



Analytics

If your business doesn't have the budget for web analytics, decipher the data produced by Google Analytics and Microsoft Gaineau

Web analytics on a budget

Web analytics for small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) is a bit like maintaining a garden: you do a little and do it often. This is different to enterprise-level analytics, which should be done a lot and all of the time, and tends to be a shade more complex due to the volume and variety of data sources.

Running a standalone project for improving a website every six months is the equivalent of blitzing the flowerbed, then coming back to find that the weeds have taken over. Regular insight and tweaks to the online presence (the site and marketing) will ensure that performance continues to improve and problems don't go undetected.

Understandably, SMBs always have an eye on cost and are reluctant to shell out on a paid-for web analytics solution. Installing Google Analytics or Microsoft Gaineau, which is currently in beta testing, should be automatic. Both products are free and Gaineau is likely to provide further stimulus to product development at this end of the market. Making sense of the data is where the investment should occur. Small and mid-sized businesses are nimble, and they can take advantage of this by putting themselves in a position where they can react quickly to changes in performance.

In the world of web analytics, it has been said that 2007 is the year of the executive dashboard.

In a small organisation, a dashboard can facilitate that nimbleness I mentioned, but how do you set one up? In a nutshell, you clarify objectives for the site. Next, you identify corresponding key performance indicators within the web analytics data. This will probably include metrics such as bounce rate, PPC campaign conversion, overall site conversion and entry pages split. Now set up the performance dashboard and trend the data. This will draw all the most important data together in one place, and it enables the analyst to look at it in context. The dashboard becomes the starting point from which site performance can be benchmarked and action can be stimulated.

Spending a few hours each week looking at the data can be enough to identify potential issues or scope for testing and improvement, using Google's free page optimiser tool, for example. Making sense of the data will require someone who knows their way around it or is prepared to learn, and this is where the investment comes in. If none of this appeals, you can always cross your fingers! ●

Hugh Gage is an independent web analytics and usability consultant, and author of the Good Behaviour blog (www.engage-digital.com). He works with businesses to help improve online marketing and website performance.

Q&A

Name Ian Thomas
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.net: How will Gaineau affect the analytics marketplace in the UK?

IT: We're hoping that our entry will prove a valuable complement to existing products in the market and provide some fresh ideas. The introduction of another high-quality free tool will raise the bar for other web analytics solutions, too.

.net: What are the key features of Gaineau?

IT: One of the features we're most excited about is the ability to break down your site's users by demographic segment – so, for example, you'll be able to see if men are more likely to make a purchase than women. This will be out-of-the-box functionality, something you can't do with any other web analytics tool. We'll also be providing analysis of the effectiveness of online marketing campaigns, with some innovative visualisation capabilities, too.

.net: How will it add value to SMBs?

IT: Historically, the ability to access quality demographic information about your web audience has been limited to "enterprise-level" web analytics tools, which require a lot of money and time to set up. Gaineau will bring this information to smaller organisations with limited budgets.

Statistics: The likes and dislikes of online shoppers

I am more likely to buy on a site that offers more interactive and engaging features*
Pop-up details: 82%
Easy "add to cart": 70%
Better imagery/more product detail: 68%
Pageless checkout: 64%
Mix-and-match product comparison: 47%

When I have a frustrating shopping experience online...
I'm less likely to return to that site: 82%
It harms my overall impression of that retailer: 55%
I'm less likely to shop at that retailer: 28%

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* Respondents were asked to rate their likelihood to buy from a site that offers interactive features on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The numbers reflect the percentage of respondents who selected four or five for a given interactive feature.