

Web Analytics Best Practices

1. **Identify and understand your business's key performance indicators before you start.** This is a function of your business, not the analytics package. Before you start looking at packages, it is important to think about what information is needed and what initiatives work well. Without this step, you could easily spend time measuring and analyzing the wrong things.
2. **Identify events needed to track underlying user patterns, throughout your website.** Some need only tracking of users through the page. Others require detailed tracking of which link they followed to provide meaningful data. Your shipping rate page may only require tracking the page views; however, tracking all the clicks on a category page with cross-sells and promotions is needed to understand buyer behavior.
3. **Don't underestimate internal resource requirements.** Analytics packages can be a lot like consumer electronics, with tons of functionality going unused. Conduct an internal requirements session. Have each department's needs identified and work with them to implement, test and improve. You may need IT to integrate analytics or modify your site to test different scenarios to get meaningful comparison data. Dedicate the time and resources now. You will not regret it.
4. **Make sure you can positively and accurately tie your referral websites to your online sales.** It's even better if you can tie them to offline sales. Without this, you'll never be able to determine from where your best traffic originates and where you should increase your marketing budget.
5. **Constantly review and adjust metrics to improve your ROI.** Tracking ROI for Pay Per Click advertising, affiliate networks, email campaigns, etc., will show which initiatives work best, and for how long. When calculating ROI, include online sales, returns, and post-sale metrics (e.g., calls to support) as they affect long-term ROI. Communicate results with advertisers, affiliates etc, so they can help improve your ROI.
6. **Take the time during implementation to ensure your numbers match.** Create processes to verify that all the numbers from your internal CRM and order entry systems tie very closely to your analytics systems numbers. Double-counting (or non-counting) is very possible and can completely skew analysis. Make sure you are measuring demand versus sales and can differentiate between the two.
7. **Positively establish web analytics governance practices.** Don't leave this responsibility to Marketing by default. Properly integrated, analytics offers powerful management and control tools relevant to the entire organization. Communicate results throughout your operations in order to create positive change from analytic results.
8. **Implement first-party cookie-setting, where possible.** Rightly or wrongly, these are deemed more secure and less subject to user deletion. User deletions are increasing; thereby, skewing analytics results.
9. **Once implemented, be sure to use analytics to test variables.** Isolate changes to the variable tested. There's a lot going on with your website and, if you test multiple factors simultaneously, you'll never know what was truly responsible for any change in performance.
10. **Run additional metrics after significant content changes.** Whether you are introducing a new product line, new online catalog, or changing order process flows, make sure you "live test" these changes to see how your customers are responding, whether positively or negatively. This will allow you to quickly react before your conversion rates are significantly impacted.