Identifying Metrics That Matter

How To Design a Winning Analytics Strategy

By Ben Magnuson

As an A/E/C marketer, you've undoubtedly received emails on the importance of using web and email marketing analytics.

Data about your website and its users has become easier to access in the last decade or so, thanks largely to products such as Google Analytics. But ease of access should not be confused with ease of use. Due to a fair amount of overpromising, many marketers expect to log in to their analytics and immediately know what they should focus on and how to make changes. Instead, faced with dozens of metrics and graphs, many become discouraged and overwhelmed.

For B2B marketers, especially those in professional services, it's important to understand that much of the analytics ecosystem is designed for e-commerce. Many mainstream metrics became so because of their importance in reporting both the effectiveness of paid ads and efficiently funneling users through a shopping cart purchase.

However, the good news is that free products, such as the Google Suite (e.g., Google Analytics) still include much of the data you need. But how do you decide which metrics are important for your digital marketing program? The process starts with logging off and sitting down with a pen and paper.

Establish User and Business Goals

A common mistake marketers make is trying to fit the goal to the metrics rather than fit the metrics to the goal. Instead of immediately diving into Google Analytics and looking for what should be important, sit down with the marketing team and walk through a specific user journey with some example questions in mind, such as:

- What is our ideal user journey?

- Where do users arrive? Where do they finish?

- What are the most important actions the user will complete during the visit?

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Do not try to answer these questions with metrics at this point, that will come later. Instead, describe the journey in actions taken (i.e., visitor reads the article, clicks on the "Subscribe" button and fills out the form).

During these exercises, you'll typically find that users go through various journeys on the site. For example, the journey for a college recruit will likely differ from that of a client prospect. That is expected. Professional services websites are often multipurposed, and identifying which site sections (such as "Careers") should perform specific tasks is important.

Determine How To Influence Goal Performance

Now that goals have been discussed, ask team members what they would do if they received a report that a goal was performing below trend. What would they change to improve it? If they cannot come up with an answer, ditch the goal, even if it seems important.

It's critical to ensure metrics are actionable, and the changes that you'll experiment with can make a positive, discernable impact. If the first reports deliver several metrics that seem to be static month to month, and the recipients don't know what to do with them, they will lose trust in the value of future reports and investment efforts.

Map Goals to Measurement

Now that goals have been established, someone familiar with the analytics tool needs to map them to metrics that accurately measure performance. In some cases, multiple metrics may be required.

Some common examples include:

- Marketers that **align to an inbound philosophy** may want to use subscription sign-ups as a metric. In this case, you may be able to track page views to your subscription form's "Thank You" page.

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- **If building brand awareness** is a key goal, you'll want to pay attention to metrics such as page views, impressions, and branded keyword ranking.

- **Lead generation** may target conversions, bounce rate on organic search landings, form drop-offs, and click-through rates to help gauge your performance.

- Finally, if you're focused on **engagement**, adding custom tagging for scroll tracking, button-clicks, and social sharing could be a place to start.

You may need to set up additional measurement if it does not exist out of the box. Great (and free) tools such as Google Tag Manager allow even non-web developers to set up metrics such as form conversions or scrolling.

Start With Baselines, Not Benchmarks

For good reason, marketers are obsessed with their competition's performance. What should my conversion rate be? What are others doing?

When it comes to reporting, focus instead on baselining your current performance:

How has this goal performed in the last three to six months? Establish a gut check prior to viewing the numbers (this can literally just be a hypothesis to start), and then identify where you are. If any areas feel like they're underperforming, prioritize them for improvement.

Especially in B2B, acquiring useful benchmark analytics can be expensive, and they don't always translate easily to your own goals. It's much more important to begin the feedback loop of using analytics to improve performance.

Introducing a new set of metrics and programs can be both exciting and daunting. But the process should be very familiar to marketers: Identify your goals, create a plan to achieve them, execute and then evaluate. ∎

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