Title:
7 Easy Secrets to Understanding Web Statistics

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Summary:
Don't be confused by the huge amount of data in your web statistics log. Here is a brief explanation of what to look for...

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Article Body:
Understanding what your visitors do on your site is crucial information. If your visitors proceed to purchase a product but then a large majority leaves the site when they get to a specific page in the order process, you need to know about it. It could be that this page is confusing or hard to use. Fixing it could increase your sales by 200%. This is just an example; there are many reasons why you want a detailed analysis of your site visitors.

Most website hosting services offer a stats package that you can study. If you're not sure where this is, call up your hosting service and ask them. Statistics are a vital part of tracking your marketing progress. If you don't have access to website statistics get a package that can help you in this area. Do not get a counter that simply shows how many visitors you've had. You'll be missing out on vital information that can help strengthen weaknesses in your site.

A good website hosting service offers traffic logs that provide an invaluable insight into the traffic being referred to a web site from various sources such as search engines, directories and other links.

Unfortunately traffic tracking provided by web hosting services is often in the form of raw traffic log files or other difficult to understand cryptic formats. These log files are basically text files that describe actions on the site. It is literally impossible to use the raw log files to understand what your visitors are doing. If you do not have the patience to go through these huge traffic logs, opting for a traffic-logging package would be a good idea.

Basically, two options are available to you and these are: using a log analysis

package or subscribing to a remotely hosted traffic logging service. A remotely hosted traffic logging service may be easy to use and is generally the cheaper option of the two. WebTrends Live and HitsLink are two good, remotely hosted, traffic-monitoring services worth considering. However, WebTrends Live is a more complicated system and is suitable for larger ecommerce websites. "SuperStats" is another recommended traffic logging service.

These services do not use your log files. Typically a small section of code is placed on any page you want to track. When the page is viewed, information is stored on the remote server and available in real time to view in charts and tables form.

Log analysis packages are typically expensive to buy and complex to set up. Apart from commercial packages there are also some free log analysis packages available, such as Analog.

A good traffic logging service would provide statistics pertaining to the following:

1   How many people visit your site?
2   Where are they from?
3   How are visitors finding your site?
4   What traffic is coming from search engines, links from other sites, and other sources?
5   What keyword search phrases are they using to find your site?
6   What pages are frequented the most - what information are visitors most interested in?
7   How do visitors navigate within your web site?

Knowing the answers to these and other fundamental questions is essential for making informed decisions that maximize the return on investment (ROI) of your web site investment.

The most important aspect of tracking visitors to your website is analyzing all the statistics you get from your tracking software. The three main statistics that will show your overall progress are hits, visitors and page views. Hits are tracked when any picture or page loads from your server on to a visitor's browser. Hits, however, can be very misleading. It is quite an irrelevant statistic for your website.

The statistic that is probably the most important for a website is Page Views/Visitors. This gives you a good indication of two things. First, how many people are coming to your site, and secondly how long are they staying on your

site. If you have 250 visitors and 300 page views you can figure that most visitors view one page on your site and then leave. Generally, if you're not getting 2 page views per visitor then you should consider upgrading your site's content so your visitors will stay around longer.

If you see the number of visitors you have increasing as well as the number of page views per visitor increasing then keep up the good work! Always look for this stat as an overall barometer of how your site design is going and if your marketing campaigns are taking hold.

Also, a good stat to look for is unique visitors. Once a person visits your site they will not be added to the unique visitors' category if they visit again. This is a good way to track new visitors to your website.

Page views are a good indication of how "sticky" your website is. A good statistic to keep is Page Views divided by the number of Visitors you have. This statistic will give you a good idea if your content is interesting and if your visitors are staying on your site for a long time and surfing.

Some people are intimidated by web traffic statistics (mostly because of the sheer volume of data available), but they shouldn't be. While there are many highly specialized statistics that can be used for more in-depth web traffic analysis, the above areas alone can provide invaluable information on your visitors and your website performance. Remember- this data is available for a reason. It's up to you to use it.