

Measuring Your Web Site's Success

By Brian Florip

I'm sure you've been asked by a potential client, vendor, or investor if you have a Web site. Like most small business owners, you've responded with a "Yes." Then you are probably asked what the Web address is, and you easily respond with it. But what happens if you are asked how successful your Web site is? What do you say? Many small business owners spend a small fortune to make their Web site look good, but then have no idea what sort of value it is returning to them. You probably have a bunch of reports and statistics to measure other parts of your business—why not your Web site, too? In this article we will show you several key methods to measure (and increase) the success of your company's Web site. These include search engine results, Web traffic log results, and Web site conversions.

Search Engine Results

Studies have shown that between 50 and 80 percent of Web traffic comes from search engines. And with the ever-increasing number of sites selling products on the Web, it is incredibly important that your site be featured in the top results for the leading search engines. These trends emphasize the importance of a thoughtful Search Engine Optimization (SEO) plan for your Web site. You should review your search engine page rankings periodically for several keyword phrases and continually tweak your site to achieve better results. Here are a few tips to achieve better search engine rankings:

1. **Keywords** – It is not enough to have your site feature general keywords, like "log homes." There is just too much competition for general keywords, and most savvy search engine users know terms like that will return too many results to be valuable. You are much better off optimizing your site for more targeted keywords like "Ohio log homes" or "Denver log homes" or "kiln-dried log homes."
2. **Meta tags** – It used to be that you could just load your meta tags with many various keywords and your search engine optimization was complete. Not anymore. While certain meta tags (title and description) are still somewhat important, the keyword meta tag carries almost no weight in most sophisticated search engines.
3. **Content** – Content is key. Most of today's search engines use site content as the primary factor in determining a site's keywords. If your site's home page has few or no words, it is virtually invisible to search engines. Be sure to use your site's keywords several times in the page copy, including in the first paragraph.
4. **Inbound links** – Another factor used to determine your site's ranking in search engines is the number of other sites linking to your site. Ways to increase the number of links to your site include syndicating articles, submitting your Web site to directories, sending out press releases, and having valuable content that others want to link to. To determine the number of links to your site, go to your favorite search engine and type "link:www.yoursite.com" in the search box.

Web Site Traffic Logs

Another method used in determining your Web site's success is your Web site traffic log statistics. The company that hosts your Web site should be able to provide you with several key statistics to help you in evaluating your Web site's performance. If your hosting company can only provide you with the number of hits your site obtains, you might want to shop around for a host that can give you all the facts. It may cost a little more, but the benefits will outweigh the cost. Key statistics to help you in your site evaluation include:

1. **Site Visitors** – This statistic represents the number of times people have accessed your Web site during the tracking period. The number of site visitors is a more accurate representation of Web

traffic than the number of hits. Think of each visitor as a person walking into a library and each hit as every book, magazine, newspaper and other item the visitor looks at.

2. **Most Requested Pages** – This statistic will tell you what information on your site visitors find useful. This is a great help when looking to expand site content to increase search engine rankings.
3. **Top Referrers** – This report will tell you how visitors are finding your site. Are they typing in your Web site's address directly, are they finding it in a search engine, or are there other sites that have links to your site? This statistic is critical if you are paying other sites to be listed in their directories.
4. **Search Engine Keywords** – This report tells you which search engine phrases are used when visitors locate your site. This is valuable in determining if the keyword(s) you want for your site are achieving the desired results.

Web Site Conversions

Probably the most easily-tracked measure of Web site success is Web site conversions. Are visitors performing the action that you want them to perform? This could be making a purchase, requesting more information via e-mail, attending an open house, or contacting a live person—whatever you consider the goal of your Web site to be. Here are several tips to aid in the tracking of conversions from your Web site:

1. Have a unique phone number with a distinct ring (or other differentiation method) listed on your Web site. This will help you determine if the call is being generated from your Web site or a different marketing program. Phone companies charge a wide variety of fees for this service, so shop around first.
2. Have a unique e-mail address (as well as a Web-based contact form) on your Web site. This way, you will know where the potential client found your e-mail address. Most e-mail hosts will allow you to have more than one e-mail alias flow to the same account.
3. Ask. Just ask people how they found you. Have it as a question on your open house sign-up forms, literature requests, Web-based contact forms, etc. This information will really help in determining if your Web site is delivering the type of results you expect.

Now that you know a little more about search engine results, Web site traffic logs, and Web site conversions, you should have a better idea of how your Web site is performing for your business. And hopefully, you've got a few more strategies for increasing that performance.

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