

Statistics on the web: What they represent - Part 2

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In the April 10-16 edition we talked about what can be measured about your visitors. This week we are going to continue on that topic by showing you some useful tools to help you with that process. There are a number of factors that may affect the accuracy of the registered statistics. Some common factors are whether the statistics are gathered at the beginning or the end of page loading (naturally not all people wait for a page to be fully loaded, so many statistics gathered at the end of the page load may be missing legitimate visits). Another factor is whether statistics are gathered by processing the server's log files, an independent application/server, sitting between the server and client to do the monitoring or using a client-based technique (like a javascript library, running in the client's browser). Server monitoring will give the most extensive results (biggest numbers), but will not be able to determine some client details (how big the client's browser window was for example or how long it took a page to render/display on the client's screen). Moreover, it may not be filtering search engines and other sources of website traffic. That is real traffic, but is not as useful to owners and advertisers alike, because no actual potential clients have generated that traffic so it does not have the same potential.

Some actual tools to help any website owner with their statistics gathering process (and employed by us here at rejournal.com):

- * Awstats - a free, open-source tool that parses server log files and summarizes their content into an easy to understand and follow HTML page. It displays statistics about "unique views", "views", "page views" and "hits", as well as giving summary of those by day, day of the week, hour of the day; by geographical location; by source, referral site, referring search engine; by visit duration; by content; by browser, operating system and many more.

- * Google Analytics - excellent tool, provided for free by the guys at google. Website owners are just asked to create a free registration and add a snippet of code to the bottom of the pages they want to monitor, and google does all the rest for them. It does an excellent job of drilling down to considerable dept based on a large number of meaningful parameters, as well as making it really easy to compare data to previous periods. Another notable feature is the goals tracking functionality, which lets web administrators find out how their visitors (prospects) turn into actual clients (buyers), where do they come from and how they used the site before they finally decided to get to one of the golden pages that all business owners are hoping they would get to. Goals can be defined and changed as required and can be as simple as visiting the "contact us" page or as complex as buying item X and paying for it.

- * Webalizer - similar to awstats, free open-source project that has lots of meaningful graphs to help you monitor and understand your traffic. One drawback compared to awstats is that it does not display visits statistics.

What is your traffic monitoring tool of choice? Leave your comment on our website.

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