

# Making Sense

## of Website Analytics



Unlock a world of actionable, performance-fueling insights.

**I**n today's digitally charged world, a bridal retail shop's website might be its most visible and important marketing asset.

In fact, for all the talk of e-commerce in the contemporary retail age, 92 percent of consumers visiting a retailer's website for the first time are doing so for reasons other than purchasing, global software company Episerver revealed in its recent "Reimagining Commerce" report. Rather, visitors are researching products, gathering store details and almost certainly judging the professionalism and credibility of the operation before making a visit to its brick-and-mortar location.

Such realities make it all the more important bridal shops have a professional website that's achieving its intended aims.

And that's where website analytics enter the fray.

As marketing increasingly moves from art to science in the

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age of big data, website analytics stand to help retailers decide where they should devote their time, resources and marketing capital to drive bottom-line results. Yet for many small business owners, website analytics can be a dizzying, overwhelming array of numbers that confound more than inform.

That said, understanding how people are finding and then interacting with your store's website can improve the customer experience, bolster confidence, improve marketing efficiency and ultimately spur traffic through the front door.

"As a small business owner, it's important to have an understanding of how your marketing

efforts are contributing to your business operations and this has never been more true as we dive deeper into the digital age," says Dan Mallette of InVue Digital, a Buffalo, N.Y.-based digital marketing agency. "Utilizing your website's analytics can help provide you with actionable insights that can help improve and grow your business's digital footprint and get a better idea of how customers are being acquired."

Indeed, "website analytics give you concrete data on who your customers are and what they want," adds Britney Kolodziej, CEO of JAM Marketing Group, an agency that creates online marketing strategies for small businesses. "Once you know these things, you are equipped to make smart, effective decisions to sustain and grow your business."

### The First Step: Install Google Analytics

Before you can begin analyzing

website data, you first need to acquire reliable data. By far, Google Analytics is the most commonly used method for website analytics, largely because it is free, easy to install and backed by the ubiquitous – and trusted – Google name.

By adding some Google-supplied code to your store's website, you can view all website statistics in one place, from standard traffic metrics like the number of website visitors to how long people are spending on individual pages, how often links are being clicked, how visitors are finding your website and the devices they're using to view it, all of which can inform business strategy and spending.

### Then, dig into the data

When it comes to monitoring website analytics, some metrics carry more weight than others. Here's where you should focus:

#### The Who: Audience

Audience data tells about website visitors, providing data on demographics, interests, geographical information and how they're accessing your website, such as through a mobile device or desktop computer. By monitoring Audience data, your store can assess if its website is indeed attracting its target customer.

"Unlike being able to interact with your customer in your brick-and-mortar store or talk to them on the phone, you don't get to directly interact with your website visitors," Kolodziej says. "Thankfully, Google Analytics provides Audience data to give you a snapshot into who these people are so you can make

*Google Analytics is free to install and provides a wealth of valuable data.*

adjustments to your website and business to better serve them."

Consider a bridal shop in Charlotte, N.C., eager to attract brides in and around the Charlotte metro area. If the store's Audience data is showing a percentage of website visitors coming from any other geographical area, that might indicate a disconnect in how Google's search algorithm is ranking the store's search terms.

"Without monitoring the data though, you'd never know of this discrepancy and wouldn't be able to fix it with a few search engine optimization tweaks," Kolodziej says.

#### The What: Behavior

Behavior data lets you know what website visitors are doing on your website. It will provide info on visitors' first landing pages as well as how visitors travel through the website and the time they spend on different pages. By monitoring Behavior, you can assess the flow of traffic on the website, such as where individuals enter the website, the pages they visit and where the session ends.

"This allows the business owners to beef up the right pages and provide further calls to action to keep the right eyes on the website and gather their contact information," says Steve Ryan, CEO of RyTech, a custom digital marketing agency with offices in suburban Chicago and Milwaukee.

While the wealth of behavior (or engagement) data can easily

seem overwhelming, Mallette calls it "extremely important" and cautions against ignoring the information.

"If there are issues that are preventing proper navigation or technical issues that are deterring users, monitoring engagement stats can help show where you need to make improvements," he says.

Under the Behavior banner, you can also view what website visitors search for once they're on your website. If, for example, a large percentage of visitors first access the homepage and then search for a specific product, it's a clue that product might be best positioned in a prominent homepage location.

"This would serve your website visitor that much quicker so they don't have to search," Kolodziej says.

#### The How: Acquisition

Acquisition data indicates the channels that feed traffic to the website, providing information on how visitors accessed it.

Did they type in your store's URL? Click on a referral link? Or use a search engine and, if so, what keyword terms did they use? Did they get directed to the website from Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest or another social-media platform or link to the website from professional listings like *The Knot* or *Wedding Wire*? Such data can help you make enlightened decisions about the most productive organic and paid marketing efforts and, ultimately, where your store's time, efforts and resources would be best placed.

For example, if you logged into

## Social-media

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Google Analytics and found 70 percent of website traffic arriving from various social-media platforms, 25 percent coming from a direct search and only 5 percent coming from paid website advertisements, it should trigger your business to reevaluate its ad

spend.

"Understanding the largest traffic acquisition source is

important to take advantage of – or correct – traffic sources," Mallette says.

Similarly, if your store is spending 10 hours a month on creating and scheduling posts for both Instagram and Facebook, but Facebook only drives 5 percent

### Beyond the Website

Social-media analytics provide powerful punch

**A**ccording to global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, social-media recommendations drive an average of one in four sales, a number that is only expected to increase as more people join platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

With current and future customers lining social-media platforms, Meg Hogan, founder of Stunning Strategy, a Pittsburgh-based digital marketing agency, says retailers must take advantage of social-media analytics just as they do website analytics to unlock a world of actionable, performance-fueling insights.

Through social-media analytics, you can learn more about customers and what they want, reviewing what followers respond to organically – funny videos, photos of local brides or beauty tips – and then adjust your content marketing strategy accordingly.

This way, Hogan says, "You're constantly increasing your value to your audience because you're giving them tips and advice they can use."

Social-media analytics can also help improve your business model, including fixing problems with products or services. As social media opens a direct line of communication between a bridal shop and its customers, you have an avenue to answer questions, address problems and share information. Social media can also help track the pulse of the marketplace, including what consumers think of your store, its products and consultants.

Hogan details the key analytics retailers should be monitoring on Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest, the bridal retail industry's three most widely used social-media platforms.

#### What you should be monitoring on FACEBOOK

**Engagement:** This reflects clicks, likes, shares and comments. While Facebook's organic (read: free) reach is rapidly declining, you should still monitor top-performing posts. Understanding what's capturing attention serves as a clue as to the type of content to prioritize moving forward.

**Page Views:** This tally allows a business to understand how much of its Facebook business page visitors are seeing. "If

you have a robust 'About' section, but the majority of people are only viewing your home section, then consider shifting your focus," Hogan says. Update header photos frequently to align with product visuals; install a call-to-action button that links to the website; or pin a notable post to the top of the profile.

**Cost:** Specific to Facebook ads, this shows the cost per action for a Facebook advertisement. While this will change with each individual ad, the lower the number while still getting the desired results is a positive. Hogan, however, says businesses should be sure to set up the action most valuable to the business. A video that costs two cents per viewing might be wonderful for brand awareness, but if your shop is trying to drive online appointment bookings, then a cost-per-click to an appointment form would likely prove more effective.



#### What you should be monitoring on INSTAGRAM

**Engagement:** The number of likes and comments on a post, Engagement metrics highlight the content most resonating with followers, whether that's product photos, images of recent brides or inspirational quotes. Use this information as a baseline to develop future Instagram content strategy.

**Followers and what times of day they're using Instagram:** With data on when followers are using the Instagram app, you can schedule posts to be published at or near those popular times, which should boost engagement.

#### What you should be monitoring on PINTEREST

**Boards with top pin impressions:** This metric identifies what broad topics are top priorities for a given store's audience, which could be shoes, dresses, cakes or photo ideas. Use this data to post more of the popular content and inform other digital content strategy as well.

**Demographics, including income, age and location:** With an idea of who's interested in your store's products, services and content, you should be able to better create content strategy and sales plans. For example, if the overwhelming majority of your audience is well beyond the high school age, then put the prom mentions aside.



of website traffic while Instagram drives 75 percent of web traffic, you might double down on Instagram and devote less time to Facebook marketing.

As yet another example, Kolodziej says consider a store that places a \$400 advertisement on a wedding industry website. Say that ad yielded 50 website clicks that led to two appoint-

*Acquisition is the first and most important metric to track.*

ments and gown sales totaling \$2,000. After accounting for – to use a round example – a 50 percent wholesale cost (\$1,000) and the ad's \$400 investment, the store still profits a very ROI friendly \$600. If that same advertisement, however, produced 50

clicks but no appointments or sales, it's clear the ROI isn't there.

"If you don't monitor the Acquisition data," Kolodziej says, "you're liable to continue investing in ads and marketing efforts that are a waste of time and money."

According to many digital marketing pros, Acquisition is the first metric retailers should review and also where basic marketers should spend most of their time.

"If you have campaigns in place, this is the foundation of where you can find out if things are working or not," says Jennifer Peterson, co-founder and president of Wavelength Marketing, an integrated marketing communications firm headquartered in Columbia, Pa.

**And finally, conversion**

A conversion is a desirable action taken on the website and while the specific conversion metrics will differ for each business, leads and sales are the most common form. One way to track this is to set up Goals in Google Analytics. Goals might be website visitors booking an appointment online, completing a contact form or registering their e-mail address.

"Conversion tracking should be your number-one goal within Analytics," says Marcus Miller, head of SEO and digital marketing at Bowler Hat, a U.K.-based digital marketing agency for small businesses. "This simple step gives the rest of the data context and allows you to make smarter marketing decisions. Do more of what works. Drop what does not work. Save money. Improve results."



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