as it forced us to do user testing with random end users instead of focusing on the client. Primarily our feedback was solicited through friends and family who were able to view the site with fresh eyes and offer us insights that might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

The feedback we got was almost universal on both the likes and dislikes of the site. The people that looked at the site enjoyed the navigation aspects of the site, finding it easy to use. This was good for us to hear as it meant we didn’t need to focus as much time on the functionality of the site. Additionally, our feedback sample liked the accessibility and look of the site cart, commenting on the pervasiveness of throughout the site using the theme we had. With this cart, the total of the customer’s purchases would be visible and totaled from any page of the site so they could see what they were going to spend without constantly having to go to a cart page.

The opportunities for improvement we ascertained from our feedback users were even more helpful. The most common comments that we got from people was that the logo and the site itself was bland. Since we had started with a slate colored theme with minimal design additions, we decided that was a good place to start taking a closer look. One of the first things we realized that we were four men attempting to make a site designed for what we hypothesized was a primarily female audience. This led us to taking a different approach by asking what the users thought would be a good color scheme and how would they go about doing it. In addition, we leveraged help from several contacts who had previous web design experience. We attempted to salvage using the theme we already selected from Shopify using the new site color scheme suggestions and logo design, but were unable to as every theme has its own individual limitations. The team then studied new theme ideas that would allow us to achieve the more flexible color scheme and logo design that we desired and eventually selected the “Supply” theme and moving away from the “New Standard” theme. We were quickly able to put together a new site that utilized a nude and maroon color scheme and a logo that we thought would appeal to the customer base Alexis was going for. While we lost the original cart that many people liked, the new cart used an Ajax functionality that allows customers to view their whole order from a pop up screen as opposed to seeing a running total throughout the site. The new feedback that we received from the users that we showed the site to was positive with almost everyone remarking that the new site was much more pleasing to the eye and showed definite improvement in drawing the user in.

The second feedback bit that we got was that people didn’t have much idea of what The Loving Paw is or what they do. The original site had some very basic functionality that we were able to import to the new site with ease, but unfortunately didn’t say much to what the The Loving Paw mission was.



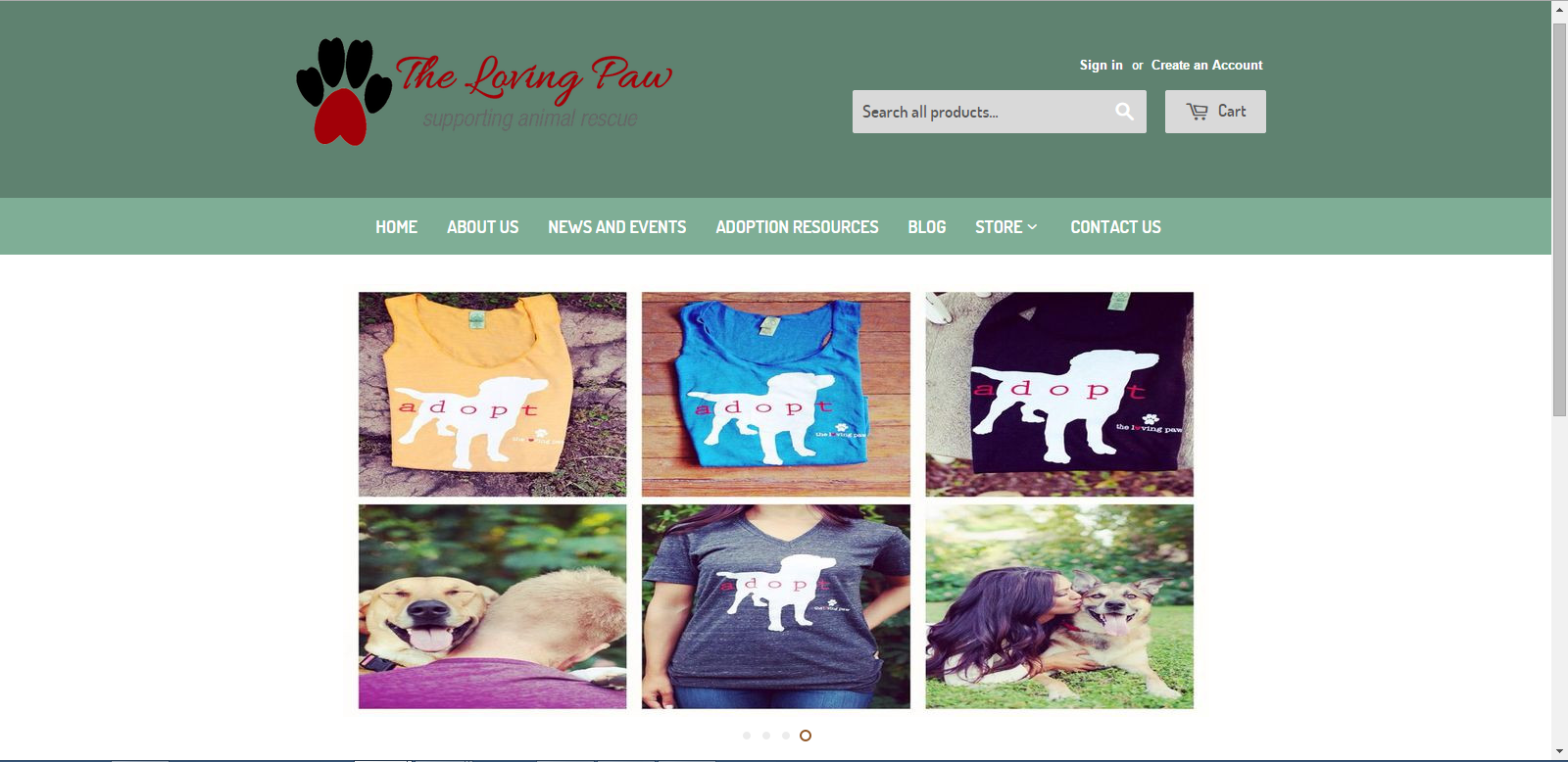
Original site

One of the things that we noticed in getting user feedback was that some people wanted to see more pictures of animals and some people wanted to just donate without buying anything. This led us to the realization that what people were looking for wasn’t an e-commerce site that promoted pet adoption, but a social community site that promoted pet adoption and had an e-commerce feature for users to buy unique products while getting news stories, learning about upcoming events or linking to similar organizations that promote pet adoption. As such we added “news and events” and “adoption resources” pages to the site in an attempt to give it more for the adoption community to experience at The Loving Paw and ideally lead to additional sales rates from satisfied users of the site.

The reaction to the new site designs was overwhelmingly positive with most people commenting on liking the new color designs and site functionality. We decided to use this design to meet with the client once she was back to health and ideally go live with by the next release. This would also allow us to begin work on the analytics and marketing portions of the project that would permit us to begin the validated learning process.

# v0.4

Release 4 saw the project continue at a slower than anticipated pace as the client’s medical condition threatened to sideline her unpredictably for the foreseeable future. Concerned about her health, but also wanting the project to gain some traction back, we decided the best course of action would be to continue the project doing meetings virtually through Google Hangouts. Though this approach would hinder our ability to train the client properly on how to manage and maintain the site once our work was completed, we felt that it was important to make continual progress in order to assess what would work when the site was live and what would need further work. We were eventually able to have a meeting with the client once she was feeling healthier at which point we were also able to get her reactions and feedback about the site as it was. She responded very positively to the content based additions to the site that she felt gave it some additional breadth and created a more robust experience for the customer. She also noted that the overall look and feel of the site was much more welcoming and professional than her previous efforts had been.



Alexis’ criticisms of our design were primarily in the form of the color scheme and the new site logo, which surprised us. The original color scheme we used were shades of red that we felt gave the site a more neutral feel, but the client just didn’t like the feel of them. We spent some time working with her on what she was looking for and eventually decided on shades of blue and green that presented a more calming feel throughout the site, but perhaps went away from the original rustic feel that she had been looking for. Her comments of the new logo were what really surprised us however. Everything we had learned thus far had indicated that site clientele was going to be primarily female and we designed the new logo to reflect that.



Original Logo



Redesigned Logo

The client was insistent that her site had a fairly equal draw of men and women and regardless of that, didn’t want the site to be overly feminine as it would potentially turn away some people who may otherwise be more involved with the site. We advised her of our customer feedback regarding the feedback we had received thus far regarding the logo and she agreed to leave it as it for the time being, but with the option to change it back to the original logo at her discretion. We concluded the meeting with her with several new ideas to work on and some definite direction to move in to finally make the site live for new customers and begin our marketing campaigns.

It was also during this time that we took a look at the project from its inception to the point we were currently at so we could get a proper idea of how much work had been completed. It also gave us an opportunity for us to decide what was and was not working as a team and learn how to be more efficient moving forward. We reflected largely on the organic growth that the project had experienced from an out of the box solution for a primarily e-commerce site to a proprietary/custom coded hybrid site that focused on engaging the animal adoption community through news and opinion pieces that invited social interaction among the participants. The e-commerce portion of the site certainly still existed, but it was no longer the focal point of the site. This would be our approach as we worked towards going live and being our analytics research.

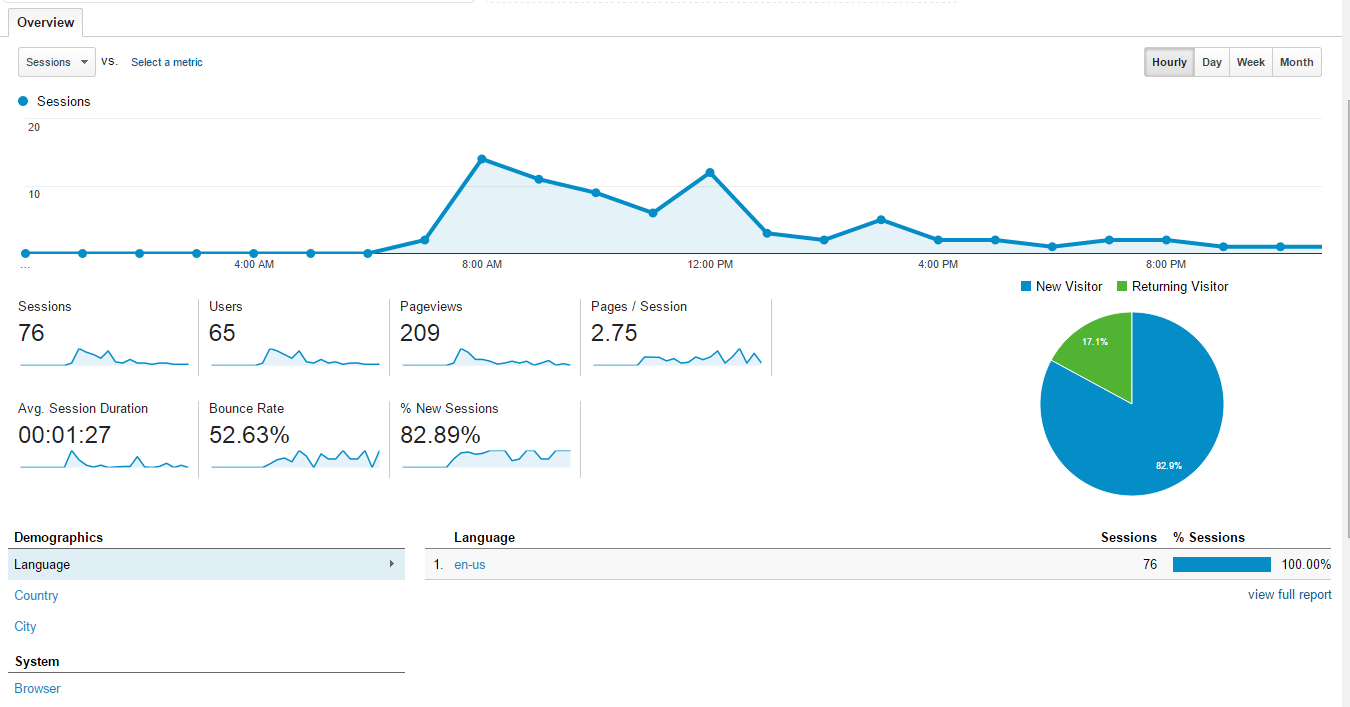
# v0.5

Version 0.5 of The Loving Paw project began with us consulting one last time with our client and putting the finishing touches on the site so we could go live. We were able to import Alexis’ inventory from her Etsy site, which the client also commented that she would like to keep. This posed a potential problem as we did not have access to her Etsy sight to see what was selling and how many orders she was getting from her old store. However, we decided to go live for the new site anyways in order to drive some traffic and ideally raise some revenues for Alexis as well. Finally, after all of the work put in by the team, we went live with the new Loving Paw on March 19, 2015. This involved simply changing the DNS settings on her GoDaddy Account to point to the IP Address of Shopify’s servers.

We had several different strategies we wanted to employ to drive traffic to the site and ideally drive sales up. We had discussed the possibility of doing an email campaign using Mail Chimp, but that idea quickly fell apart when we realized that we had no easy access to a mailing list. Running with the new social theme of the site, we decided instead to focus on social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit. We discussed the order of how we wanted to approach the marketing pushes in a sense of should we start with a smaller audience to slowly roll out the site and identify problems or push to a larger audience to get sales as quickly as possible.

Ultimately, we decided on pushing to a smaller audience to start with as it would give us a chance to identify any lingering problems with the site as well as the fact that the client’s inventory was too thin to handle a large potential influx of orders. The best strategy for this was to push to our personal Facebook accounts. The reasoning behind this decision was that it would be a smaller total audience than some of our bigger audiences and it would give us the most random sampling of people to test our two main hypotheses: that social interest would drive traffic to the site and that pure volume would drive sales up.

We added the Google Analytics tracking code to the new site and all four of the team members put posts up at the same time informing people what the site was and what it was about as well as providing a link to the new Loving Paw. Our first day results were mixed.



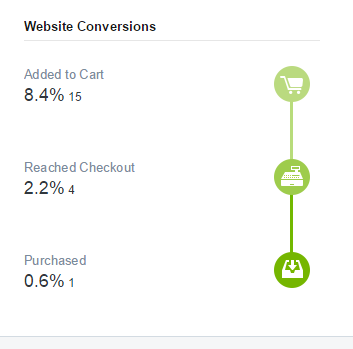
Day 1 Analytics overview

We saw somewhat higher traffic than we had anticipated with 65 users logging onto the site throughout the day and 82.89% of the traffic being new users. The page views per session ended up at 2.75 which about what we were expecting given the limited content. However, the average session duration was lower than we wanted at 1:27 and the bounce rate was at 52.63%. We were able to ascertain from the date however, that some of the site hits were from foreign web crawlers that simply go to the site and then move on. This leads to an artificially high number of users and bounce rate and an artificially low average session duration. We applied a filter to the site to block the most active crawlers which brought our traffic results more in line with what we expected. Additionally, we noticed that people were sharing the site on their own Facebook pages, which led to hits from around the country. Although the traffic was definitely heavier locally, we were able to see people looking at The Loving Paw from over 40 other cities throughout the first week of going live.



First week results by geographic location

While we were excited about these initial results, we didn’t see any initial sales on the first day. Using Shopify’s e-commerce based analytics, we were able to see that a few people had added things to their carts, but abandoned them upon checkout. A manual test of the site turned up that the e-commerce settings were still set to testing mode. We quickly rectified this before our second push and verified that orders could actually be made from start to finish. Upon the second push, we saw similar results to the first push. People were visiting and sharing the site with some people adding items to their carts, but no one actually buying. This was rather discouraging and made us start leaning towards invalidating our second hypothesis that volume would drive sales. However, we theorized that this may be due to the fact that most of the site visitors were probably friends and family that didn’t have much interest in buying pet adoption products. With one partially validated and one partially invalidated hypotheses, we could redirect our coming marketing pushes. We would continue to use social media platforms but with a more pointed approach towards finding people that more directly interested in pet adoption and rescue. Additionally, future campaigns would be more aggressive, perhaps with daily postings instead of once or twice weekly.



First week E-commerce results using Shopify Analytics

While we had been sharing these results with our client, we didn’t hear much back until the first week of the marketing pushes was done at which point we were informed that she had a seen a surge in her Etsy store sales over the previous week. Because we weren’t given access the Etsy store, our data for those sales was limited, but we were able to match at least a few of the sales to our marketing pushes. This meant we would have to again redirect our line of thinking. We decided to still go towards the pet adoption crowd as the products we were trying to sell appealed to a niche market, but we would perhaps be a little less aggressive and carefully monitor the site activity and sales to make sure that the client didn’t not get overwhelmed with orders that could potentially cause stock outs or unfulfilled orders for any reason.

# v0.6

# Technology Stack

# Testing

# Project Future