



THE EVOLUTION OF WEB ANALYTICS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today there are many ways of analyzing traffic to a website. These methods typically address two different goals via two distinct methods. The first method is reviewing the logs of the web server. The logs from a server will always count when a page is hit as the server contains the process that presents the page to the viewer. The second is page tagging and other third party components that are often able to obtain additional information about the viewer. Both of these methods have benefits that are crucial to quantifying the value of a web page, but their uses should not be confused.

Analytic services, whether managed in house or by third party providers should be used to understand the experience of the user once they have landed on the site. Understanding what links are clicked inside of the site, where users came from and possibly additional personal information about the viewer will add tremendous value to continued development of marketing materials. While valuable, these tools are developed to address specific goals. It should be understood that due to a variety of variables on the viewer's side, they will not always be successful. For that reason, these tools cannot be relied on to count pure "hits" (also known as impressions). To quantify the actual traffic of a page or site, the server's logs are the one true keeper of that measurement. When measuring the effectiveness of an e-mail or other marketing distribution that contains a link to an exclusive landing page, only the server logs will truly disclose the real impression count. Companies that wish to capture as much information about the visit as possible, while retaining the ability to accurately measure traffic, must utilize a hybrid approach and recognize which log contains the appropriate information.