

CFO's Guide to Investing in Web Analytics



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Introduction – Engaging Your Web Audience

This note is for the CFOs of firms with a web presence and would like an outline roadmap for investing in that presence and the associated analytics. It is *not* addressed to people in digitally led, consumer-oriented businesses for whom digital is a strategic concern who will find other useful resources on this site. This note is to help you think ahead about how you might develop your web presence, identify and address your target audience, to the point at which you will want to bring together data on the people you engage with digitally and in person.

Website Analytics

Every business with a web presence begins with setting up a basic website. It is cheap and setting up the analytics for it is also cheap. There are tools like Google Analytics (GA), MixPanel or Adobe Analytics that you can connect to your website. Each tool has a wizard to help you connect. It connects to your website by inserting tracking code on the pages. The tracking code sends back data, that can then be analysed in analytics tools, such as Google Data Studio, Power BI or Tableau. If your visitors agree you can set up cookies so you can gather data on their individual activity and interests.

For a basic website you may be interested in basic information, for example, how many visitors you have, how they found you, and how many of those visitors return, which pages they visit and how

long they spend on those pages. Essentially you can see how many people are checking you out and can assess the level of interest in you and your business.

Analytics for Content-rich Websites

However, Google Analytics can analyse a lot more than these basic measures. And this will be important if you are using your website actively to attract business. To attract visitors, you might be investing in creating relevant content so that visitors will find when they search for information. You might be investing in AdWords, in paid search, to stand out from the crowd and alert people to your relevant content. You might get visitors to share their contact details with you. You can set up Google Analytics to work out how your investments in attracting visitors might be paying off. This requires some thought about your goals and how to measure how well you are performing against them. (It also helps in analysis if you make sure that you are using a logical structure for the URLs of your content pages, so similar pages can be grouped together.)

Google Search Console

You can also install Google Console on your site, which is also free, and this includes Search Analytics which helps you see, among other things which search terms (keywords) that visitors are using when they find your site in the search engine results page. You will also be able to use Google Search Console to check that your site content is easy to find.

Investing in Content and AdWords

You are competing for people's attention. There is no substitute for investing in the quality and relevance of your content and in quality advertising. For example, high cost AdWords are expensive because they are effective. Data analytics will help you to compete effectively and check that you are getting what you are paying for, and an expert internal team or data analytics consultancy can easily set this up.

Analytics and Tagging

If you would like to see in more detail how people are engaging with your content and perhaps downloading documents, then that will require investments in more sophisticated tracking of visitors' activity and actions. This is done by "tagging" elements of the website with snippets of code so that when the visitor clicks on a tag this triggers the sending of data to Google Analytics. You will need the services of an experienced developer to set up the tagging. The developer will use Google Tag Manager (GTM), a tool that assists with the task of adding Java code snippets using GTM tags which Google has pre-validated. Google Tag Manager coverage of tagging requirements improves continuously and GTM could already cover most, if not all, of your tagging requirements. Where it does not, custom code/plugins are also available on GitHub to an experienced Java developer.

More extensive tracking is usually only required if you sell products, either digital or physical from your website (This might include branded promotional goods for example). This requires the tracking of transaction information. This has three elements; data about the transaction (held in a central repository or data layer), a tag for the transaction and a trigger to bundle and send the data about the transaction to Google Analytics. GA is readied to accept the data by enabling the Google E-commerce plug-in within GA settings.

There is a more advanced plug-in that helps to give better information about the shopping behaviour of visitors to the site and a more extensive range of reports on the purchasing funnel. (For example, enhanced e-commerce provides more tagging options around shopping carts, promotions, discounts and check-out behaviour than standard e-commerce and has additional standard reports.)



Even if you don't want to sell on your site, you can "hack" the enhanced the e-commerce tracking plug-ins and use the standard funnel reports to give more information about the "funnels" visitors move through on your site and how engaged they are with your content.

If you seek to attract customers through display advertising, you may also use automated platforms, to push ads to your target audience. These take only milliseconds to identify a high value prospect online from data, complete a bidding transaction and select and display your ad. Then you will also get data returned from the platform on the performance of your advertising.

If you are spending advertising money through multiple media channels, then you will need to bring together data on spend on, for example, social media, electronic media, print, TV and radio and to have a method of attributing the value of the business you are generating to your spend in each of these channels.

The more important your web presence and web reputation, then the more important it becomes to listen. Social media and web monitoring services will tell you what people are saying about your company and your brands online. And give you time to respond. Generating another source of data.

You will wish to combine web data with your other data on customers and prospective customers from your CRM and financial systems. Bear this data integration step in mind and keep all this data compatible with shared data disciplines across responsibility areas. Make sure people in different functions use the same identifiers for critical data elements like the names of customers, prospects and campaigns across all channels and systems otherwise you will have an extra mapping task to do when combining the data.

At this point, data from media, social media and web sources has become just another element of your data strategy and your use of analytics, data science and AI. You might want to check out our White paper on Analytics, Data Science and AI or our blog Guide to investments in data analytics and digital.

Conclusion

Though this note has been addressed to businesses that currently are neither strongly digitally led nor consumer oriented, the use of digital media continues to grow strongly. It is hard to overstate the potential for a firm to use digital channels to have "conversations" with its audience. In the direct to consumer sector, such "conversations" with consumers have been the basis for product and brand innovations that have rocked some of the big established brands. There may be more opportunities for your firm in increased digitisation and digital data that you would like to explore. For some firms, digital and web analytics have been the foundation on which to evolve a broader data strategy and digital strategy including the application of data science and AI to data from all sources.

