



Transform Your Website Into An Intelligence Gathering Tool

By Don Kent ■ *eCablevision Consulting*

Who are your customers? This is an important question to answer because knowing your customers—or understanding whom your prospective customers are—allows a company to more efficiently listen and meet their customer's requirements and target their marketing message to minimize customer acquisition costs.

So whether a website is used for customer acquisition or customer retention, it is important to learn who is visiting your website, why they are visiting, and if their visit was satisfying. Website tactics allow companies to accomplish this via the use of (a) traffic logs, (b) cookies, (c) JavaScript, and (d) "listening" by providing online and email questionnaires.

Traffic Logs

Traffic logs allow companies to learn about their visitor's surfing habits, which website or search engine the visitor came from, the browser used, the visitor's domain name (or their ISP), the website's most popular page, and even the page-by-page order in which the visitor traversed the website. As part of a marketing campaign, if a company knows that many visitors frequented their customer acquisition website but few visitors purchased their service, it suggests that the campaign was effective in driving traffic to the site but something at the site did not convert the leads into customers. Traffic logs can help a company understand if this was due to the offer, the teaser, confusing navigation, or site performance issues, based upon a careful examination of the traffic logs. By understanding where visitors originate, a company can more effectively place banner ads and fine-tune their online adver-

tising. A traffic log can also track special offers when a separate webpage is created for each offer and the number of visitors to each page is tracked. Are your visitors going to the webpage that asks for the sale—or if not, where are they getting lost? Traffic logs can help a company understand where the visitor is on your site when they decide to click off to

pages, offers, and tactics are driving the sales. Consumer privacy is as important as it is that your customers trust your company—so especially when using cookies, ensure that you detail a privacy statement that is consumer friendly. Visit www.Truste.com for additional information regarding privacy and to learn how to qualify for the TRUSTe privacy seal.

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another site. This feedback enables a company to adjust their site's navigation, verbiage, or sales proposition so that prospects are driven to a page that allows them to place their order.

Cookies

A strategic use of cookies enables companies to track affiliate referrals, display banner advertising, or to remember passwords so that customers can easily access (and more easily use) your website. Cookies can help the marketing team quantify the return on investment for a marketing campaign, when the site is built so that each person that responds to an advertisement is given a cookie on their web browser and then the cookie is retrieved by the site ordering system. To the frustrated executive that exclaims, "I know that 50% of my sales promotions work great—but I just don't know which 50%," the mystery is solved. Now a company can determine which cam-

JavaScript

JavaScript can harvest information contained in the visitor's browser, including the browser version, plug-ins used, screen resolution, and operating system. If understanding your prospective customer is important to a company's sales efforts, this is one way of better understanding them. If your site optimized for an 800X600 resolution when your average prospects are using 1280X768, a subtle impediment may be created when trying to convert visitors into customers. Is your website graphically intensive to highlight the benefits of broadband? This may be an effective strategy if your prospects already have broadband, but if most still have dial-up, a bandwidth intensive site may disappoint with slow performance and result in fewer sales. JavaScript can automatically identify visitor bandwidth, and even automatically

direct the visitor to a high bandwidth or a dial-up site, if you have both.

Listening by providing online and email questionnaires

An online questionnaire enables companies to respond to questions important to prospects that are considering purchasing your service, or they may be a method to facilitate requests for collateral materials or a call from an account executive. Most importantly, an online survey allows the company to initiate a dialogue with their website visitors, which will often facilitate the sales process. Many companies offer off-the-shelf software that will enable companies to easily create an online questionnaire, including www.addaform.com, www.itracks.com, www.iNetSurvey.com, and www.infopoll.com (this is not an endorsement for these companies but merely to serve as several examples of software with different pricing structures and sophistication). To maximize the response rate,

questionnaires generally should have less than ten questions and should be able to be completed in no more than a minute or two. Fill-in-the-blank questions often provide more useful information than simple yes/no questions. Consider offering an incentive to complete the survey, such as a prize or contest. Make certain that the questionnaire assures anonymity and displays a link to your privacy policy.

Email questionnaires are another alternative, but this requires a process by which contact information will be captured. While email questionnaires are a little more difficult to correlate and analyze than software driven programs, this tactic allows companies to send a questionnaire at the time of their choosing rather than when the customer or prospect is visiting the Website. If the email is created properly and especially if they are sent to a company's existing customers, one can expect a high response rate—which means that you'll receive more information by conducting

the survey.

Who are your customers? Knowing your customers, or understanding whom your prospective customers are, allows a company to more efficiently listen and meet their customer's requirements and target their marketing message to minimize customer acquisition costs. A website offers companies tactics to better understand their visitors, fine tune their marketing and sales campaigns, and more effectively listen to their customers. Traffic logs, cookies, JavaScript, and questionnaires are tactics that should be included in virtually every website. ■

About The Author

Don Kent has spent over 25 years working with video operators, broadband service providers, and with early phase companies specializing in the delivery of broadband and digital content services. Please address questions or topics that you'd like to see discussed in subsequent columns to Dkent@HTINC.com.



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The image shows two computer monitors. The left monitor displays the Teleguide website interface with a grid of program listings. The right monitor displays a promotional message for CTV, including the CTV logo and text about free call centers and a special offer.

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