

## Google Analytics: Bringing science to the art of marketing

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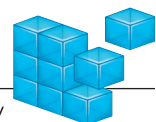
Web marketing is a topic we take very seriously here in the labs. And we're not talking about the hocus-pocus "get ranked on the first page of Google" snake oil that you've probably been pitched at some point in the past. We're here to help you discover tools that help you get more business from the web today and well into the future. So I'm going to show off a cool tool that helps you understand what your website visitors are doing, and how you can optimize your site to get more traffic and orders.

For many appraisers, getting started with marketing their business on the web is daunting. They don't know where to start, or what to focus on. And they never seem to find the time to get going. But once they get started, many get hooked on it. They work 5 or 10 minutes a day touching up a content page, changing a call to action, or rearranging keywords in a page title so Google will list them just a little better. The result? They get more orders from more diverse sources of business.

Luckily, web marketing is more science than art. And being the data-driven type, appraisers are in a perfect position to use hard numbers and facts to improve their websites. That's why XSites have built-in basic statistics that allow you to see page views over the last three months, entry pages, and number of new and unique visitors. The stats tool is great for most users, but it can't answer all the questions. There are some things about your website that only a search engine can shed light on. Enter: Google Analytics.

Analytics is one of the most powerful website tracking tools around. Big companies all over the world use it daily to see which pages people are looking at, when they're looking and for how long, and if they come back for the all-important return visits. Appraisers should use it too. Analytics might just be your new best marketing friend. Here are some of the highlights:

**Visits Over Time** - Analytics gives you a visual overview of the number of visits each page of your site is getting over time (days, weeks, months, etc.) This gives you the ability to spot trends. The image below shows a month's worth of data for a particular page. Notice the weekly fluctuations where the weekend gets much less traffic than the rest of the week, something to be expected on a business-to-business page. A homeowner-specific page for tax appeal appraisals might have a smoother curve to it since there would likely be some more weekend browsing.



**Bounce Rate** - Getting ranked for certain keywords in Google is just the start. You want to raise (or at least maintain) your page rank. But don't ever forget that Google isn't trying to make you happy. Their goal is to make the Google users — aka the people doing the searching — happy. One important way that Google does this is by tracking which keyword searches actually end with a user visiting (and staying) on a page. If a user glances over your site and quickly hits the "back" button to go back to Google, it indicates to Google that that page didn't help the user. If enough users find your page unhelpful, Google will lower the page rank for that set of keywords.

Let's say that you have a page on your XSite called "Estate Appraisals." Your service area is really the Nashville area, but for whatever reason, your fault or theirs, Google ranks this page highly for the keywords "Estate appraisals Tennessee," effectively showing up for the whole state. If users looking for an appraisal in Memphis find your page, they'll likely "bounce" back to Google. And if enough users do that, your "bounce rate" for that page goes up. In general, the higher the bounce rate a page has, the lower its ranking will be. So you have to ask yourself: Why is this page not helpful to visitors? Does it have poor content, or is the content inappropriate to the visitors I'm getting? That leads me to the next two features, which can help you answer those questions.

**Entrance Keywords** - Analytics can show you which keywords users are searching when they find your website in Google. Using the example above, if you noticed that the third set of keywords for your "Estate Appraisals" page is "Memphis Tennessee estate appraisal," or something similar, you'd know immediately that this page isn't listed properly in Google, and you can go about updating the page with better SEO (maybe you forgot to put the word "Nashville" at the beginning of the page title, for instance) so that Google will list this page by keywords more appropriate to your site visitors. This may lower your overall traffic numbers, but it will increase what we call "qualified traffic" — meaning you'll get a higher percentage of your site visitors that are actually looking for your services, in your area.



**The Map/Location View** - You can also use the map view of page hits to show you visually where your searchers are coming from. If you have a larger number of out-of-service area hits, then you might want to update that page with better SEO for your area or start marketing more to other areas.

**Top Exit Pages/Exit %** - Your XSite's built-in stats feature lets you see which pages people first hit when they come to your site, but Analytics can tell you which page was their last, or what percentage of a page's visitors left after viewing the page. Even then, you have to ask yourself: Did they leave because they found what they were looking for, or because they just



gave up? The next feature can help you answer that question.

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**Time On Page** —Use this stat to gauge if people are staying long enough on a page. To use the example above, if your whole site has an average “Time On Site” of over two minutes, but the page you’re looking at has a high bounce rate, high exit percentage, and a low “time on page” stat, it may be that you need to spend 5-10 minutes punching up the content to make it more appealing or more relevant.

Analytics is a powerful tool and I’ve offered just a small handful of examples to illustrate how useful Google’s product can be to someone who wants to take their web presence to a whole new level of finesse. It’s a vast set of tools, and the list above only scratches the surface.

But here’s the best part: It’s free. You just need a Google account to start setting it up, and it usually takes about five minutes to get it turned on for your XSite. Basically, Google gives you a short HTML string that you simply copy and paste into your XSite. We recommend putting it into your custom footer, which then enables Analytics on every page. And wouldn’t you know it, we’ve got a video to walk you through setting it up, click by click. Enjoy!

