The way tools are chosen at the moment is through a extensive process that usually looks like this:

1. Collect all the business requirements (goals, strategy, KPI's, reports, reporting schedule and so on)
2. Collect all the technical requirements (site architecture, servers, scripts, pages, IT needs and so on)
3. Ensure that anyone who could ever need any kind of access to any kind of web data is contacted (inside and outside the company) and their needs documented
4. Put all of above into a RFP (Request for Proposal), and add vendor financial stability, references, etc into the requirements
5. Send to vendors, set a very aggressive reply schedule
6. Receive RFP’s
7. From those weed out the “insignificants”
8. Selection of one vendor that meets the requirements by a esteemed committee
9. Implement (champagne celebration included)

What’s the best practice for selecting a Web site analytics tool?  Clearly define your needs before you begin reviewing tools and interviewing vendors.

**Define needs.**

Resist looking at the features offered by various tool solutions until you’ve defined your needs.  Understand first what’s important for your organization’s Web analytics effort.

We’ve grouped the factors that affect Web analytic tool selection into six (6) main categories.  Use these questions as triggers to get you started in developing your own evaluation criteria.  Not all of these factors apply equally to all Web analytics projects.  And you might think of more factors to consider specific to your situation:

1. **Business needs.**  You’ve already identified your Web site analytics *business* measurement goals and received executive commitment for Web analytics.  Now it’s time to think at a more granular level, drilling down beneath high level business goals.   Exactly what is it you need to measure and improve?  Content conversions, search engine marketing, email conversions or online buying?  Do you have to track forms or downloads?  Is real-time access needed to detailed data or will you be circulating periodic, summarized reports? Who do you need to send reports to, and how often?  What will they do with these reports?  Do you have partners, distributors or affiliates who need information?  How important is accuracy? What are your future needs?
2. **Availability of business resources.**  What’s your total budget?  How many staff do you have to handle analysis of the data from a *business* point of view?  Because data that isn’t analyzed or circulated on a timely basis is of limited value, staffing is very important.  If you’re short on in-house business analysis resources, look for tools that are easier to use, intuitive, require minimal start-up training, have strong vendor start-up support, or a pool of vendor or third-party consulting services for ongoing analysis.
3. **Web site technical architecture.**  Is your Web site static or are the pages dynamically generated by a database or other content management system (CMS)?  Do you have a lot of flash-only pages, videos, modal windows, sliders or other rich media? Will you be using tag management?  Will your company’s firewall block or allow hosted server scripts?  Are there multiple sub-domains, third-party applications providers?
4. **Availability of internal technology support.**  Some tools require more technology start-up or maintenance support than others.  Understand the difference in support requirements and capabilities for installed software and hosted applications.  Both options require some technical support for installation and troubleshooting.   Additional hardware, firewall modifications, Web page redesign or CMS changes may be required.  The availability and capability of internal support may influence which tool will deliver the best outcome for your project.
5. **Level of vendor support required.**  How much support will you need during the tool evaluation phase, start-up and maintenance?  Is there a downloadable evaluation version or hosted demo available for a trial period?  Verify if start-up or maintenance support is part of the package or incremental.  What amount of technical support and problem response will you need?  Is ongoing or more advanced training available?  Is training available online anytime or periodically in person?
6. **Linkages to other information data sources.**  Does your organization have a business intelligence or business data warehouse application?  You may have to integrate Web analytics data with these data sources to generate meaningful recommendations.  This is an advanced analytics requirement but one that requires careful consideration if it’s a significant key to successful measurement in your organization.

**Assess Web analytics tools based on needs.**

Although consolidation amongst Web analytics tool vendors continues, there are still plenty of options.  Common vendors are Omniture (Adobe Analytics), IBM (previously Unica & Coremetrics), WebTrends, AT Internet and Google.  Having identified your organizational needs, you are ready to assess these five (5) basic aspects for the tools you are considering:

* **Type of application.**  Is the application tool a server-side installed software, a hosted application, or a hybrid?  (See sidebar on the right for definitions)  How easily can be be deployed with 3rd party tag management tools or will you be using that vendor’s CMS?
* **Reporting capability.**  Availability of reports, ease of customization, ability to automate report distribution, ease of data integration with other sources, search engine marketing tools, email service providers and online advertising campaigns.
* **Scalability.**  For future expansion and growth, in the foreseeable future.
* **Total cost.**  In addition to initial software purchase cost or hosted analytics set-up, include installation, training, support, maintenance and hardware.  If your organization seeks a proof of concept trial, be sure to include this cost.
* **Vendor track record.**  For reliability, support and service.  If your project has complex or unusual needs, ask to speak to references for similar implementations.

When assessing reporting capability, a great way to descend from the hypothetical into reality is to have some specific analysis scenarios ready.  To construct these scenarios:

* Think about at least three actual situations where you’ll have to deliver analysis to staff and managers at different organizational levels.
* Identify specific types of campaigns (e.g. PPC, email, banner ads…) or geography or content areas that may require analysis.
* Identify some KPIs you’ll have to report on and analyze.
* Brainstorm some questions the people you are reporting to will ask you once they see the numbers.  What kind of drill down will you need to be able to answer their questions?

Use these scenarios when discussing with web analytics vendors what their product can specifically do for you.  And then use these scenarios again to put the web analytics tool finalists to the test when you do a proof of concept trial.

Some trade-offs will be necessary.  But having taken the time to think through what will drive success in your Web analytics project, you are well positioned to make informed trade-offs and select the best fit solution for your organization.

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| **Definitions of Data Sources and Types of Analytics Tools** |

**Logfile:**  Traffic data is collected on your web servers or your Web host’s servers.  All activity is logged, regardless of whether it is by Web bots or humans. Also referred to as server-side data collection.

**Page Tagging:** Web pages or elements are ‘tagged’ with JavaScript data collection code. Traffic data is then collected by the code deploying when a page is viewed by a browser.  Also referred to as client-side data collection.

**Server-side Software:** Web analytics reporting tool available as a piece of software. Processes your website server’s logfiles into more usable and useful reports.

**Hosted application:**  Web analytics data is collected by software on Web computer servers “hosted” by the Web analytics vendor.  Your Web site pages, images or forms are coded with a *page-tagging* script.  When the page is viewed, traffic information is sent to vendor’s servers.

**Hybrid:**  Typically an installed software application, with additional page-tagging scripts provided by the vendor.  Client-side data collection, in addition to logfiles, are stored on your Web servers.

**Establishing Streaming Data Quality**

As businesses continue to consume large amounts of data, they should place a greater emphasis on ensuring the accuracy and reliability of data quality. To create consistent, complete and relevant streaming data messaging, organizations should follow nine critical steps to ensure data integrity throughout the life cycle of streaming data.

1. Establish data quality rules at the source to confirm data integrity.

2. Conduct in-line checks to guarantee that the data complies with standards and is complete. Certify counts and amounts, and recognize patterns and threshold violations in real time.

3. Detect and eliminate duplicate messages.

4. Verify the timely arrival of all messages. Confirm that messages were aggregated and transformed correctly, and certify that the appropriate consumers received the messages.

5. Reconcile and validate all messages between producers and consumers to ensure that data hasn't been altered, lost or corrupted.

6. Conduct data quality checks to confirm expected data quality levels, completeness and conformity.

7. Monitor data streams for expected message volumes and set thresholds.

8. Establish workflows to route potential issues for investigation and resolution.

9. Monitor timeliness to identify issues and ensure service-level agreement (SLA) compliance.

The power and potential of streaming data to support the growing volumes of information and improve operations industrywide is driving businesses to event-driven architectures en masse. Automated data quality capabilities are necessary for companies to adopt before implementing messaging platforms because traditional, manual-based data integrity checks will fall significantly short in a streaming data world.