

Web Experience Excellence:

Expectations for the web have changed. Are customers excited about what your site delivers?

A 3-Part Series by Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company

BY THE NUMBERS

*An interview with Manoj Jasra
Webmaster, WebAnalyticsWorld.net
Sr. Strategist, Shaw Communications*

As a Sr. Strategist at Shaw Communications, one of Canada's largest telecommunications companies, Manoj Jasra oversees SEO, PPC and Web analytics strategies. Additionally, Manoj runs a top-read Web analytics blog, WebAnalyticsWorld.net, and he regularly writes and speaks on the topics of SEO, Web analytics and blogging. Manoj recently caught up with Frost & Sullivan's eBulletin Editor, Erin Lindholm, to discuss the nuts and bolts of Web analytics, the importance of touch point analysis and the Oprah effect on Twitter's traffic.

Erin Lindholm: So let's start with the basics. What is the primary goal of Web analytics?

Manoj Jasra: The primary goal is to use web analytics to make decisions based on concrete data and historical trends rather than just guessing at something, to give insight. And, in addition to that, it's also a way to help prove whether a specific campaign is working well.

EL: So every Web site can collect that basic data about traffic. Would you agree or disagree that enterprises are using the data properly?

MJ: I think on the enterprise level it's more underutilized than anything. There's a reason for that, because in enterprise, there are so many things going on there are often not enough resources to look into Web analytics in much detail. Enterprises often think that if they have a couple hundred dollar piece of software in place that's enough. The rule that comes into play, the 80/20 rule, you should have 80% of your resources dedicated to analysts and 20% towards a product, because you could almost use Google Analytics or free Yahoo Analytics and do everything you want if you have an analyst in house that can do it.

EL: So what first step can an enterprise take to begin to use the data it's already collecting in a more meaningful way?

MJ: There's a couple ways. First, the analyst team should probably look at the data based on who's going to be receiving the reports. Gather the stakeholders who will be receiving the reports, so that the metrics that matter are given to the appropriate person. The next thing is to establish a process to look at the data: Who has access and what are they doing with it? I think the best way to start would be to get small buy-ins from the appropriate team members for a small campaign, whether it be, say, PPC or email marketing. Take a small segment and show huge improvement doing landing page testing or keyword optimization to get that buy-in, so you can really start diving into it with more priority later on.

EL: That leads to another point which I think for businesses there might be a little bit of a disconnect between — we have all this information, we have all this data, but how can we actually show it's effecting the bottom line? It seems like that's a real challenge for a lot of enterprises, translating it into something demonstrable.

MJ: I completely agree with that. It's difficult to often show improvement because you might not have enough time, spending time on other projects, but it's the only way to get buy-in on Web analytics; it's they only way you can prove a strategy is working. You can try to get as much buy-in as you can to begin with, but you're not going to get it unless you've proven that you've seen the results. Often the regular phone calls or the direct mail has worked in the past so enterprises tend to stick to that. You have to show people that your online campaigns are working, as well. And the only way to do that is to begin with small campaigns until you can begin to build it up.

EL: So in your experience in your career, can you think of any specific examples you might be able to give me about some sort of trend or insight you derived from looking at the data?

MJ: At a very basic level, a lot of your traffic comes from search engines; say, 60% or 70% of your traffic often comes from Google. And about seven or eight years ago Google, Yahoo and MSN all switched their algorithms completely and sites that had been ranking well just started doing very poorly. They [the major search engines] changed what the important factors were for rankings, and because of that you saw a lot of people loose traffic and a lot of sales.

Web Experience Excellence:

Expectations for the web have changed. Are customers excited about what your site delivers?

A 3-Part Series by Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company

What it made me think was how important it was to not put all your eggs in one basket, to spread out where your traffic is coming from. Nowadays, you can really take advantage of things like paid search, blogs, the social media, making relationships with other sites linked to you, the offline means. If you end up putting too much emphasis on one kind of factor, like Google search rankings, if Google switches its algorithms, your site could drop ranks and traffic could drop.

That's why I think the notion of touch point analysis is important. You should understand where your users are interacting across the entire Web — whether they go to a specific blog, whether they always use your emails to come back to your site, do they come in directly — you should have an understanding of what these things are, and you should be able to spend budget appropriately and equally that way as well.

Google is generally the same in terms of where you're getting traffic from, but if you're benchmarking your Web analytics data historically you see new things like Facebook and Twitter popping up, and you see more traffic coming from those areas, so it's definitely important to leverage as much as you can.

EL: It seems like a lot to keep track of, the whole idea of all these touch points, there's a lot going on. It kind of seems overwhelming. Do you have any good recommendations of how to organize it or think about it where you can manage it all at one time?

MJ: It's definitely very overwhelming. At the basic level, it's, say, looking at your referrals and understanding which one of those are providing you the most benefit at your bottom line and attacking it that way. There are a quite a few tools out there that allow you to benchmark against your competitors, you can look at where their traffic is coming from, compared to yours, and you can get a sense of where you should be.

EL: On the subject of Twitter, I remember reading that after Oprah joined Twitter, the traffic to the site spiked 24%. I think that's a great example of how dynamic the Web is, how quickly traffic can change. In that sense, can you speak a little bit about how important timeliness is in relation to Web analytics? When is the data yesterday's news?

MJ: I think timeliness is very important and in Twitter's case I really hope they analyze those spikes to see — if they have a huge spike and they can catch it early, to see what really happened on their site. Did they make changes and what effect did that have? Were the changes really useful to them or whether people were just coming to the first page and bouncing right off? Did they consume the content you wanted them to, and did it affect your bottom line? And what you want to do is to learn from these spikes, and if they worked well for you, ultimately to apply the same technique over and over so that spike becomes a natural increase in your traffic.

EL: So just as you can find spikes and other things to help grow your traffic, and improve your bottom line, can you also see what's not working, what needs to be changed?

MJ: You totally can. Take your popular pages report, look at your most popular pages and you can see which ones are causing the most amount of conversions, and you can actually see which ones have the highest bandwidth, which ones have the most use, if you do that in the reverse order, you can see where your dead content is on your site, what's not working. You can quickly see what the top pages people are landing on, where the highest bounce rates are, and you get a sense of what you could change to stop those visitors from exiting so quickly.

EL: I think that would be as useful as or maybe even more useful than the top hits, where can you clean up a little bit.

MJ: If you don't have analytics in place you should at least get something free up there. There are numerous resources out there now that measure almost everything, so you might as well get that going. Establish priority. One thing that's gone well for us here is just to educate. Get your marketers, your managers and your V.P.s, and if they've got time, show them what kind of strategies you should be doing, what kind of things you've learned, what kinds of things you could potentially do based on the data collected.

EL: Is it possible to have too much data or overanalyze what you're looking at?

MJ: I don't think many analysts will tell you it's possible to have too much data. It's possible to definitely overanalyze, especially if it takes you off the track of being able to answer the questions that you're marketing team or your C-Level needs to have answered, or that if you got so far into the data that it becomes difficult to explain your assumptions to the rest of the team. The best data metrics and business reports are the ones that ultimately help your business grow and keep your team so engaged that they want to see more of that data and more of those reports and they help your business continue to grow.