



Measuring Up: Tools and Tips to Measure Your Success

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Defining Success

You cannot know if you are successful unless you have defined what “success” means to you. Maybe you are looking for new customers, or maybe you are trying to increase the average amount of sales per customer. Or if you have a community-based site you may simply be looking for more people to be involved in a project (rousing energy for community-based projects can be more difficult than closing a sale!).

No one *needs* a web site. Businesses were perfectly successful before the web came along. There were auctions before eBay, bookstores before Amazon, and you could even get a mail order bride before sites like Match.com and Lavalife came along. A web site should *help* your business, not just act as a time sink. You need to determine where your web site can automate tasks and allow you to manage your time more effectively.

You need to work towards achieving the right milestones at the right time. Everything that you do to your site should be to either:

1. fix an existing problem, or
2. improve your client’s experience with the site (and therefore with your business).

Avoid adding new features to your web site just because they are cheap to add; instead save up for the features that are really going to make a difference to the user experience. Solutions are not always easy to quantify. By deciding *how* you will measure success before implementing changes you will be able to determine whether or not your changes were “effective.” This *how* part of evaluating success is referred to as “metrics.”

Metrics

First you will need to decide what you want to evaluate. Here are some suggestions:

- “How much.” Include volume of: sales, activity on discussion boards, and readership.
- “How fast.” Include both ability to ship products and site download times.
- “How good.” Include the quality of the product and/or experience.
- “How happy.” Include both customer satisfaction and internal acceptance by staff and management.

Once you’ve decided what you want to evaluate, you will need to decide how you will do the evaluation. The following is a list of tangible ways to evaluate the success of your project:

- an increased number of visitors to your site (ask your web hosting provider for access to your web statistics)
- an increased amount of traffic in a new area of your web site
- an increased number of sales (possibly with the same number of visitors)
- an increased percentage of buyers compared to browsers
- an increased number in repeat customers and/or increased repeat visitors to your web site

- an increased number of phone calls inquiring about new (or different) products and services
- a *decreased* number of phone calls (showing your web site has all the information people need)
- the number of people who visited your web site directly from an email or other marketing campaign (use unique URLs for each campaign which redirect to the actual page on your site—monitor their use in your web site statistics)
- the number of people signing up for your on-line newsletter
- the number of orders received through the web site

The hardest part in measuring success is affecting change. Whether it is change for the better, or change for the worse, you need to have a way to interpret your measurements. If your measurements show that you have an increase in sales, are you able to respond to the change? What about a decrease in activity? You must consider all of the possible outcomes before you look for answers. Decide ahead of time how you will deal with *both* satisfactory and unsatisfactory results. You do not need to implement massive change—in fact it is much easier to implement small changes and measure the effectiveness of the new change made. If you change too many things at once you won't know which bit was effective and which bit was not.

Start Measuring Success Now

Based on your business and the goals you have for your web site pick one thing to measure about your web site. At this point you do not need to be measuring a specific goal. Rather start with a simple monitoring process. Once you know what your baseline is, you can begin to make changes and evaluate the success of the changes. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Is your web site informational or sale-focused? Should you measure visitors to your site, or the number of sales generated through the web site?
- Does your web site have a login component? Can you compare the number of registered users on your site compared to the number of guests who are not logged in?
- Do you have a mailing list? Do you have promotional items that people might be interested in receiving? Release your promotional items as a “reward” to people for signing up for the mailing list. Count the number of people that register for your mailing list based on each reward.
- How often does someone call you instead of visiting your web site? Start a call log to monitor when a person called, at what stage of the sale cycle they were in, and whether their problem could have been solved by your web site.
- Do you attend a lot of events? How many business cards do you try to collect at each event? How many do you give out. Could you give out a free coupon to an eBook on your Web site?
- Do a lot of people link to you? Count your incoming or referral links.
- Do you know if other people are talking about you? Create a Google Alert

(www.google.com/alerts) for your name, your business name, and any products or services that use very specific names.

A blank template is included at the end of this workbook to help you list the actions you want to track.

Use the Right Tools

I am always testing new tools to measure Web site statistics. My basic kit has included these three pieces of software for several years now:

- Google Analytics – <http://www.google.com/analytics>
- Webalizer – <http://www.mrunix.net/webalizer>
- AWStats – <http://awstats.sourceforge.net>

All three are free to use but do require some configuration. Ask your hosting provider if they already have a stats package set up on your account. You may already be tracking visitors without even knowing it.

Google Analytics is installed on all Web sites that use a content management system, such as Drupal or WordPress. A small snippet of Javascript code is placed on each Web page and reports back to Google every time someone visits the page. It allows you to easily track:

- sources of incoming traffic
- keywords people use when they find my Web site
- number of visitors
- amount of time each visitor spends on the site
- click map of which links people are clicking on within my site

Webalizer and **AWStats**, on the other hand, use the raw log files of your Web server. One of these two systems is typically installed for you when you pay for Web site hosting. Unlike Google Analytics, you do not need to place a piece of code on each page of your site because they use the data collected by your Web server each time someone visits your Web site. Unfortunately there is often a lot of non-human traffic that visits your site. For example: search engine bots need to visit your site to update your search engine entries. You must configure Webalizer and AWStats to ignore all of these visitors. Although it is “trivial” for a Web geek to do, it is time consuming and not always 100% accurate. Google Analytics typically gives you a more accurate look at your true Web site traffic.

Don’t abandon your server-side software completely though! Webalizer and AWStats still provide incredibly important information! They tell you about broken links on your Web site and if people are arriving at missing pages. Use the information these tools provide to fix things that are broken on your Web site.

Vocabulary Tip: Be sure to get a human-friendly glossary that explains what all of the numbers mean for any analytics package you use on your Web site. In my experience not all web stats software packages use exactly the same terms for things like, “page views” (typically

the number of individual pages viewed by visitors to your site) and “hits” (typically the total number of files, including individual images, downloaded from your web site).

By measuring your baseline you will know how effective every change is that you make to your Web site.

Five Tips to Getting More Traffic

You can start improving your search engine rankings today. It's easy if you know how search engines work.

- 1. Update your Web site frequently.** When a search engine visits your site it checks to see when it was last updated. The more frequently you update your Web site, the more frequently it will visit you and update your ranking in the search engine. At least once a week make one of the small edits suggested in tip #2 to at least one of your Web site pages.
- 2. Put keywords higher on the page.** In a newspaper story the key facts are presented at the very beginning of the article. Search engines are like busy newspaper readers. They assume that the most important thing is at the top of the page, and less important things are at the bottom of the page. Think about the words that people will use when searching for your Web page. Move those words to the beginning of the page. Where it's relevant, include them in the title of the page as well.
- 3. Use more keywords.** Different people will search for different terms. Be sure to include a variety of these keywords on your site. For example: earlier this week I needed cupcake decorating instructions. I searched for, “how to decorate a cupcake” and “cupcake decorating instructions” and came up with completely different search results. For more help with this tip, take a look at the free tools offered by Google: <http://www.google.com/websiteoptimizer> and <http://www.google.com/sktool>.
- 4. Use semantic markup.** Search engines look at the tags as well as the words on the page. If you have long articles, use logical headings with keywords instead of using only or to make things look more important on the page. Search engines will recognize the “bold” tags. But they will give even more credence to text that is in a heading.
- 5. Popularity is important, get more incoming links.** Get out on the Web and be active. Leave relevant comments on other people's sites with a link back to your own. Get listed in business directories. Get interviewed by a popular blogger or news site about your business. Unfortunately this tip takes a lot more effort than the other ones, but it is very effective. Search engines measure the number of incoming links to determine your popularity. Your popularity determines your ranking against other sites that have similar content to your own.

Results Tracking for _____

| Action You Took | Customer Reaction to Track | Actual Results Obtained |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Newsletter promoting free eBook download. | Number of eBooks downloaded. | |
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Measuring Up

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