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Articles

Using Statistics To Improve Your Website's Performance

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Website statistics provide information about the activity on your website. Interpreting your website statistics correctly, and regularly monitoring changes and trends, will help you identify information that you can use to inform your future website plans.

There are three key questions your website statistics help you to answer:

- How busy is my website?
- Which pages do visitors look at most / least?
- Where do my website visitors come from?

By answering these questions, your website statistics give you an insight into how well your website is performing for your business. You will be able to identify any under-performing areas and take appropriate steps to improve matters.

A website performing at its optimum will...

- provide accurate and timely information to visitors;
- generate good quality sales enquiries for you;
- assist you in converting sales enquiries into orders;

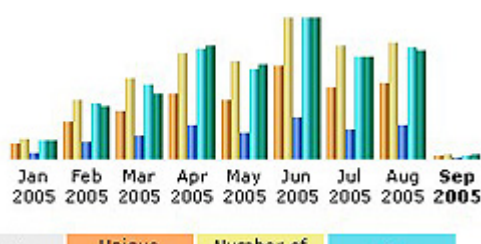
...and your website statistics can help you achieve these results.

How busy is my website?

The fundamental purpose of website statistics is to track the number of visitors to your site. It's not uncommon for website owners to talk about the number of "hits" their website receives and such information comes from their website statistics.

Statistics measure the "busyness" of a website in 3 ways:

- the number of hits;
- the number of visits;
- the number of unique visitors;



The last of these - "unique visitors" - is the most useful as it measures how many different people visit your site. "Visits" is similar and also worth checking, except that it records a visit on each occasion that someone views your site, irrespective of whether they also viewed the site

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Hits
Jan 2005	247	334	14218
Feb 2005	622	998	42808
Mar 2005	801	1359	57075
Apr 2005	1103	1770	83487
May 2005	986	1653	68409
Jun 2005	1559	2366	107338
Jul 2005	1207	1912	78134
Aug 2005	1287	1969	85210
Sep 2005	44	56	2288
Oct 2005	0	0	0
Nov 2005	0	0	0
Dec 2005	0	0	0
Total	7856	12417	538967

before or will do so again in the future.

"Hits", despite being the most-quoted measure, is the least meaningful. A "hit" is generated when a web page, graphic, photo, supporting file, video clip or sound file is requested from a website.

For example, if someone visits a page on your website that includes 10 graphics and 3 photos, 14 hits will be registered in your website statistics. 14 hits and yet only 1 viewing of the

web page!

As there's no fixed relationship between the number of hits and the number of occasions a web page is viewed, and because the hits figure is a gross exaggeration of the actual viewings, studying the number of hits your website produces is of little genuine benefit.

As well as providing you with the number of unique visits, your website statistics will often break down the figure against days of the month, days of the week and hours of the day.

This is especially useful if you are keen to see the effect of some recent marketing activity. Did the sales advert in last week's newspaper produce an immediate increase in website visitors, for example?

Day	Number of visits
01 Aug 2005	83
02 Aug 2005	85
03 Aug 2005	70
04 Aug 2005	92
05 Aug 2005	51
06 Aug 2005	51
07 Aug 2005	34
08 Aug 2005	58
09 Aug 2005	80
10 Aug 2005	76
11 Aug 2005	45
12 Aug 2005	59
13 Aug 2005	54
14 Aug 2005	69
15 Aug 2005	72
16 Aug 2005	101
17 Aug 2005	74
18 Aug 2005	59
19 Aug 2005	78

Which pages do visitors look at most / least?

Monitoring the popular and unpopular pages on your website provides you with a useful insight into how visitors digest the information on your site. Which of your product pages is attracting most attention? Are the topical pages on your website - news, case studies, testimonials and special offers - receiving more visits than the static pages?

Ideally, you want the most popular pages to include a clear call to action. This might involve directing the visitor to your online enquiry form, encouraging them to add a product to their shopping basket or to request a brochure.

Pages-URL (Top 10)	Full list	Entry	Exit
59 different pages-url			
	Viewed	Entry	Exit
/	310	230	186
/clients2.php	48	5	12
/testimonials.php	47	10	11
/website_design_derby.php	46	10	18
/contact.php	39	5	18
/website_hosting_derby.php	36	14	14
/ecommerce_developers_derby.php	33	6	10
/website_resurrection_derby.php	28	10	9
/news.php	26	7	7
/web-based_software_development_derby.php	26	10	7
Others	272	67	79

When you review the more unpopular pages on your site, you should be careful to consider the potential cause of the low number of visits.

It is unlikely to be a direct result of the copy on that page - the visitor cannot read the copy until they visit the page and visiting the page would register in your website statistics!

A more likely cause is your website navigation: are visitors easily able to find the unpopular page? Are there sufficient links to it from your home page and other popular pages? Do your links make it clear what that page is about and offer the visitor a reason to visit?

Information about your popular and unpopular pages often includes details about "entry" and "exit" pages. As its name suggests, an entry page is the one at which your visitor first arrives.

It's easy to assume that this will be your home page and, although this is often the case, it's not always true. Therefore, if you have vital information on your home page that you want visitors to know before they move around the rest of your site, you run the risk of confusing or alienating those people that arrive on a different page.

An exit page is the one your visitor last viewed before leaving your site or closing their browser. Some pages of your site are natural exit pages: a Contact Us page is an obvious example. (Once a visitor has sent you an email, found travel directions to your premises or called you on the phone, they've generally achieved what they wanted to and will finish with your site.)

But what if one of your product pages is a frequent exit page? Ideally, you want your visitors to take some action after they've learned about your products... and leaving your website is not the action you want! Reviewing the copy on this page and checking that the page doesn't include any spelling mistakes or slow-loading images is a good idea.

Where do my website visitors come from?

Your website statistics provide information about the source of your visitors in various ways.

Your stats will monitor "referrers" - other websites that send visitors to you - as well as geographic information about where in the world your visitors reside.

Referrer information is useful if you have reciprocal links with other websites: it helps you identify which of those are sending traffic your way.

It is especially useful when it comes to search engines, as you can see not only which search engines are directing visitors to your site but which keywords those visitors searched on in order to find you.

Connect to site from	
Origin	
Direct address / Bookmarks	
Links from a NewsGroup	
Links from an Internet Search Engine - Full list	
- Google	87 87
- Yahoo	8 8
- MSN	7 7
- AOL	2 2
- Ask Jeeves UK	2 2
- Lycos	2 2
- Overture	2 2
- Tiscali	1 1
- Mamma	1 1
- Mirage	1 1
- Others	2 2
Links from an external page (other web sites except search engines) - Full list	
- http://www.regiochannel.co.uk/nottingham/websites/web-design-and...	16 16
- http://www.searcheurope.com/cgi-bin/links/search.cgi	7 7
- http://www.trafficparking.com/parking.php	6 6
- http://www.einternetdirectory.co.uk/Website-Design.php	4 4
- http://www.ukrecruiter.co.uk/suppliers/resweb.htm	4 4
- http://www.ffinto.org	2 2
- http://filduk.com/news/1,27	2 2
- http://www.applegate.co.uk/it/company/co_1121393.htm	2 2
- http://filduk.com/content_management_systems_derby.php	2 2
- http://www.erolonline.co.uk/home/midlands.asp	2 2
- Others	42 58

Search Keyphrases (Top 10)		
Full list		
82 different keyphrases	Search	Percent
web design nottingham	6	5.6 %
iceberg	5	4.6 %
web page designers	4	3.7 %
website design	3	2.8 %
makeover websites	3	2.8 %
web design	2	1.8 %
website design derby	2	1.8 %
website design uk	2	1.8 %
iceberg website	2	1.8 %
web based software development	2	1.8 %
Other phrases	76	71 %

For anyone who has implemented search engine optimisation work on their site, such information is essential.

Web development companies can research the most popular and relevant keywords for your industry or profession but there is no substitute for monitoring your own data.

Geographic information about the location of your website visitors must be taken with a healthy pinch of

salt!

Bear in mind that unless a visitor specifically reveals who they are - which they might do by logging in to an online account, for instance - a website has no way of ascertaining who is visiting. Statistics record the number of visits and the number of unique visitors but have no way of identifying those people as specific individuals.

However, website statistics do *deduce* a visitor's location by monitoring related data. For instance, the details of the visitor's Internet Service Provider (ISP) or the default language of the visitor's browser software are often used as ways of establishing where in the world that person is based.

Plan, Implement, Monitor, Change

Good business marketing involves four distinct stages:

- Plan your marketing
- Implement your plan
- Monitor the effects of your activity
- Change what didn't work well and try again

If you are like the majority of business owners, you use your website for marketing purposes. You want your website to attract customers, impress customers or compel customers to take some positive action.

With this in mind, website statistics can help you with the monitoring stage of your marketing. Without statistics, you are unable to answer questions such as:

- How did my marketing affect the number of visitors to my website?
- Did my marketing cause potential customers to visit the "right" pages (e.g. my product pages)?
- Did those visitors follow my call to action?
- How has the number of visitors to my site been affected by my online marketing / search engine optimisation?

Perhaps it's time to add statistics to your website or, if you have them already, to make more use of the information they reveal?

*Iceberg Internet provides **website hosting** for many clients, which includes website statistics. Statistics are updated every night and are accessible online, using a username and password.*

*Contact Iceberg Internet on **01332 331332** or via **www.iceberginternet.co.uk** if you are unhappy with your current website hosting or would like to benefit from website statistics.*

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