

HOW TO TRACK RESULTS

>> Tracking statistics can help you determine where your traffic is coming from.

WEB STATISTICS

We'll use Webalizer in our examples since it's a fairly standard program for tracking web stats, and often comes pre-installed when you purchase server space (*see Tip box, right*).

What does it tell you? First of all, you get a comparison chart of traffic over the past year, compiled with monthly averages. This gives you a good over-all view of whether your traffic has trended upwards, downwards, or whether you had a large jump in traffic due to some specific event.

Looking at the numbers. Be careful about making hard and fast assumptions about the numbers you're seeing. What a program like Webalizer does is, it takes your raw server logs and interprets them into more easily readable data. In addition, web pages may be 'cached' so that computers can recall them from temporary memory rather than having to download a recently visited page all over again. This makes it difficult to get real numbers on how many people are actually visiting your site.

Hits, page views and unique visitors. A 'hit' is counted each time the server receives a request for a file from your site. For example, a page with five pictures on it may require the server to send out one html page, one css page, and five jpeg files, for a total of seven hits. If that page has thirty thumbnail pictures on it, the page could count for over thirty hits. Because hits are an unreliable indicator of the number of visitors, Webalizer will give you an estimate of how many page views you've had and the number of unique visitors. The important thing to remember is that there is no fool-proof way for the server to determine a "unique visitor" so again, the number is an approximation.

Other information. Other useful information includes top ten entry and exit pages (the most popular pages on which people come to or leave your site); top referrers (the most popular url's that bring people to your site, including direct referrers or typing in the domain name); and top search strings. These can be especially important, as they tell you what search terms people were using when they found your site. The results may surprise you - on www.sportponymagazine.com, we get the predictable searches for "sport pony stallions" and "ponies for sale." But, we also get a lot of traffic for people searching for "Spruce Meadows," as we have annual features on the Spruce Meadows Masters.

TIP

The simplest way to track visitors on your site is to add a free hit tracker such as SiteMeter.

www.sitemeter.com

Webalizer is another free, more detailed program that can be added to your host server to track your web stats. Many hosting packages come with Webalizer pre-installed.

www.mrunix.net/webalizer/

If you're interested, Google Webmaster Tools offers more detailed tracking for each page of your website.

What kind of goals should I set?

Advertising is most effective if you set goals, measure and track results, and evaluate to see if you are getting the response you want.

In the first year of your campaigns, you might increase website traffic but not see an increase in sales. This is because many potential customers will not be in a position to buy at that particular time. Over the second year of a successful campaign, you should start to see the increased website traffic start to produce some sales results.

TIP

If you purchase a banner ad, it is standard for the host site to track statistics on how many people viewed the ad, and how many clicked through to your website.