

Foreword by **SCOTT MONTY**
Global Head of Social Media,
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Digital Marketing Analytics

Making Sense of Consumer Data in a Digital World



CHUCK HEMANN AND KEN BURBARY

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Digital Marketing Analytics:

Making Sense of Consumer
Data in a Digital World

CHUCK HEMANN
KEN BURBARY

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Digital Marketing Analytics

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Foreword

“We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”

—Epictetus

“Data! data! data!” he cried impatiently. “I cannot make bricks without clay.”

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

“The geeks shall inherit the earth.”

—Scott Monty

When I decided to become a classics major in my undergraduate university, I didn't really have an expectation as to how the lessons in ancient history, drama, architecture, politics, and culture would remain with me in throughout my professional career. At the time, my sole desire was to expand my academic horizons beyond the heavy science commitment that a pre-med/biology concentration would otherwise allow. While I posited that the use of Greek and Latin roots in medical terminology would be helpful, I was also keen to broaden my knowledge base beyond my narrow focus on the life sciences.

While I eventually moved to the business side of healthcare (and later biotech, pharmaceutical, and high-tech—the last of which fueled my interest in social media), I found that it was the humanities rather than the sciences that continued to forge a lasting impression in how I perceived and thought about the world around me, particularly with respect to consumer behavior. No other quote has quite stayed with me like this one from the Roman orator and politician Cicero: *“If you wish to persuade me, you must think my thoughts, feel my feelings, and peak my words.”*

For in observing human behavior over the course of history, it became fairly obvious that we haven't changed much in the 2,000 years that separate us from Cicero. Certainly, the industrialization and technological advance of our physical world has moved us far beyond anything the ancient astronomers could have imagined, but fundamentally, we still want the same things that we've always wanted: what's best for ourselves and those we care about, the need to be heard, and the desire to be part of something bigger than ourselves so that we can make a lasting impact on the world. If we as marketers and communicators can grasp that reality and ensure that we're thinking about the needs of consumers in this digital age, we'll find that awareness will be repaid by more attention, trust, and loyalty.

If we revisit that Epictetus quote—a saying that nearly every reader may recognize as emanating from their grandmother—we can immediately understand its great wisdom: listening trumps talking. And perhaps we can even, with a certain degree of emotional intelligence, understand our great failure in this post-mass marketing digital age, as we've rushed to find even more people, likes, followers, and audiences who'll be the recipients of our “messages.”

Ever the master logician and thinker, Sherlock Holmes opined for more data before he could apply his reasoning. For years, marketers have been data-driven in their product research, consumer assessment, and audience segmentation exercises to help bring a product to market. And we stand on a threshold of Big Insights (derived from the ubiquitous “Big Data”) that should allow us the unprecedented ability to predict needs and products.

Marketing Science has been the stronghold of most of data-driven portions of marketing to date. However, the rise of social media has granted us access to unfiltered consumer data in real-time, or near real-time, that can influence the direction and even the creative elements of campaigns. In the 2012 presidential election, we saw how the information crunchers and back-room data geeks managed to steer the already nimble Obama-Biden campaign machine to a decisive victory based largely on studying the numbers and helping the front line apply its efforts to the right markets and the right people at the right time.

Rest assured that this is the very type of marketing expertise that will be highly valued in the future. The geeks shall truly inherit the (marketing) earth.

What Chuck and Ken have developed is a definitive handbook to help you navigate the important analytical and technical aspects of modern marketing. From listening to planning, search to response, launching products to supporting customers, and more, digital and social media play a central role in your ability to successfully integrate with the world around you. Read, study, and enjoy this book.

And always listen to your grandmother.

—Scott Monty
Global Head of Social Media
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About the Authors

Chuck Hemann, Director of Analytics for WCG, has spent the last eight years providing strategic counsel on digital analytics, measurement, online reputation, and social media. He was previously VP of Digital Analytics for Edelman Digital and VP of Digital Strategy and Analytics for Ogilvy Public Relations. He has worked with global brands from Intel to General Mills to Pfizer.

Ken Burbary, Chief Digital Officer at Interpublic's Campbell Ewald, has 16 years of online marketing and advertising experience, including a deep background in digital and social media. He served as VP-Group Director, Strategy and Analysis at Digitas, working with global brands from American Express and Bank of America to P&G and GM.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mom, grandmother, and grandfather. Without their consistent encouragement and guidance, I would not be where I am today. There is not a day when I am not thankful for everything you have done for me.

—Chuck

This book is dedicated to my family. They gave me the inspiration to embark on this journey and provided much support, encouragement, and understanding throughout the process. I would not have been able to do this without their love.

—Ken

Acknowledgments

From Chuck

Raise your hand if you have ever thought about writing a book. The number of you now raising your hands is probably pretty small. It is not that you don't have a lot of experience; rather, it is that you have to make sure all that experience lands on the page for the reader. Up until last year, I would have put myself squarely into the camp that said they would never write a book. However, after going through the process of writing this book, I can say that it is the most professionally gratifying experience I have had to date.

A book like this does not happen without a lot of support. First and foremost, I would like to thank my mom and sister Marie for being amazing cheerleaders. They were always there, checking on progress and offering encouragement throughout the process. There are many who suggested we write this book, but the loudest voice was Stephanie Wonderlin. I can't thank you enough, Stephanie, for suggesting that I go down this road.

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Thank you also to Ken Burbary, my co-author, for agreeing to embark on this journey with me. It could not have been completed without your expertise and knowledge.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to all the clients I have worked with over the years. All of you have taught me a lot about business and marketing, and I hope I have added value to your business during our relationship.

From Ken

Before setting out on this adventure, I never imagined what an amazing and terrifying process writing a book could be. I survived, but only thanks to the love, help, and support of so many wonderful people in my life. I would like to thank my family for being so supportive, understanding the sacrifice that this “second job” required. The encouragement, support, and at times tough love you gave me were incredible, and I wouldn’t have succeeded without you.

I'd like to thank many other people, from friends to professional mentors and peers, but there simply isn't enough room to mention them all. A special thank you to the following people, whose advice, opinions, or expertise helped me throughout the writing of this book. Thank you Tom Webster, Aaron Strout, James Sanders, Adam Cohen, Lucy-Shon, Bill Silarski, and Noah Mallin.

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Understanding the Digital Media Landscape

When digital marketing and advertising began in the 1990s, the promise of digital channels was to deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time—a game-changing upgrade over traditional media channels. Digital media has been sold as a nirvana of data collection, analysis, and measurement that would yield the most efficient, optimized programs one could hope for. Fast-forward 15 years, and we’ve learned that achieving that reality isn’t impossible but can be far more difficult than it seems at first glance.

Today’s digital media landscape is more complex than ever before. The continuous and rapid introduction of new platforms, tools, data sources, and media consumption devices (such as mobile devices and tablets) have created an environment that can make any marketer’s head spin. The challenge now lies in identifying which unique composition of all those choices is required to produce the outcomes needed to achieve your digital goals and objectives.

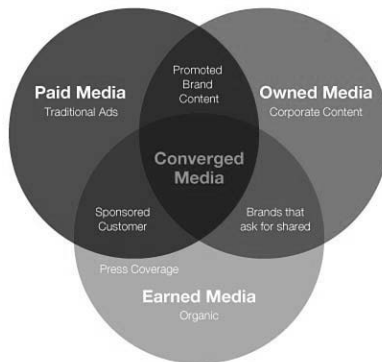
Digital media is great at creating data about who you are, what you like and dislike, and where you've been online. This book helps you work smarter by providing you with the approach and information you need to understand and utilize the data that exists across the entire digital landscape. Hopefully the original digital promise that got everyone so excited in the first place will become a reality for you, and you'll have a better understanding of why digital channels continue to draw more investment in time and money away from traditional media channels.

Digital Media Types

From the mid-'90s until the present day, the digital media landscape has undergone tremendous change. For a good 10 years there were two dominant media types, although we've relabeled them through the years. The first is *paid media*, either in the form of paid search (think Google AdWords) or display advertising (think DoubleClick banner ads). Paid media is literally just that—digital media channels that a brand pays to utilize.

The second is *owned media*. This is a generic term for any media asset or platform that a company owns, controls, and utilizes to reach a prospective audience. Some of the most common forms of owned media are dot-com brand websites, email marketing to subscribers, and company blogs. For both paid and owned media, clicks still rule as the dominant data to collect and analyze. However, tracking what happens after a user clicks on a link can be useful, but it can't answer all the questions.

Figure 1: The Convergence of Paid, Owned & Earned Media



Source: "The Converged Media Imperative: How Brands Must Combine Paid, Owned & Earned Media" Altimeter Group (July 19, 2012)



Figure 1.1 *Paid, earned, and owned media are converging to the point where one type of media has a direct impact on the other.*

Source: "The Converged Media Imperative: How Brands Must Combine Paid, Owned & Earned Media," Altimeter Group (July 19, 2012)

In the past several years, there has been the emergence of a third media type, called *earned media* (see Figure 1.1). Some say it's new; others think it's simply a new label for what public relations professionals have historically called *free media*, something generated by word of mouth, buzz, or a communication "going viral."

With Facebook eclipsing 900 million users and Twitter closing in on 150 million, owned and earned media are now richer sources of data that include new data types that weren't available to marketers in the past—specifically those types that involve user behaviors, intentions, and affinities. The new era of engagement has resulted in a data explosion that takes us beyond analyzing clicks, counting advertising impressions, and adding up website page views.

The data and tools available today can give you the insight you need to improve marketing and advertising performance. You can now better understand both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of a prospective audience. You can use this knowledge to personalize user experiences and facilitate a real value exchange that meets users' needs and expectations. Simply put, you've never been in a better position to generate the desired outcomes and predict future behavior thanks to the robust ecosystem of data and analytics tools. Over the course of the next several chapters we will dive into these tools, which include search analytics, social media monitoring, and social media engagement.

Each media type contains several channels that serve a purpose and play a role in your marketing mix. The data and analytics associated with each helps you determine how much or how little of a role each should play. No digital strategy can succeed based on only one media type.

Paid Media

Paid media is a more mature media type than some of the other digital media types. It has well-established methods of targeting, audience segmentation, and measurement. Additionally, paid media programs contain real-time measurement capabilities, which allow companies the opportunity to assess and change course if necessary. However, because the way paid media programs are executed is well-established, the models have not evolved to meet the impact of owned media channels (such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and so on).

Paid search is still one of the best places to get insights and understanding about an audience. Several search engine and third-party analytics tools work with search data to identify user, behavioral, and intention insights. Read Chapter 5, "Tools: Search Analytics," for more information on paid search data and analytics.

Paid display, otherwise known as banner advertising, is suffering these days due to "banner blindness." Banner blindness happens for one very clear reason: utter saturation of the digital landscape with all types of banner advertising units, including

standard ads, rich media ads, interactive game ads, and social ads. Consumers have become so attuned to seeing display ad units on web pages that they block them out. Banners are essentially background noise most of the time. The net effect is declining views and click-through rates (CTRs).

Performance of banner ads varies due to many factors as well as the banner type. The average CTR for a standard banner ad unit is estimated to be around 0.1% or 0.2%, depending on banner type. This means that if 1,000 people see a banner, only 1 or 2 people click it. This is subpar performance by any standard, and it compares unfavorably to seemingly less attractive digital options, such as email (or even traditional marketing options such as direct mail).

The upside of the paid display market is its well-established methods for targeting and measurement. Publishers and ad-serving platforms have become quite advanced in their usage of cookies for collecting data and tracking an audience. In fact, it's big business. According to a 2012 cross-industry study by Krux, data collection and audience profiling grew 400% over the prior year. This means, for example, that the average number of data-collection events associated with a single web page visit increased from 10 to 50.

Targeting is done through a combination of both first- and third-party data. What does this mean? It means the company (first party) that owns the website you land on is directly capturing data about you and your visit. Third-party collection is responsible for the lion's share of data collection growth. In fact, the number of data collection companies has doubled, with more than 300 companies observed in the 2012 Krux study, compared to 167 the previous year. Targeting is done through a variety of creative cookie wrangling and has been aided by the integration of social technologies into owned media assets.

An example of targeting that is quite common, and yet not well known, is popular social sharing widgets such as ShareThis. It's a simple proposition for website owners: A company can easily install a preconfigured social sharing widget to allow sharing of their brand content across major social networking platforms and/or email. ShareThis is free, and it takes little time to get it installed and running. The catch, though, is data leakage. The sharing widgets are voluntarily leaking data about users to third parties.

In exchange for freely distributing a sharing widget, companies like ShareThis target users by tracking users' sharing activity through the network of websites that have the widget installed. They collect data about what users like, read, share, save, and more. This data is then augmented with additional targeting data and sold at a premium.

To truly understand the magnitude of data generation and collection that occurs, you can do a fun exercise using a browser plug-in. The developer disconnect.me has created a plug-in for the Google Chrome browser called Collusion that graphs

in real time all the data collection that occurs during your web browsing. Figure 1.2 maps the web of data collectors associated with just 15 minutes of a web surfing session. Collusion provides an effective way to see a visual representation of data leakage.

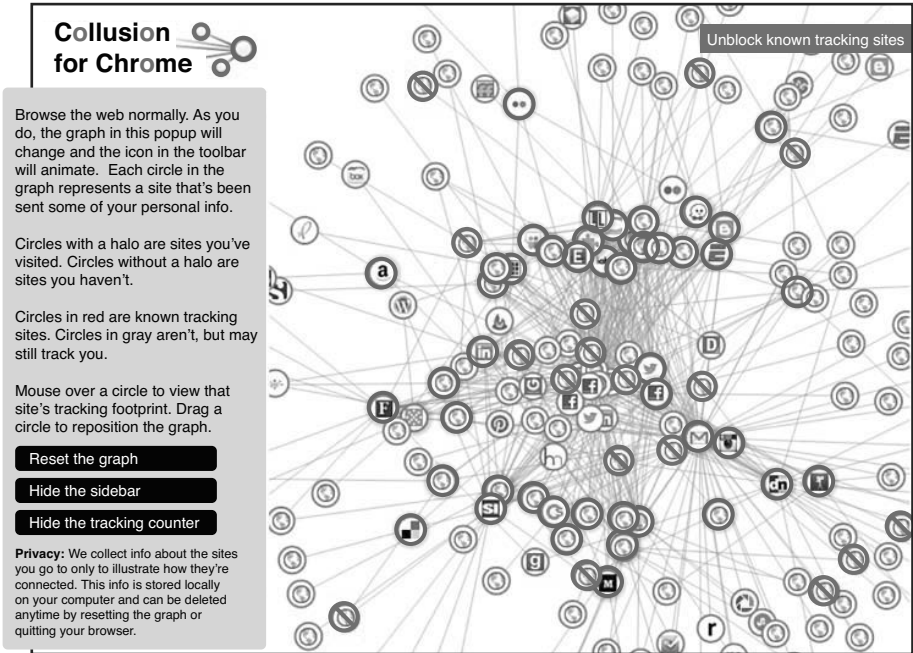


Figure 1.2 *Data Collection Map: An example of how data is collected with just 15 minutes of a web surfing session.*

Source: Google

The end result is a robust data set that can be sliced and diced using data management platforms (DMPs) such as Demdex or BlueKai. DMPs are cookie data warehouses married to analytics engines that have massive horsepower. They are designed to clean, manage, and integrate data with all different types of first-party and third-party data that a company might have or purchase.

DMPs offer advanced capabilities to find trends and to understand and segment audiences based on user attributes, media consumption habits, and more. Many large corporations with complex segmentation needs, such as those within the Fortune 100, have migrated to utilizing DMPs to increase performance and improve efficiency through optimization and targeting.

We identify some paid media data sources that you can use to gain deeper audience insights and understanding in this chapter.

Owned Media

It's not just the emergence of earned media that is new to the digital data and analytics landscape. Owned media assets offer more options than ever to gather competitive intelligence, user experience feedback, real-time site analytics, and testing for site optimization in addition to richer-than-ever-before clickstream activity analysis.

Your goal should be to tie the insights and data from each media channel to one another to tell a deeper story. These are not redundant analytics options, meant to be an either/or decision. Remember, they complement one another.

Trying to decide which of the data and analytics options to implement can be overwhelming. Your choice depends on your defined goals and learning agenda. You can read more about the details of defining clear and specific objectives in Chapter 2, "Understanding Digital Analytics Concepts."

Developing a learning agenda is a useful technique in defining the boundaries of where to focus your analytics efforts. Such an agenda essentially defines the specific questions you are trying to answer about your audience and acts as a guide for your analysis during a project to keep you focused.



Note

It's now the big data era. Massive amounts of data and processing are available, but you don't need all of it. Many companies are struggling with digital analytics because they are trying to collect everything. Resist the urge to collect and analyze all the data these platforms make available. Remember that although they're interesting, many digital data sources are diagnostic measures at best, and some lack the ability to take action. Applying the "So what?" test is a simple and helpful way to avoid chasing shiny objects that have no real business value. Ask yourself, "So what? What action can I take based on this data?" If the answer isn't clear, you're probably just playing with a tool that spews data rather than valuable insights.

In the following few sections, we dive into each of the considerations for analytics on your owned media properties.

Competitive Intelligence

Keeping an eye on competitors is nothing new. There is quite a bit to pay attention to these days, and there are many tools aimed at helping you understand what your

competitors are doing on both their owned media assets and social media platforms. You should use a combination of free and paid tools to access the data you need for competitive intelligence.

 *Note*

You'll see that using a combination of free and paid tools to perform adequate analyses is a theme of this book.

Free tools from Google, Alexa, and Compete can provide competitor website and audience profile data. Paid versions of these tools offer more robust data on consumer behavior data that you can use to answer specific questions such as these:

- Which audience segments are competitors reaching that you are not?
- What keywords are successful for your competitors?
- What sources are driving traffic to your competitors' websites?

It's not difficult to gather competitive intelligence data when it comes to social media. Most of this data is freely available to anyone who is interested in it. Quick-and-dirty approaches using free versions of tools such as SimplyMeasured can provide a wide range of competitive intelligence across several social platforms, including the following:

- Facebook competitive analysis
- Facebook content analysis
- YouTube competitive analysis
- YouTube channel analysis
- Twitter profile analysis

These higher-level reports do not always provide the depth you need. To get more information, you can use specialty tools that focus on particular social platforms and can provide more detailed data and metrics. For example, EdgeRank Checker focuses exclusively on Facebook analytics for a specific industry and compares them to your brand page. Reports like the ones you get from EdgeRank Checker provide analysis and insight into post-grading, page recommendations, trending of post performance over time, and keyword engagement analysis.

Clickstream (Web Analytics)

Counting onsite activity using web analytics is the oldest form of digital analytics. (Remember log file analysis of website hits?) Thankfully, web analytics tools have

come a long way since those days and now offer a full suite of advanced measurement and analytics features, including the following, among many others:

- **Custom dashboards**—Leading platforms offer the ability to create custom dashboards, personalized to your site and conversion events, including threshold notifications for key events and custom key performance indicators (KPIs)/goal definition.
- **Content analytics**—Content is king. Identifying best- and worst-performing content is invaluable. You cannot optimize what you don't measure, and content analytics gives you a window into what content users are consuming and interacting with most (and least). Internal page analytics and local site search reporting also provides useful insights into what users are looking for.

In addition to content analytics, several leading web analytics platforms, such as Adobe Omniture and Google Analytics, also allow for content experimentation. This feature gives you the ability to test variations of content and user experience on your website pages in order to determine which specific permutations yield the most conversions and highest user satisfaction.

- **Mobile analytics**—The mobile web is in the midst of an explosion, and it hasn't yet reached critical mass. Mobile analytics is no longer only a nice-to-have feature; it's a core requirement to provide an effective mobile experience, whether through a mobile-optimized site or mobile application. Web analytics tools have incorporated mobile support, and they offer a robust set of features to measure any mobile content across any mobile device. Mobile analytics provides answers to common questions such as these:
 - Where is my mobile traffic coming from?
 - What content are mobile users most interested in?
 - How is my mobile app being used? What's working? What isn't?
 - Which mobile platforms (and versions) work best with my site?
 - How does mobile users' engagement with my site compare to traditional web users' engagement?

Conversion Analytics

Your website exists for a reason. More specifically, it exists for a set of specific conversion events. Leading web analytics platforms provide insights regarding this key area and answer questions about how onsite user behaviors lead to conversions (regardless of what those may be—sales, registrations, leads, and so on).

One of the most advanced capabilities offered in the area of conversion analytics has to do with multichannel funnel attribution. You're no longer limited by the "last click" attribution problem. You can now gain insight into how much each digital marketing or advertising channels are contributing to specific conversion goals, including paid search, paid display, social marketing, email marketing, and more.

Another useful feature is user experience path visualization, which enables you to determine the highest-performing visitor conversion paths. What are the most common and highest-performing entry points onsite? Where are users getting stuck along the path? What step in the user experience journey causes the most abandonment? These are all key questions involved in optimizing the user experience.

Finally, some leading platforms, such as Blue Fountain Media, offer attribution modeling. Want to build predictive models to attribute conversions to specific channels to better gauge your channel mix and investment? Now you can.

Custom Segmentation

Custom segmentation enables you to personalize your web analytics in the way that's most relevant to your business. It allows you to define custom variables and classify individual user segments or groups.

Analyzing your traffic in aggregate might be interesting, but it isn't advised. As Avinash Kaushik—one of the foremost experts on all things web analytics—has repeated over the years, data in the aggregate is useless. You must segment or die. This has never been more true than it is today. It's one of the biggest issues we currently face with social platforms and the data they generate. Most social platforms provide vast amounts of data, but in the aggregate, which is not terribly useful. Facebook, for example, provides basic segmentation by certain demographics, such as age, gender, location, and a few others, but as of this writing, it doesn't allow page administrators to segment their audiences in a meaningful way.

With custom segmentation, you can divide your audience into segments that mirror your customers and prospects, and this enables you to optimize and personalize the user experience for each. Custom segmentation also enables you to drill down into specific subsections of a site, such as visitors that converted or paid user behavior versus organic user behavior.

Visual Overlays

Visual overlays are a nice-to-have but useful method for viewing web analytics data in a visual format. This typically includes overlays in the form of heatmaps, click-maps, and geomaps that show physical locations of website users.

API Integration

We live in a world of application programming interface (API) integration. Mashing up one data type with another can reveal new and incredible opportunities. Thankfully, leading web analytics tools provide APIs for precisely this purpose. The ability to connect website user data with other types of data is a reality. Chapter 23, “The Future of Digital Data: Business Intelligence,” touches on this topic.

Social Media Reporting

Some people like to categorize any social profile in the earned category, but we disagree. There is a difference between real “earned media” through word of mouth, buzz, and so on and direct investment in maintaining a brand presence on a social platform. Maintaining a brand presence requires investing time and money on behalf of a brand, which is why we have included social reporting in the owned media category.

Many web analytics tools now provide varying degrees of social analytics reports. These channels do not exist in silos but must work together. Converged media is the future. In an effort to measure the specific effect that social activities have on the metrics and goals that matter, we see these tools in the early stages of social attribution. There are indeed limitations now, but they offer the ability to

- Identify which social referral sources send the most engaged visitors to your site.
- Learn which brand content social visitors engaged with most and what visitors are sharing most.
- Learn how users engage with your brand content offsite, on websites that are not your own.
- Segment and measure the performance of individual social media campaigns.
- Create custom segments for users on individual social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. This is a useful feature because segmentation enables you to truly understand the differences between your user groups and provides you with insight to optimize and personalize the user experience.
- Identify which user-generated content is responsible for amplifying brand content; this contributes to true “earned media.”

These social report integrations for web analytics tools do have some shortcomings. Data quality concerns, reporting inconsistencies, and overall data coverage are issues. For example, Google Analytics currently supports some major social

platforms in its tracking, but it excludes others. This creates blind spots and can lead to questionable analyses and decision making, based on a false view of user behavior and the digital landscape.

Although an integrated solution containing both web analytics and social analytics is ideal, at this point you are better served by using best-of-breed tools for each. The social analytics landscape is immature, fragmented, and, frankly, a mess. There is too much choice, there are too many redundant tools with little to no differentiation that have created an incredibly frustrating and difficult experience for buyers. The future holds more mergers and acquisitions to reduce these problems, much as it did in the early days of digital with the early web analytics vendors.

User Experience Feedback

There are tools that enable you to gather very specific qualitative user feedback through onsite surveys. Some call this “voice of the customer,” and others call it “visitor feedback.” All these tools share a common functionality, which is a continuous and consistent measurement of the user’s website experience.

Clickstream analysis can provide insight into the volume of activity by page and conversions. It’s a starting point, but it provides an incomplete picture of overall site activity, and it’s why companies try to collect specific feedback. User experience feedback can be crucial for answering the following questions and determining how users feel about the overall website experience:

- How would you rate your overall website experience?
- What was the primary purpose of your visit?
- Were you able to complete your primary task?
- Could anything about your website experience be improved?

Site-survey solutions, such as those from iPerceptions and ForeSee Results, provide additional benefits, such as web analytics integration, threshold-based alerts to notify you about significant changes, and benchmarks of vertical industries for comparisons.

The combination of quantitative clickstream analysis to determine what is happening onsite and qualitative user experience feedback can answer many questions about what is working with an owned media asset and what needs improvement.

Real-Time Site Analytics

The newest kid on this block, real-time analytics, overlaps with traditional web analytics in terms of technical capabilities, but real-time analytics runs at hyper-speed. Real-time analytics is all about what’s happening on your website *right now*.

Real-time solutions from companies such as Chartbeat and Woopra were created to solve problems for those on the frontlines who are responsible for managing publishing and media sites, but they're useful for just about any company. The assumption is that the end users are in sales, marketing, or content roles and aren't looking to immerse themselves in data and reports. They're focused on optimizing the user experience for each audience segment in real-time.

Real-time analytics tools provide analysis and reporting of what users on your site are doing on a second-by-second basis. You can use these tools to determine how active your users are on a page, what page interactions they are most engaged in, and what content topics and types are most consumed, shared, and ignored. Whereas web analytics focuses on clickstream analysis, real-time site analytics focuses on everything else that happens between clicks.

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