

step action plan to use your web analytics tool to optimise your website.

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By Erik Van Rompay
CEO Internet

**Please visit my website: <http://vanrompay.online.fr>
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Some lines about myself

I am actually working as an executive on the Internet, specialised in the tuning of e-Business environments.

My first Internet experiences date from 1991 but I really discovered the web creation and publishing in June 1995. Since that day, my life changed as I have been opening and tuning everything from small web sites to major websites with one millions daily visitors and e-business platforms managing 2000 simultaneous transactions per second.

When the major companies on the web have well designed and tuned portals, most companies are still struggling with their web presence.

I find it frustrating how many have implemented web analytics tools but are not capable in using it properly or using the wrong indicators.

The web is there to make business – so the web analytics tools should indicate the progress made in making business. The following 7 actions, independent from a specific web auditing tool, indicate you the way to improve your web.

Have a nice reading and let me know at theonlineceo@yahoo.com if it worked for you.

Action 1: REAL VISITOR STATISTICS

Your web analytics tool records every time a visitor hits your website. It is wrong to use these global numbers.

What you need to know is:

- The number of unique user sessions.
- The number of frequent visitors.
- The percentage of users going further than the homepage.
- The time that users spend on your web site (if possible, those that visit more than one page).
- If you are running multiple servers, the number of people that cross your sites (you keep the visitor so you can also tune his experience).

Don't forget that technology changes can impact these numbers.

- More and more people use high bandwidth connexions so they download more pages due to technology.
- The implementation of a mobile interface will make it that people use other terminals to visit your website. This will have an impact.

When almost all use these in their weekly/monthly reports, some managers use some calculated numbers that are perhaps more interesting:

- Monthly broadcast = average time spend by visit multiplied by the number of visits that month. If this number goes up, you have more Internet reach.
- Heavy users = percentage of people spending more than 10 minutes on our web site.
- Committed user = percentage of users coming back during the same week.

For eBusiness environments, this can also be the conversion rate or average revenue per incoming visitor.

Action 2: ELIMINATE ONE PAGE VISITS

It is surprisingly how many visits end with only one page displayed. Perhaps there is a specific reason but in 99% of the cases, it indicates a problem.

- Start with an audit tool to see if your page is technically OK. Perhaps you have a script that calls a publicity add that doesn't work properly...
- Redesign your webpage to see if this one page view percentage goes down
- If you are using an animation, flash or something else, disable it temporarily to see if this works.
- If you have links to partner web sites, how many leave instantly your web site without viewing a second page on your web site? You have to keep people longer on your site.

Action 3: TUNE HOME PAGE DESIGN

Look in detail how people behave when they are on your home page. If you have an internal search engine, how many are using this feature? If none, it means it is misplaced. If a lot, it means they can't find the right information on your home page to click.

Also look to the bottom line. I once had a link on my site that was only used by 1% of the visitors (so rather unimportant at first view) but these people stayed 10 minutes on my web site and in 30% of the case, they made a purchase. The link was important as a revenue generator so we had to keep it on the home page.

If you have the chance of managing many portals, try to realize your tests on one web site to validate your improvements (higher conversion rate....) before deploying it on other sites.

Do you know if the use of your website changes in time? Do people behave in the same way during the year, just before a holiday period and during the holiday period? The answer is yes, they change but do you know how you have to translate this in your homepage design? I created a different homepage design during school holidays – focused on cross sales - and our overall sales got up by 30% during that period. *(FYI, I tried to keep it one week longer but it was a disaster so it only works during school holidays periods).*

One of the items that could be interesting is to implement fast response onto the internet. I created once a “flash-news” indicating a promotion for a very short term (normally 4 hours) as we got a real price.

This (almost) real-time promotion allowed us to increase our annual revenues by 8%. Our competitors implemented the same concept 6 months later but we had created a market advantage.

Action 4: MOST AND LEAST REQUESTED PAGES (and/or chapters)

You have to know what's hot on your web site and what isn't. This can be on 2 levels. The first one is the “chapter” level. How many visitors do you have in the news column, in the sports column, in the weather column....of your portal.

This allows you to know what people expect from you and add pages on strategic issues.

The same has to be done on page level. If you have pages on a subject that are almost never consulted, eliminate to discuss the issue as your clients are not interested.

Action 5: MORTAL PAGES

This is what I call the pages where people leave your web site and you don't want them to do that on that spot. The most frequent exit page will be the home page and it is also normal they leave at the confirmation page after making an order.

Look in detail why people leave at certain levels (for instance in the middle of filling a shopping cart) and you can instantly detect some problem issues. If you are using pop-ups, publicity... look if these elements have a negative or neutral impact on your page.

I once changed the order-taking process on an e-business platform and got a 40% higher conversion rate the next day. A classical item is a bad functioning search engine so our "mortal pages" indicate that the people did not find the product in our catalogue so we tuned the search engine to give them the appropriate product sheet.

Action 6: ENTRY POINT OPTIMISATION

Your web analytics package will tell you who is sending you traffic through the search engines, your advertising campaigns (banners, sponsored links, email campaigns) and partner web sites.

The nice aspect about the search engines is that you can know what really matters in search terms for your business. As people keyed in these words, are they finding the same issue easily on your home page? Pay attention to details as these contain surprises. Look also to misspelled keywords as you can easily buy these at cheap prices to create a better ranking position.

Action 7: TRACE YOURSELF

Changing, testing, updating, modifying... you are manipulating the whole toolset to optimize the web experience and to improve all numbers. But things can change fast and items that worked 3 months ago are not necessarily working as well today. So you have to question again your web analytic tools to improve your web performance once again. If you have written your first experiences down in a journal, you have an important step by step source to guide you through your work.

You will have to complete your journal with new tests results but the acquired knowledge will give you a company-wide recognised expertise. You can only do this if you use a consistent work method.

Remember, even if the web is big business, the most important thing is to have fun with web design. Make it a personal challenge to beat your own web site day after day. Beating your previous records is the only reason why you should do it.

If you have comments or want to share your story with me, please send me an email to theonlineceo@yahoo.com.