Metrics, Measurements, and Mayhem

Internet Marketing has become one of the most powerful marketing tools for both the B2B or B2C environment, but has trying to decipher which is the most appropriate and relevant metrics and measurements to use or buy creating mayhem?
When you try to create structure around something like the Internet that is inherently an open environment with open access and free flowing information, you may feel like the inmates are running the asylum. In addition, the concept of statistics has always had a certain aura with regards to presenting information in a manner that may emphasis less relevant,but better looking data or as the saying goes,"Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics."

So, what are you to do if you are trying to create a position to show that your product or service is valuable, and from the procurement side, how do you analyze which solution truly has the linage and supporting information to ensure that it will meet your needs? And, how do you rationalize the different metrics and measurements without creating mayhem?

The first problem is semantics; in most cases you are speaking different languages, not literally, but figuratively. The information that the buyer of solutions is looking for may not be in-sync with what the seller is presenting, and in many cases the seller will react to make a sale and adjust their information to meet the buyer's request. This may seem like an obvious reaction, but many times the information that is being requested may be passé and irrelevant. A good example of this is when a buyer asks for data about clicks, visitors, or time on a site. Though in some cases this type of information may be relevant, in many cases this type of information was born out of the Internet Marketing from 5 years ago. What we have learned is not all web sites are the same, and not all marketing of web sites is the same, so more sophisticated information is being created, but it will take time for this type of information to filter down in to the mainstream vernacular. In addition, sellers are always coming up with new ways to spin a statistic to make their product look the best; this is not new to the Internet market.

So, if you are a buyer of services and you are trying to rationalize which service will provide you with the most value, or if you are a buyer looking to procure metrics or measurement solutions for your website, it all starts with understanding your customer, and how they use the Internet. If the product that you are looking to measure is informational in nature then the amount of time on your website may not be relevant, nor the number of clicks. Thus, looking at metric tools and measurement solutions that talk about showing you the time on your website or the total number of clicks would not be relevant. If you are looking to buy a service then you need to understand what you want out of the service versus them telling you what they do. You may also want to review results from other clients serviced by the vendor; this way you can see if this type of results oriented solution is right for you and not get caught up in terminology that may be foreign to you.

The seller of services is in a tough position in that they are excited and passionate about what they have to offer, they feel it is superior to their competition, and they have created data, information, and statistics to prove their point, but the buyers may not find this information relevant. Thus, the time to close a deal lengthens as you work your way into the customers needs and attempt to translate your information into their terminology, or if possible into hard results.

With all this said, there is still a challenge in understanding that most of the metrics and measurements available are flawed or inferred. The bottom line to the Internet is that it is unstructured, and the free tools are only as good as what you paid for them. With respect to the tools that you can buy and link to your website, these tools will be more mature and provide layers and layers of data, which will require dedicated personnel to sift through and interpret their relevance. This also means that if you had the money to buy sophisticated tools that you are further down the road to understanding and tracking customer behavior.

So, let's deal with the numerous free tools that are available, and seem to be causing mayhem.This is not to say that the free tools (i.e. Google Analytics, Webmaster tools, Quantcast, Alexa, etc.) are useless, but as I noted, they are free and as such have limited information, and this is not about me providing a score card on the tools. The point is that tools like Google Analytics have some excellent solutions and provide very detailed data if they are setup correctly on your website, but interpreting the data and relevance out of it is in your hands. On one hand, if you become very dependant and attentive regarding the information supplied by Google Analytics then you might be in a position to move to a more sophisticated purchased

solution. What I have found is that people set up Google Analytics and then select the information that seems best and forgo using any of the other information. It seems that this happens because it takes time and attention to details when looking at any data, and most people either get frustrated trying to interpret the data, or they do not have the time, resources, or focus.

With regards to the other inferred tool sets, example Quantcast and Alexa, they provide information on a website that is inferred, but not actual. Yes, Quantcast has the ability to be loaded onto every page of the website if the owner so chooses, which would increase the accuracy of the information, but in most cases this is not the case.

I know companies that use these websites as well as others like this to make business decisions on other companies. The problem is that most of these free Internet tools load as many websites that they can to their list so that when someone comes to their site looking for information on a website they have something about the website in question. The concern is that in most cases the information that is provided is not accurate information, it is inferred information. These free information Internet websites are not directly linked to every site and thus they use various methods to infer results such as visitors, time, demographics, and more. What is really sad is that I have heard of decisions being made from this type of data that caused some very qualified solutions to be removed for a list of potential candidates. When I asked groups that use these tools why they use them, the response was that they did not understand all of the different terminology when they spoke with various vendors thus they felt more comfortable soliciting information on their own.

The bottom line is that if you are the buyer or decision maker there are no generic metrics and measurements that are easy to reference. So, to avoid metrics measurement mayhem you need to take time to create a list with respect to how you want your customers to interpret the data you have, or how you want them to interact with your website. This will go a long way to creating an understanding of what data, information, and statistics are relevant for your needs.

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