



MEASURING WHERE YOUR WEBSITE STANDS

One of the great privileges that RJM has enjoyed over the years is to have built well over 200 websites for businesses of different sizes serving a variety of industries in many of the fifty states. This allows us to take a look at online trends at a macro level that many people will never be able to see. We can see where the trend lines are pointing, but often individual businesses have no way to compare themselves to their peer group. That's about to change.

This year, RJM completed its first comprehensive website review and we're sharing the results with you. We're not naming names, but businesses will now be able to see how well they're performing among a similar peer group. The statistics are derived from the analytic reports of 119 different websites from July 15, 2011 to July 14, 2012. These businesses include a wide array of employees and a variety of industries - manufacturing, community organizations, consumer goods, health care, construction, insurance and tourism are all represented among others. They represent a diverse cross section of the business community that operates outside of Wall Street and Silicon Valley.

THE MEAN AND THE AVERAGE

Google Analytics reports are notoriously overloaded with more information than many businesses know what to do with. Many of these analytics are unique to the business, but we found twenty figures that are important no matter what business you're in.

STARTING WITH THE BASICS

The question that will inevitably always be asked when talking about a website is, “how many people visit our site?” For many, it’s the base measurable of success. What we found was a wide variance in how many people visited a website. This difference is most likely due to a wide variety of reasons, many that we’ll discuss later. Our most heavily trafficked website pulled in well over 10,000 visitors per month and our lowest were pulling in single digits per month. With many popular websites within the study, this pushed the average number of visitors to over 6,000 per year, or 500 per month. Don’t fear if your business isn’t bringing in those numbers, however. When factoring the median number, or the true middle of the entire data set, RJM found that the number of visitors that one can expect per month is much lower, roughly in the 200 per month range.

| | Average | Monthly Average | Median | Monthly Median | Low | High |
|------------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|----------------|-----|---------|
| Unique Visitors | 6,220 | 518 | 1,945 | 162 | 1 | 130,434 |

You might think after seeing those statistics that you have to be a large website generating a lot of traffic each month to be successful. What RJM found hidden in the analytics, however, is that each website, no matter the traffic level, performs about the same. People tend to act the same no matter how large or well known a business is. This finding showed itself in the next three statistics that we looked at: pages per visit, average visit duration and bounce rate. While the absolute high and low numbers reach both ends of the scale, the median and the average were almost identical, illustrating that sites large and small share the same visitor behavior.

One of the longest standing misconceptions of online behavior is how long a visitor stays on your website. Many people will guess that the average visitor stays for a considerable amount of time on the site, clicking pages and reading copy. If you’re worried that your time on site is only a minute or two and that people are only seeing one or two pages, don’t worry, you’re completely average. For over 100 different websites, very few could pull a visitor in for more than a few minutes, putting the average visit time just below two minutes. The bounce rate, or the percentage of people that will enter on one page and leave from it, will hover near 50% for almost every site. The more curious will only visit about three of those pages you’ve invested in.

| | Average | Median | Low | High |
|------------------------|---------|--------|-------|--------|
| Pages per Visit | 2.96 | 2.75 | 1 | 19.13 |
| Average Visit | 1:58 | 1:11 | 0:00 | 11:00 |
| Bounce Rate | 49.98% | 46.09% | 0.34% | 91.67% |



HOW STICKY IS YOUR SITE?

Since we know that website visitors don't stay for very long, we can at least hope that they come back. What our survey told us was that businesses should start looking to invest in materials that provide a visitor feedback loop because visitors won't come back on their own. Websites don't generally automatically produce return tickets. Over the course of a year, expect that 75% of all your site visitors will be people who have visited once. The remainder will come back many times over the course of a week or month.

| | Average | Median | Low | High |
|---------------------------|---------|--------|------|--------|
| New Visitors | 74.93% | 79.22% | 25% | 95.8% |
| Returning Visitors | 25.06% | 20.70% | 4.2% | 78.57% |

THE TRANSITION TO MOBILE

These days, the Internet is rarely farther away than a reach into your pocket. With the rise in smartphone technology, surfing the web while standing in line at that grocery store or while on the beach isn't uncommon. The stats for mobile visitors mirror the statistics for overall web traffic with glaring disparities between large and small sites in overall traffic numbers, but very little difference in how the user acts when there. While the average number of mobile visitors is skewed by the high traffic sites, the average and median time on site and pages per visit are almost identical.

| | Average | Monthly Average | Median | Monthly Median | Low | High |
|------------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|----------------|------|--------|
| Mobile Visitors | 1,190 | 100 | 274 | 22 | 1 | 30,838 |
| Pages per Visit | 2.14 | | 2.07 | | 1 | 12.95 |
| Visit Duration | 1:23 | | 1:22 | | 0:01 | 8:51 |

BRINGING THEM IN

It's inevitable that sooner or later the topic of search engine optimization will come up when discussing a business's website. While emphasis is often placed on organic search traffic, there are many ways to drive traffic to your website - search, referrals, direct traffic, campaigns and social. Each source brings its own set of advantages and each is important in the global view of increasing traffic to your website. Let's first take a look at the traffic that search engines bring to your site, both organic and paid.

| | Average | Monthly Average | Median | Monthly Median | Low | High |
|------------------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|----------------|-------|---------|
| % of Search Traffic | 57.46% | | 63.13% | | 8.21% | 87.46% |
| Organic Search Visits | 5,618 | 468 | 1,768 | 147 | 8 | 118,077 |
| O.S. Pages per Visit | 3.10 | | 2.82 | | 1.25 | 21.25 |
| O.S. Avg. Visit Time | 1:57 | | 1:48 | | 0:43 | 11:33 |
| Paid Search Visits | 1,478.4 | 123.2 | 184.5 | 15.38 | 110 | 11,604 |
| P.S. Pages per Visit | 2.95 | | 2.28 | | 1.43 | 10.77 |
| P.S. Avg. Visit Time | 1:46 | | 1:06 | | 0:12 | 8:50 |

Search still dominates as the number one method in which visitors find a website. Close to two-thirds of all traffic comes through a search engine, mostly Google and Bing. While efforts can be made to use other sources to bring in traffic, this illustrates why search engine optimization is such a common topic. In fact, search engines bring so much traffic in that the pages per visit and average visit time numbers for this source come close to mirroring that of the entire site.

Search traffic is broken down into two segments - organic and paid. Organic search is any traffic coming from search engines that you don't directly pay for. This includes any listings in the center section of the search engine results. It is input into and ranked by the search engine companies, and while you have the ability to make changes to your website in the hopes of getting better results here, you have no direct control on what goes in your website, or how high your website ranks. Paid search traffic is anything that you directly purchase within the search engine. This includes the advertising, which often looks similar to the organic search rankings, listed on the right side of the search engine results and in the bar at the very top of the page.

Of course, if you are struggling to bring in organic traffic, it's possible to purchase your way to the first page of results. Surprisingly, only 10 of the 119 sites are taking advantage of this marketing opportunity. Of these ten, only three are committing any considerable budget to the effort, leading to a wide disparity in the average and median numbers for paid search. The effect that these ten companies are seeing, though, is increased traffic brought to their site through an inexpensive method that is very close to the same quality of traffic that the site holds as a whole.

The other ways that traffic can come into a website would be through referral traffic (links from other websites), direct traffic (domain name typed directly into a browser), campaigns (eNewsletters or other tracked marketing efforts), or social media. These sources make up a much smaller portion of the overall traffic, but they're important to look at as well.

| | Average | Month Average | Median | Monthly Median | Low | High |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------------|--------|----------------|-------|--------|
| % of Referral Traffic | 20.29% | | 14.86% | | 5.22% | 68.42% |
| % of Direct Traffic | 22.15% | | 17.84% | | 6.42% | 77.94% |
| % of Campaigns | 0.10% | | 0% | | 0% | 6.44% |
| Social Referral Visits | 125 | 10.41 | 13 | 1.08 | 0 | 5,313 |

While most businesses rely on the search engine, these numbers do tell us that many businesses may not be ranking well for search engines. Of the twenty least trafficked websites in the study, only three of them brought in over 50% of their total traffic via search engines. This illustrates that lacking a prominent search engine ranking will put incredible pressure on a business to use outside marketing efforts to generate traffic to their website. While referral traffic plays a part in overall search engine rankings, and direct traffic, campaigns, and social visits can all indicate the strength of the overall marketing campaign, these correlations between overall traffic and the percentage of search engine traffic shows us just how important search engines are. While they continue to update and increase the effectiveness of how they rank websites within the rankings, many business owners fail to update their sites along with these changes. While a site may have ranked highly in the past, updates by the search engines themselves have regulated older sites to back markers in the traffic driving game.

WHAT THE NUMBERS TELL US

When you stare at this many numbers long enough, two things tend to happen. First, your eyes start to cross and blur, but more importantly, some interesting trends begin to emerge. It should be noted that no site led in all of the indicators. While one site might have led in total traffic, the bounce rate, or the percentage of people who come to and leave from the same page, may have been higher than normal. Those sites that led in time on site didn't lead in number of pages per visit. It was more common to find that each and every site either shared a commonality in a measurable, or were widely separated.

IGNORE SEARCH AT YOUR OWN PERIL

If it's been awhile since you've updated your site and you're still relying on keywords to rank you high in the search engines, it's time make another investment in your website. While we didn't take a look at overall search engine rankings, only traffic generated from it, it's clear that ranking highly and across a breadth of words is a leading indicator of success. Of the websites generating over 6,000 visitors per year (21 total), three of them derived over 80% of that traffic from search engines; four received over 70% from search, and seven received over 60% from search. Getting traffic to your site is the building block of having success on the web. An obvious point for sure, but without it, the chances for sales leads and inquiries from your website drastically reduce.

YOUR SECOND PERILOUS WARNING

While we've determined that search is important to getting traffic to your site, we wouldn't recommend investing time and money into search engine optimization or paid search if it didn't pay off in the end. If we take those sites that receive more than 70% of their total traffic from search engines (44 sites), and those that receive less than 50% of their total traffic from search (33 sites), the group receiving more traffic from search has a higher average pages per visit (2.84 v. 2.42), higher average time spent on site (1:41 v. 1:11) and a lower bounce rate (46.19% v. 58.64%). These sites that are performing well in search are performing well all around.

If you find your site isn't in the top of search engine rankings, paid search can be a great alternative for a short term jump in traffic. For a few dollars per click, paid search brings in traffic that is just off par for all traffic to the site. Considering that paid search normally brings in traffic that is unfamiliar with your business, this is quite impressive.

MOST BUSINESSES AREN'T

While we constantly receive feedback that a business's website is considered one of the most critical marketing elements, it was surprising to learn that most companies aren't marketing around the site. Only ten of our 119 companies were marketing using paid search.

As well, only ten companies showed any percentage of visitors coming from campaigns. Campaigns can be a wide variety of outside marketing efforts, from eNewsletters to display advertising. Through a simple code added to your website URL, campaigns of any nature can be tracked through analytics to better understand how each segment of traffic acts. While some companies may be doing these marketing efforts without tying them into analytics, by far the great majority of companies seem to be doing little digital marketing to promote their website.

While certainly not the only solution, a commitment to marketing a business website will be one of the ways to reverse the trend of non-returning visitors. Building feedback loops into the site, where customers can easily subscribe to a secondary source of information, be that a newsletter or Facebook account, provides a way to bring a visitor back to your site. If these methods of marketing are not utilized, continue to expect that 75% of your visitors will only see your site once.

YOU ARE MORE THAN A NUMBER

There is a large disparity between companies in different analytic categories depending on the industry and purpose of the website. The companies that far exceeded the average in number of pages per visit tended to be those that had a great number of products on site, either in a searchable database or by creating individual landing pages for each product. The product itself could have ranged from real estate, to educational classes, to consumer and commercial goods. By listing the products online, these companies have invited users to come, browse and stay at their site for longer than what they would on a site with less depth.

THE RISE OF MOBILE

Have you checked your site on a mobile device lately? If you haven't, don't wait too long to see how it looks. With the rise of smartphones and tablets, the equivalent rise of mobile traffic is undeniable. While not every site is showing large amounts of mobile traffic currently, mobile devices are definitely invading certain industries quickly. In the sites receiving more than average traffic numbers from mobile devices, the travel and entertainment, health care, and consumer good categories are represented in large numbers. These are industries where people need information quickly and often on the go. They're comparing features and pricing of your product versus your competitor while standing in the store; they're looking for quick contact and service information; or they're looking for things to do at that very moment. We're sure this trend will not stop at these companies.

When websites get reduced down in size from large 20-inch or more monitors into a 7-inch tablet or 4-inch phone, the usability and user requirements change drastically. You can't rely on your website, unaided and untested, shrinking and scaling to work properly on these devices. Custom mobile websites are often times needed, or generally desired, to help users navigate these sites easier. Less information, different text formatting and redesigned menus are just some of the considerations to take into account when dealing with mobile development. And that's even before the word "app" begins to appear.

LOST OPPORTUNITIES IN SOCIAL

Facebook. Twitter. YouTube. Tumblr. Pinterest. LinkedIn. Google+. Flickr. Instagram. Other than just often times missing a crucial vowel, these social media outlets have something else in common - they can be a great traffic driver to your website. These days, with the amount of interest social media generates among business owners, and nearly every one taking a stab at doing it, RJM expected to see a sizeable amount of traffic coming from social media. Such was not the case.

Of the sixteen companies performing better than average in social media, only four of them did not have an ongoing, dedicated effort budgeted for each year, either internally or externally, based on our knowledge. These numbers prove that social media does not happen by itself. It must be worked at. Setting up accounts and not populating them, or relying on others to spread your message in these channels does not work. If you want to have success with social, you must commit your business to being there.

The other glaring note was the tremendous drop-off of social referrals from the top to the bottom of the list. Sixteen of the 119 companies were above average. Three more were just below average, bringing in over 100 social referrals in a year. Only two companies had more than fifty. The vast majority of companies, 78 of the 119, had twenty or less social referrals all year. In the age of social, it seems that most businesses aren't.



THE GRAND FINALE

After all is said and done, what do we know for sure? First, we know that it's rare, if not unheard of, for a business owner to say that their website isn't important to their business. Years ago it was established that to not be online was to miss out on opportunities that could elevate business sales to numbers beyond normal expectations. Second, we know that the average business is reaching thousands of people per month with their site. This in itself deserves congratulations for many business owners.

The downside to that is that many businesses are still not taking every advantage of the platform they have available. Paid search uptake is relatively small. Social media referrals are almost nonexistent for the vast majority of sites. Campaign usage is low across the board. For a marketing material so critical now to overall success, these marketing efforts should show more prominently across the board.

RjM knows that change isn't over - online or off. The statistics show us that mobile usage is on the rise and will surely hit every industry in the coming years. Search engines are updating their algorithm criteria every four to six months. Social media continues to grow and change in both user demographics and referring sites. It'll be up to every one of us to try and keep up. Standing still will not slow down the online world, they're more than happy to move on without anyone else.

ABOUT RJM

At our core, RjM is an advertising agency. Since 1980, we've continued to unconventionally think about advertising to truly harness the power of all mediums and unlock the potential of our clients' brands. We also keep our workplace unconventional (we prefer to throw a red sock in with the white collars), because our people love what they do, and have fun doing it. Learn more about RjM at <http://www.rjmichaels.com>.

