

How can something free be so good?

We're all familiar with the term - location, location, location. Why? Simply, because location is so vitally important to the resale value of property. However, when it comes to your own marketing, the most important factor is that every marketing initiative must produce an acceptable return on investment. It could therefore be argued that the three most important factors about marketing are - measurement, measurement, measurement. With so much marketing now done online it is vital that anyone who takes their web based marketing seriously needs to be able to measure the effectiveness of their website. These days, just knowing the number of hits the website receives simply isn't enough.

Some good news!

Google Analytics is a supremely effective tool for measuring a website's activity. And even better news - it's absolutely FREE! So how does it work? Well, the first thing you need to do is attach some very specific "html" code to each page of your website. Again, the good news is that Google will have automatically written the code for you when you sign up to use the service, and they'll give you all the instructions required to insert it. (Your webmaster can do this very easily) To access Google Analytics just visit Google as if you were about to do a web search and select "Business Solutions" from the menu below the search box. Then select "Analytics" from the options on the next page you are taken to. Once you select Analytics the system will take you step by step through the setting up process.

What does Google Analytics tell me?

Once you have set up your free account you can start analysing the data Analytics generates for you. The data is updated every day and you will be taken to your home page each time you log on. It is possible to manage several websites simultaneously within Google Analytics. All the websites

you manage will be listed on the home page. By selecting "view reports" you will be taken to your "dashboard". We do not have the scope within this article to cover all the functionality of Google Analytics but we can provide a flavour of its power.

The Dashboard

The dashboard is where you choose what you want to view immediately you select "view reports". The default provides the following information:

- **Site Usage** – A graph that shows you day by day the total number of hits the website has received. Below the graph, five other options can be chosen – total number of pages viewed, average number of pages viewed per visit, bounce rate (the percentage of people who left the site from the same page they entered the site without visiting any other pages), the average time each visitor spent on the site and the percentage of people who visited the site for the first time. All that information in itself is very powerful, but as you'll discover there is a great deal more to come.
- **Visitors Overview** – This provides information regarding the unique visitors your site receives as opposed to total hits.
- **Map Overlay** – Want to know where your website visitors come from? Well this feature gives you that information. You can drill down by country, town and get data about each town, similar to that outlined in "site usage" above.
- **Traffic sources overview** – This element provides information on how your visitors arrived at your site. Was it direct traffic (those that type your web address into the address bar), search engines (and it tells you which ones) or from referring sites. This last one is especially important. The more sites that are linked to your site the more important Google considers your site. Think about all the sites that you have visited that offer you a download as a PDF (portable document format) file. Adobe are the creators of PDF files and as Adobe Acrobat Reader is used to read these files many sites provide a link to Adobe's website where the free Acrobat Reader software

can be downloaded. Adobe therefore have millions of referring sites across the Internet, making them a very important site as far as Google are concerned. Also within this section Analytics will tell you the keywords used, by those visitors that used a search engine, to find your site. This is invaluable data when trying to optimise your site for search engine visibility.

- **Content Overview** – This section provides deeper analysis on which specific pages have been visited. Look for the pages that have very high bounce rates and short periods of time spent on them. This may suggest that the visitor is not finding the page of interest – time for some action to help boost its ratings!

As we have already seen the default dashboard is a gold mine of useful information about what is happening on your website. However, other aspects of website activity may be more important to you. As Google recognise this fact they have structured Analytics to provide you with a dashboard that can be customised. You can therefore add elements from the following categories to make up your own bespoke dashboard:

- Visitors
- Traffic Sources
- Content
- Goals

The above categories provide further drill down capability so let's look at a couple of examples from each.

Visitors

- *Loyalty* – This provides information about how regularly visitors visit your site. For example it will tell you such things as the percentage of all visitors that have visited your site, say, between 15 and 25 times.
- *Bounce rate* – Bounce rate is the percentage of visitors that exit the site without looking at any more pages. In essence they look, don't

see immediately what they want, and leave. (Note: The final article in this series will look at how to reduce bounce rates – amongst a host of other useful tips) If you want to know which days of the week your bounce rate is low or high, this graph will tell you both the good news, and the bad news. Useful when comparing specific campaigns that are geared to driving visitors to your site.

Traffic Sources

- *Keywords* – It is not only important to know which keywords create traffic to your site, but it is especially important to know which keywords get the lowest bounce rates, longest times on site, most pages visited etc. By using this information you can develop a more effective keyword strategy.
- *Search Engines* – In the previous article we mentioned that 80% of all searches in the UK are done using Google. If **all** your search engine traffic comes via Google it might suggest that your website is not optimised sufficiently well towards other search engines.

Content

- *Top Exit Pages* – If your home page is the top exit page then maybe now is the time to look at the relevance of the content of your home page. Visitors will leave if they can't see what they want. This section will also tell you what percentage of visitors leave each page. Remember you should be working towards a website that engages visitors and keeps them on your site rather than looking elsewhere.
- *Site Overlay* – Using this feature is great for seeing how effective the links are on your site. It will show you, using your site on screen, the links visitors use when navigating your site. Great for helping to improve the layout of the site.

Goals

- *Conversion Rate* – If you want to know how many visitors you converted into online sales then conversion rate does it for you. (Note: You will need to add additional html coding to your site to take advantage of this function.)
- *Funnel Visualization* – This feature tracks where the customers entered your site and where they left it, if they didn't make a purchase.

So that is a quick guide to some of the functionality of Google Analytics. It's intuitive, it's powerful, it will add value to your web marketing initiatives and above all else – it's FREE!

One final point – you should use Google Analytics to track how you your visitors get to the site and use the site. Don't corrupt your data with activity from internal laptops and PCs. Make sure you use the Analytics filter to ensure that internal visits to your website are not included in your data collection. Each computer attached to the Internet has its own IP (Internet Protocol) address. If you wish to know the IP address of each computer then log on to www.whatismyip.com and it will provide you with the number, which is supplied in four blocks, such as: 123.45.67.255

following format: 123\.45\.67\.255

This process should be done for each computer connected to the internet.

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